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INTRODUCTION

Middle Eastern intrigue? Turkish soaps, the rediscovery of the Ottoman past and a new image for Turkey in the Middle East

Lea Nocera



In recent years Turkish soap operas have invaded the international television scene, attracting an ever-expanding audience. The success of these tv shows, echoing the popularity previously enjoyed by Brazilian soaps, is felt throughout a large area, extending from the Balkans to Central Asia, and all the way to Malaysia. However, it is in the Arab World that Turkish soap operas have particularly asserted themselves as a real social and political, as well as cultural phenomenon. Overshadowing Syrian and Egyptian tv productions, which

dominated the scene until recently, Turkish soaps have been met with large consensus over a short period of time. They have not only attracted the interest of media and communication scholars, but also that of sociologists and political analysts. Despite the fact that the success of Turkish soaps can be partially explained by their high technical level – the quality of scenes and the acting – on the other, undoubtedly, its roots lie in the muted scenario of relations between Turkey and Arab countries.

Throughout the 2000's, and in particular after the Akp's (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, Justice and Development Party) rise to power in November 2002, a political and foreign policy strategy was developed to re-launch the country as an internationally recognised regional power. Foreign relations began to be defined in conjunction with the creation of a wide range of political, economic and cultural influence. To a certain extent, this process followed a political pathway set in motion in previous years. Between the 80s and the 90s, Turkey began to actively engage with neighbouring countries in order to promote relations, notably with former Soviet republics. This political strategy arose from the restructuring of the national economy, which opened up Turkey's domestic market, and began to take into account the importance of creating and opening new markets. In these years, the need for a versatile foreign policy affirmed itself, as well as the importance of interdependence among states in the same geographical area. This became critical for establishing a regional balance and productive economic cooperation. Throughout the 90s, however, this political course remained entangled in a security and military discourse and only subsequently gathered new momentum.

After the Akp's first electoral victory, the new imprint given to foreign policy became instantly clear. This first appeared in Ahmet Davutoğlu (subsequent Foreign Minister) publication entitled, "Strategic depth. Turkey's international position". The policy is based on a reassessment of Turkey's geopolitical position and its primary goal is to promote an active and operational role on different fronts and extend its influence on a global scale. Within the new international relations framework, easing tension with neighbouring countries and ensuring economic and cultural factors prevail over institutional rivalries remains paramount. Within this new approach, creating a real axis of civilization assumes fundamental importance, hence a sphere of influence in which to make cultural specificities prevail. Indeed, it is, especially on cultural specificity, or rather identity, that Turkey aims to re-launch its relations with Middle Eastern and North African countries. Moving in this direction, religious matters, Islam and a

shared history – the Ottoman Empire – become the main elements around which to build new balances and alliances.

The new political course initiated by the Akp government and its leader, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, now in his third term, follows a programme in which religiously inspired conservative moral values, democratic aspirations and unbridled neoliberalism converge. In the space of a decade, Turkey has achieved wide-ranging international visibility and gained recognition for its rapid economic development. Initial shock and concern accompanying the 2002 elections, which resulted in an Islamic-inspired party in government, soon gave way to a positive and supportive attitude. Performance in the economic sphere, leadership in foreign policy and the emphasis on a domestic political democratisation process, contributed to promote an image of Turkey in which democracy and Islam coexist in an innovative manner. The latter appears to adhere to global trends and transformations. Turkey's success appears to confirm a political process, which has led the country to assert itself as a modern nation with a Muslim majority, a solid secular state structure, a republican and parliamentary political system and a growing liberalised economy. In the course of the last decade, what has been defined as the "Turkish model" began to take shape. It has been described as a lucky synthesis between Islam and democracy in a region torn apart by regional conflicts and crushed by authoritarian regimes. Indeed, Turkey emerges as a subject of mediation between Islamic and Western nations. Moreover, the country's foreign policy appears to be moving in this direction by attempting to undertake an increasingly active role in the Middle East. However, in more recent times, this model has begun to wane, revealing its first cracks. Following a similar fate is the "zero problems with neighbours" policy, which is becoming increasingly difficult to maintain. Indeed, the Arab Spring, the Syrian conflict, political changes in Egypt, as well as the Turkish government's strong reaction to protests in June 2013 have played a role in this process. Nevertheless, Turkey persists in its efforts to position itself as a key player in the region, both at a political and socio-political level.

Turkey's repositioning itself in foreign policy and in particular in the Middle East is developing within an ideological framework based on the re-evaluation of its Ottoman Past, repeatedly referred to as Neo-Ottomanism. The imperial experience has undergone a contemporary revision and is represented in a way that offers Turkey the basis on which it can promote a regional discourse, through which it seeks a more active presence. The past is evoked to cement, update and reformulate new ties to Middle Eastern and Mediterranean countries. Turkey – which is rediscovering itself as the heir of the old

empire, despite having built its republican rationale on a clear break with its imperial past – is acting as the new guarantor of a 21st century *Pax Ottomana*. A stable situation has been achieved through economic agreements, movement between countries (also through a more flexible visa policy for Arab tourists) and a good dose of *soft power*. The latter also represented by exporting mass cultural products, of which soap operas represent the most obvious example.

This rediscovery of the Ottoman past, frequently marked by a nostalgic imprint, reveals a broader and more complex ideological discourse. While, in foreign policy this discourse serves to legitimise Turkey's strategic position in the Middle East, domestically it is employed to legitimise the ruling party, as well as a national political project and vision. This is particularly clear in urban settings, especially in Istanbul, where a broad programme of urban transformation, implemented by the central government, has been actively intervening in the metropolis. This programme tends to accentuate the glorious Ottoman capital's history and heritage. However, the re-evaluation of the Ottoman architectural heritage, which is not in fact a restoration, but rather a makeover, is nevertheless more and more involved in reformulating the past. However, in reality this reformulation intends to be a real rewriting of both the city and the nation's history. Ultimately, Istanbul's reconstruction, characterised by projects met with criticism on all fronts, reveals a new imagined modernity. It is an original synthesis of the sparkle and pace of global metropolises, and the uniqueness of a city once the capital of culture and of regional exchange, as well as that of the Caliphate and the centre of Islam. The Ottoman heritage therefore appears to have lost its negative connotations. Indeed, it has become the reason or legitimising Istanbul and Turkey to represent a much needed union and connection between cultures, within an autonomous and specific decline of contemporary modernity, and no more an emulation or imitation of Western models. In fact, a positive image of the Ottoman past is now being proposed. An image characterised by a broad rhetoric on tolerance and cosmopolitanism, within a project that is in fact exclusively defined by the powerful elite. Despite this, Istanbul and Turkey's new image appears very fascinating, particularly in the Arab world. Thus, in recent years, tourism from Arab countries has grown exponentially. The metropolis seems to offer the possibility to access global consumption easily, in an atmosphere which is both Mediterranean and quasi-European but set in a reassuring Islamic context. In part, the growth in tourism appears to be an effect of the success of Turkish soaps, which are, after all, primarily filmed exploiting the suggestive scenery that the Bosphorus has to offer.

In addition, the mania for Turkish soaps, which is storming the Arab world, has generated a considerable rise in expenditure – gadgets, furniture, clothing, designer products, and tourism – all in Turkey’s favour. Moreover, an interest and curiosity in the country has also been awakened. For example, the rise in demand to learn Turkish is rapidly spreading. As previously mentioned, and even confirmed in this publication, Turkish soaps are frequently viewed as an instrument of *soft power*. That is to say, an unconventional tool used to exercise influence and accrue the country’s power. Alongside a whole armoury conceived and put into practice to extend influence and channel a unique and attractive image of Turkey – a set of tools extending from development aid and humanitarian organisations, to cultural promotion programmes and religious associations – the Turkish government also takes every opportunity in attempting to benefit from media influence, especially popular culture channels, soap operas and tv in general.

The first two contributions in this volume by Marwan M. Kraidy, one of the main experts in communications and media in the Arab world, focus on these two areas of Turkish mass culture. In the first essay, the author analyses the phenomenon of soap operas from the perspective of the reactions they have evoked in the Arab world. Departing from the rather animated debate on Turkish television series – and therefore from media observations, and those of journalists and Arab commentators as well as religious authorities – different aspects emerge to explain the success and appeal of Turkish soaps. They tend to offer the charm of an accessible modernity to an Arab audience, which does not only feature VIPs and fame. This is primarily thanks to their portrayal of a non-Western model of wealth and success, as well as cultural vicinity in which Islam also plays a role. The fact that Istanbul and Turkey have become the custodians of dreams of well-being and modernity is also due to the soaps’ ability to discuss themes which appear to be unmentionable in Arab contexts. These soaps confront themes such as divorce and extramarital relations and the existence of illegitimate children. Yet, these are played out in an Islamic context where characters recite prayers, or respect fasting during Ramadan. Moreover, it is interesting how in a series such as *Noor* (*Gümüüş* in Turkish), a model of virility with sentimental trappings emerges, with little in common with the machismo frequently linked to Middle Eastern masculinity. Kraidy also analyses more political tv series. These explore contemporary themes with many references to regional conflicts. In particular, he focuses on the *Valley of Wolves*, which appears to be successful because it offers an inverse analysis of Western narratives on the Middle East, portraying

Turks, and consequently Middle Eastern people in general, as heroes.

According to Kraidy, both types of soaps illustrate geopolitical aspects underlying in different ways the successful ascent of Turkish productions in the Arab world. For the scholar, this equates to a desire for assertion, channelled through a model of modernity that he ironically defines as *neo-Ottoman cool*.

As Kraidy argues in his second paper, both the pathway and developments accompanying the creation and existence of the Turkish state-owned channel in Arabic, Trt7 al-Turkiyya, are useful to better understand how the Akp and the Turkish government's political interests are working on expanding in the Middle East. The television channel's launch in April 2010 was part of Turkish television's transnationalization policy. This has given rise to the establishment of other channels, such as Trt Avaz destined to the Balkans and Caucasus region or Trt Seş in Kurdish, which is also the result of internal political motivations. Trt7 al-Turkiyya has revealed itself to be an obvious tool of Turkish diplomacy. Moreover, it appears to explicitly portray Turkey's intention to affirm itself as a regional power. Primarily based on providing information and entertainment, Trt7 contributes to creating the image of a fashionable country, thereby stimulating interest in Turkish social, cultural and political life. As a result, it only indirectly promotes the country's political and economic interests. However, as Kraidy observes, in the transformed context resulting from numerous recent political events in Egypt and Syria, which sees weakened relations between Turkey and Saudi Arabia – a colossus in the world of Arab media – Turkey's policy of influence faces significant obstacles.

Joshua Carney's contributions present an in-depth analyses of three popular Turkish series: *The Magnificent Century (Muhteşem Yüzyıl)*, *Gümüş/Noor* and the *Valley of Wolves*. According to Carney, these shows – though differing in terms of contents – facilitate an understanding of how a media discourse in mass culture is entwined with politics and party ideology in the national Turkish context.

He argues that the broadcast of the historical drama the *Century of Wonders*, which narrates the life of Suleiman the Magnificent, reveals the delicate and sensitive question of the public use of history. This is particularly relevant in Turkey, especially since the Ottoman past has become an object of redefinition for political ends. A deeper analysis of *Gümüş/Noor* reveals social dynamics embedded in the conservative niche of the ruling elite, of which the main character's social transformation from village dressmaker to successful manager is only one example. Yet, *Gümüş/Noor* is also employed for public awareness campaigns on important social themes, such as organ do-

nation. In this way, Carney returns to the reasons for the show's success in Arab countries, motivated by the eclectic mix of both familiar and unfamiliar elements. His paper on the *Valley of Wolves*, a political drama, assists us in discovering a complex tv series. Indeed, the latter is played out over different seasons, and also features full-length films addressing burning issues on domestic and foreign policy, such as the Turkish "Gladio" operation, the Kurdish issue, the war in Iraq and the Israel-Palestine conflict. Carney's analysis underscores debates and controversies sparked by the series. These are primarily a result of the ambiguous overlap of fictional and non-fictional elements, which suggests a distorted vision of reality, not privy to ideological and political implications.

Lastly, Stefano Torelli develops the main theme in this publication; the relationship between the production and spreading of soaps operas, and foreign policy in Turkey. By referring to different tv series, Torelli illustrates the strong connection that exists between soaps and Turkey's political-diplomatic relations in its foreign policy with neighbouring countries. These are not strictly limited to the Middle East but also to the Balkan region. Once again, the soaps are analysed as the means for promoting a successful model of development that Turkey has been trying to create in the past decade.

Thus, if from the start the history of Turkish soaps already contained something of the legendary – the random discovery of Turkish soaps by one of the directors of the Saudi channel, Mbc, in a hotel room – the broadness of the phenomenon is multifaceted. Furthermore, it also reveals various clues as far foreign policy relations are concerned, but also regarding neighbourly relations between Turkey and the Arab world.

Despite the fact that for the moment it does not appear that the series are really having an impact on political elites and Arab governments, as instruments of *soft power* their influence on the Arab public appears indisputable. Indeed, they appear to have quelled age-old rancour and friction between Arabs and Turks. What this will bring, particularly in the light of the Middle East's rapidly changing scenarios, and tensions emerging in Turkey, has yet to be discovered.

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Neo-Ottoman Cool Turkish Television and Film in Arab Public Discourse

Marwan M. Kraidy



Arabs and Turks have had a fraught history. After 400 years of Ottoman dominion over Arabs that ended post-World War 1, Turkish leader Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's forced secularization drive in the early decades of the republic involved jettisoning the Arabic alphabet and cleansing Turkish of Arabic words. Secularism, nationalism and NATO membership during the second half of the 20th century further distanced Turkey politically from its Arab neighbors. This trend appeared

to undergo a sudden change with the 2001 launch of the Akp by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Abdullah Gül. Incorporating electoral politics in a pro-business platform reflecting the Akp's pious and entrepreneurial constituency in mid-sized provincial cities that came to be known as the "Anatolian tigers", the Akp has consolidated its power in electoral victories since 2002. In the past decade, Turkey's forceful foreign policy, public criticism of Israeli actions, increased economic entanglement in the Arab world, and overall rising status, has been discussed via the trope of "neo-Ottomanism." Despite Erdoğan's autocratic tendencies and his government's worrisome imprisonment of numerous journalists and academics, the Akp appeared to be invincible until popular demonstrations in the summer 2013 put Erdoğan on the defensive.

Both Turkish and Arab mediascapes experienced radical change in the past three decades. Since the mid-1980s, Turkish media has undergone a structural transformation marked by concentration of ownership, dismantling of unions, commercialization of the airwaves, and transnationalization, when of state broadcaster Trt sought to reach Turkish migrants and populations worldwide. After a 1994 law regularized private television, commercial channels began targeting Turks overseas, mostly in Europe. At the same time, the transnationalization and commercialization of Arab television created a pan-Arab, multi-national public sphere. As a result, demand for content increased, providing Turkish productions an opening into a market with hundreds of channels. Together, these "push" (on the Turkish side) and "pull" (on the Arab end) forces set the ground for Turkish television drama and films to enter Arab media space.

Turkish television drama made a strong entrance into the Arab world in the summer of 2008, when the Saudi-owned, Dubai-based, pan-Arab satellite channel Mbc first aired *Noor* [Turkish original: *Gümüş*] in the summer of 2008. Mbc is the lead channel of Mbc Group, a conglomerate owned by a Saudi businessman with family connections to the Saudi royal family. Mbc Group is one of a handful of leading multiplatform media companies to have evolved during the last two decades in what is often described as the "Arab satellite revolution." *Noor's* sensational popularity spurred a debate—in cartoons, op-eds, mosque sermons, talk-shows, *fatwas*. The series' popularity is deeply paradoxical. After all, Arabs lived under Ottoman rule for 400 years, and for most of the 20th Century Turkey's foreign policy countered Arab interests by partnering with the US, NATO and Israel. Why, then, would Turkish drama be popular with Arab

audiences, especially at a time of unprecedented vibrancy in Arab cultural production?

In fact, the two dominant genres of Turkish television drama resonate with Arab viewers for related reasons: social drama conjures up an accessible modernity that is not wholly taken from the West; political drama enacts a counter-hegemonic narrative that puts Turks in particular and Middle Easterners in general in the role of heroes. In a shifting geopolitical context in which Turkey is assuming an increasingly central role in the culture, politics and economic of the Middle East, and against the backdrop of imperial Ottoman history and complicated Turkish-Arab relations in the modern era, the rise of Turkish media in the Arab public sphere offers insights into the geopolitical underpinnings of the circulation of Turkish popular culture in Arab countries, best captured by the deeply ironic notion of *Neo-Ottoman Cool*.

A significant proportion of Turkish dramas dubbed in Arabic tell stories about the Istanbul elite and their problems with love, sex, marriage, family, money, violence, social class and organized crime. Among these, *Noor* was by far the most popular. Set in Istanbul against the backdrop of the Bosphorus and dubbed in spoken Syrian Arabic, the series' more than 150 episodes became a transmedia event in the Arab world. *Noor* features a rag-to-riches story articulated on a rural-urban axis and driven by romantic and sexual tensions typical of Latin American *telenovelas*. *Noor* is a young and ambitious woman from the Turkish hinterland who struggles to integrate the rich Sadoğlu clan when she weds Muhannad, chief male protagonist featured in the cartoon described in the introduction, and grandson of the Sadoğlu' patriarch.

According to Mbc's own viewer ratings, more than 84 million Arabic-speaking viewers watched the last episode of *Noor* on Mbc, making it one of the most popular programs on Arab television and a social sensation. Stories circulated about the popularity of merchandise bearing images of the stars of *Noor*. An Afp story cited a street vendor near Damascus University saying that he sold more than 500 pictures of the stars a day near the campus. Other reports discussed the impact of the popularity of the series on business and tourism and reported a record increase in the number of Arab tourists visiting Turkey. In 2009 there was a 21% rise in the number of tourists from the United Arab Emirates to Turkey and 50% increase from Morocco. Some journalists began to see the "Turkish invasion" of Arab television as a threat to Egypt and Syria, the two dominant Arab television drama

production centers, while ironically, *Noor* was dubbing into the Syrian colloquial that popularized Turkish drama across the Arabic-speaking world because of the previous success of Syrian drama. According to Arab commentators, the mix of popularity and controversy that met *Noor* and other Turkish series can be understood in three main registers: style and aesthetics, gender and spousal relations, and social values.

Arab commenters argued that Turkish series had higher production values and scored better than their Arab counterparts in their portrayal of style, beauty and fashion. In Syrian and Egyptian *musalsalat* [serialized dramas; sing: *musalsal*], actors' and actresses' dress and make-up are overdone, especially in domestic scenes. In Syrian drama, it is a common occurrence for a female character to wake up with full make-up and hairdo. Many Syrian actresses appear to have surgically puffed lips and chiseled noses, marking stars and the characters they play as inaccessible. In contrast, Arab commentators argued that Turkish dramas depict modernity as way of life accessible to average viewers, not only stars and celebrities. Turkish drama has influenced Arab fashion trends, beauty tips and interior design. In Jordan, hairstyles bearing the names of Noor and Muhannad rose to popularity for women and men. There were also reports in the Arab press about the popularity of Muhannad's leather jackets amongst young men and household items such as bedclothes with Muhannad and Noor themes.

Some writers did criticize *Noor* on social and stylistic grounds, arguing it was repetitive and predictable with its exaggerated depictions of "sobbing, violence, torture, chases, rape, kidnapping, concentrated use of guns and daggers which result in repeated visits to hospitals and jails. There are also repeated incidents of divorce, marriage and fights over custody ... and ... imposed touristic scenes"¹. Such critique, however, was a discordant note in an otherwise positive discourse –with the exception of religious discourse attacking *Noor* on moral grounds– about the appeal of production style in Turkish drama.

Gender and Spousal Relations

According to Arab journalists and commentators, another ingredient behind the success of Turkish *musalsalat* is their portrayal of

1 Abdulhamid Bandar (2009), *The vulgar melodrama juice*, "Al-Hayat", 24th September.

spousal relations, with a focus on women. The Arab press noted that several Turkish series feature romantic representations of loving couples, not only young and hip, but even old grandparents. On the video-sharing website YouTube, the most shared videos from *Noor*, with million-plus views, are of sensual and romantic scenes. Some clearly target women viewers, with the camera focusing on sensual depictions of the male actors' bodies. Censorship of "inappropriate" scenes during Arabic-dubbing in Syria prompted numerous Arab fans to download the original Turkish versions of the series and upload them on YouTube in an act of un-censoring. Arab commentary also focused on the popularity of Muhannad, Noor's husband, played by the Turkish actor Kıvanç Tatlıtuğ, with Arab women viewers. According to several news reports, Arab female viewers' fascination with the series and its star caused divorces in Sudan, Syria and Saudi Arabia.

The debate about Turkish *drama* in the Arab world also took up the role of Islam as a bridge, between Turkish productions on the one hand, and Arab viewers on the other hand. Arab journalists contended that the Istanbul elite lifestyle enjoyed by television drama characters, does not reflect the situation of a majority of ordinary Turks, who tend to be more conservative, or that Turkish *musalsalat* represented an image disconnected from the lives of Muslims in both Turkey and the Arab world. On the other hand, some of the television drama characters are shown to observe Muslim holidays, including fasting during Ramadan and following Muslim religious rituals at funerals and weddings. Since most Arabs and most Turks are Muslims, expressions of religiosity uttered by Turkish characters sound natural in Syrian Arabic.

Conservative Arab clerics, however, took action to fight what they saw as Turkish drama's harmful effects. The Mufti of the Syrian city of Aleppo issued a *fatwa* banning prayer while wearing shirts depicting stars from the series *Noor*. In Kuwait, the Ministry of Education issued a decree ordering schools to forbid students from using *Noor*-themed stationary, vowing to form committees to oversee the decree's implementation. Even stronger condemnations came from ultra-conservative Saudi clerics, with Mufti 'Abdulaziz Bin Abdullah al-Shaykh issued a *fatwa* banning *Noor*, which in his view encouraged sinful behavior among viewers. However, though Saudi princes and investors control leading Arab satellite channels, including Mbc, which aired *Noor*, the mufti's stinging rebuke had no effect whatsoever in stemming the series' popularity in Saudi Arabia or in influencing the programming decisions of Arab satellite channels.

Turkish dramas with explicitly political themes also resonated with Arab viewers, especially those sympathetic to the Palestinian cause. The most prominent was *Valley of the Wolves*, a movie and television series that caused a diplomatic row between Turkey and Israel. *Valley of the Wolves* was dubbed into the Syrian vernacular and aired by Abu Dhabi tv between 2007 and 2012. It tells the story of a Turkish intelligence officer, Polar Alemdar (Murad Alemdar in Arabic) who unravels plots against Turkey and retaliates against foreign conspirators and local collaborators in the name of Turkish pride and Middle Eastern solidarity. Some of Alemdar's exploits occurred beyond Turkish borders, notably in Northern Iraq, Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories, and both films and television featured graphic violence against US troops in Iraq and Israeli troops in the Occupied Territories.

Tensions arose with negative depictions of Israelis and Jews in *Valley of the Wolves–Iraq*, and Arab media extensively covered the ensuing Turkish-Israeli row. That season centered on what Turks know as the July 2003 “hood event,” when US soldiers led Turkish commandos in Sulaymaniyya, Iraq, at gunpoint, hoods over their heads, into 60 hours of detention. Though the US later apologized, Turkish media condemned the incident as an insult to Turkish pride, triggering anti-US protests in Istanbul and Ankara. The official website of *Valley of the Wolves–Iraq* described the event as a US bullying attempt.

In the film a Turkish First Lieutenant commits suicide after feeling dishonored by the “hood incident,” leaving a note that compels Alemdar to avenge his colleague. Alemdar travels to Northern Iraq and observes US forces humiliating the local population. Particular scorn is reserved for a US commander called Sam Marshall, who was responsible for the “hood event” and for raiding a wedding party in Northern Iraq and killing the groom and dozens of civilians. An unlikely alliance emerges between the Iraqi bride-widow and Alemdar who together seek revenge against the US officer. The movie depicts Turkish commandos as unequivocal heroes, Americans and Israelis as unmistakable villains. The Arab press described how the *musalsal* features Israeli agents kidnaping children and Israelis smuggling body parts. In one particularly contentious episode, as Alemdar storms a Mossad post to rescue a Turkish boy, he shoots the Mossad agent, whose blood splatters on the Star of David of the Israeli flag.

Israel accused the series of anti-Israeli and anti-Semitic content,

triggering a mediatized Turkish-Israeli diplomatic storm in January 2010, which temporarily appeared to jeopardize the two countries' strategic alliance. Israel's deputy foreign minister summoned the Turkish ambassador to Tel Aviv to the Knesset rather than to the foreign ministry, and was made to sit on a low couch, which made him appear on cameras to be on a lower level than the Israeli diplomat. The Turkish flag was also removed from the table. An Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs statement accused the series of showing Jews as war criminals. Furious at Israel's diplomatic rebuff, Ankara demanded an apology, which it received in the form of a letter to the Turkish ambassador. Pana Films dismissed Israeli accusations, wondering how Israel's leaders "shell[ing] refugee children hiding under the banner of the United Nations (in Gaza) [but] feel upset when real events are told by *Valley of the Wolves?*"

Arab media closely followed the Turkish-Israeli row, casting Turkey as proactive and Israel as reactive. A Lebanese daily opined that Turkey "exposes Mossad as the ghost behind many assassinations and mafias that infiltrate the Turkish state and its agencies," while a UAE paper wrote that "the Turkish position is brave and resolute in defending Turkish pride and international standing," and that it would behoove Israel to be more ashamed of the images of the horrific deaths it caused in Gaza rather than of *Valley of the Wolves*. *Valley of the Wolves-Palestine*, released in 2011 in Turkey and Europe, revolves around the *Mavi Marmara*, the Turkish Gaza-siege busting ship stormed by Israeli commandos in May 2010 who killed 9 Turkish citizens on board, causing an anti-Israeli uproar in Turkey and in the Arab world. In the film Alemdar leads Turkish commandos into the Occupied Territories to liquidate the Israeli commander of the *Mavi Marmara* raid. When during fighting an Israeli soldier asks Alemdar: "Why did you come to Israel?" He answers: "I did not come to Israel, I came to Palestine."

Some journalists were skeptical of images of Turkish regional heroism and critical of Turkey's hypocrisy, on the one hand constructing an anti-American and anti-Israeli self-image, on the other hand maintaining close economic and military relations with the US and Israel. Reflecting Saudi anxiety towards Turkey, the Saudi-owned Al-Hayat dismissed Alemdar, wondering "whether the world really needs a Turkish Rambo?" Nonetheless, Arab media coverage of the issue bolstered Turkey's status by framing the series as a tool in regional geopolitics. In reality, the significance of *Valley of the Wolves* resides less in its artistic or factual merits, and more in its reversal of

Hollywood's routine representations of Arabs and Muslims as villains and its glorification of Turkish power. It is therefore narratively "counter-hegemonic," though the Arab media's reading of *Valley of the Wolves* in purely geopolitical terms obscures economic and cultural factors.

The popularity of Turkish television drama in the Arab world calls for a multiple modernities perspective that would acknowledge that Turkey and the Arab world share common histories and memories, and therefore will gravitate towards similar assemblages of the modern. Indeed, several historical times cohabitate in the contemporary Middle East, of which Turkey is currently the most appealing example. As several scholars have noted, Turkish modernity is politically and culturally hybrid. After decades of Kemalist state-led modernization based on nationalism and secularism, Turkish modernity has shifted as religion has become more politicized and economically grounded. Secularism, once a pillar of Turkish modernity, has since the 1990s been in crisis, as a political Islam claiming to be modern, and hence legitimate, is fueled by economic growth and a rising profile abroad. The ongoing syncretism of Turkish modernity, now with a religious element that remains contested by a secularist legacy—as evidenced spectacularly in the demonstrations that started in Gesi Park in Istanbul a few months ago, resonates with similar searches for a negotiated Arab modernity. The elaboration of a selective modernity adapted to local historical and social realities often takes shape in contentious debates around popular culture and its imputed effects on society. As I argued in my last book², such was the case with the reality television controversies that rocked the Arab public sphere in the preceding decade.

Neo-Ottoman Cool, then, is grounded in a Turkish modernity that has been attractive to Arabs because it manages to combine a variety of hitherto separate and seemingly contradictory political, economic and socio-cultural elements in one seductive "package," what one Arab columnist captured as "[A] European, Islamic, Secular, Capitalist Turkey." Turkey appears to have momentarily pulled off a juggling act—the elaboration of a uniquely Turkish modernity—that resonates with Arab popular aspirations as revealed by Arab reactions to Turkish television drama and its treatment of social and political issues. The pan-Arab success of Turkish drama enables a deeper un-

² Kraidy M., *Reality Television and Arab Politics: Contention in Public Life*, Cambridge University Press, 2010.

derstanding of Arab public opinion of Turkey. Arabs face Turkey with a combination of desire and anxiety. Nonetheless, so disappointed and resentful have Arabs been towards the United States after Iraq, Afghanistan and continued US support for Israeli policies that the mere promise of a non-Western power rising in their neighborhood endows neo-Ottomanism with significant allure. For many Arabs, the rise of Turkey holds the promise of literally de-centering Western power in the Middle East, i.e. removing the West as the necessary central mediator between different countries and cultures in the Middle East. The re-centering of Turkey as a pivotal state and a great power that goes hand-in-hand with a reduced Western role is a foundation of the political, economic, and socio-cultural capital that fuels *Neo-Ottoman Cool*.

In this context, Turkish drama conjures a twofold model of masculinity that echoes a dual model of power. *Nour's* Muhannad and *The Valley of Wolves'* Alemdar are two faces of the same coin. Whereas Muhannad is understood as a domestic, attractive, though silent and passive husband, Alemdar is the martial, fearless, vocal and proactive commando. They are conquerors, one operating through sexual seduction, another through military aggression. Arab discourses about the two male protagonists establish them as icons of a Turkish, and by extension Middle Eastern *modern masculinity*. If the trope of neo-Ottomanism was invoked by Arab pundits concerned about the return of regional Turkish influence (hence the "Ottoman") but in a different—i.e. diplomatic, cultural, economic—guise (hence the "neo"), then coverage of Muhannad and Alemdar establish them as *cool neo-Ottomans*, more alluring and muscled versions of Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.

From that perspective, then, *Neo-Ottoman Cool* is a productive, however ironic, notion to capture both underlying causes and outcomes of Turkey's rising status in the Arab world, facilitated by the political bankruptcy of competing powers: Saudi Arabia's clerico-religious system is a liability in the race for the hearts and minds of Arabs, and Iran's anti-US and anti-Israel vitriol, compounded by the Sunni-Shi'i split, has failed to sway large segments of Arab public opinion. Turkey's allure, with its glamorous stars and its popular politicians, has recently been complicated by Turkey's growing involvement in the Arab uprisings, especially in Syria. Nonetheless, Turkey's position in the Middle East is poised to become more central as Islamist parties friendly to the Akp's blend of religion, capitalism and electoral politics take over Arab governments. The most singular

achievement of the Akp in this regard might be its success in uprooting anti-Turkish sentiment in the Arab world, without effecting a deep geopolitical shift, relying instead on media, popular culture, diplomacy and skillful oratory to create the aura of *Neo-Ottoman Cool*.

Trt7 al-Turkiyya The First Three Years of Turkey's Arabic-Language Satellite Television Channel

Marwan M. Kraidy



“**T**urks and Arabs,” intoned Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, one spring evening in April 2010, “are like the fingers of a hand. They are as close as the flesh and the nail of a finger... We belong to the same history, the same culture and above all the same civilization.” Erdoğan was speaking in the launching ceremony of Trt7 al-Turkiyya, Turkey’s Arabic-language satellite television channel, and his speech was carried live on

Al-Jazeera and other Arab news networks. His speech, and the event the speech keynoted, crowned a multi-year rapprochement between Turkey and its Arab neighbors, in which Erdoğan's soft-Islamist, socially conservative, economically liberal Akp executed a masterful charm offensive towards the Arab world, undergirded by warming political ties and growing economic trade between Arab countries and Turkey.

When considered against the backdrop of history's *longue durée*, where the Ottomans were the imperial overlords of most Arab societies, Erdoğan's expression of deep friendship and common destiny is astonishing. It contrasts sharply with a popular saying repeated in the early days of the Turkish Republic reflecting the Turkish elite's attitude towards Arabs: "We neither want to see an Arab's face, nor eat the sweets of Damascus." Turkey's Cold War alliance with the West and membership in NATO relegated Turkey's Arab relations to the back seat. During the last decade, however, since the Akp rose to power, Turkey has made news headlines in the West and the Middle East alike for its friendly turn towards Arab and Muslim neighbors, described by many analysts as "neo-Ottomanism."

The Launching of Trt7 al-Turkiyya was a pan-Arab media event. Turkish officials made a big show of the ceremony: The Crown Prince of Qatar Tamim bin-Hamad al-Thani, the head of the Islamic Conference, Ekmeleddin Ihsanoğlu and Turkish Information Minister Bülent Arınç attended the launching ceremony, while Arab League chief, Amr Musa, made a pre-recorded statement.

Al-Jazeera aired a special program dedicated to the launch from the Qatari channel's Beirut headquarters. Hosted by Al-Jazeera's erstwhile Beirut Bureau Chief Ghassan Bin Jeddu, who has since then moved on to launch Al-Mayadeen, a rival of Al-Jazeera, commented the launch video that Trt prepared, in which a young Turkish man is seen traveling from one Arab city to the other, always drinking a cup of ubiquitous Turkish coffee with the people of Beirut, Cairo and Damascus. The symbolic resonance of Turkish coffee underscored the authenticity and naturalness of the Arab-Turkish relation. As Bin Jeddu said that evening, in the special program dedicated to the opening of Trt7 al-Turkiyya,

Turkish coffee is the symbol, the slogan, and what captures Arab-Turkish relations. Turkish coffee is there every day and every morning in every Arab neighborhood, alley, household and café... Turkish coffee neither needs nor waits for a political decision or a presidential or royal decree.

In addition to his remarks previously quoted about “Turks and Arabs are like the fingers of a hand,” he claimed that “Trt7 al-Turkiyya was launched to become our common language, or common screen, our common passion.” He also underscored cultural links by reciting from Nizar Qabbani’s poem, *Beirut, the Lady of the World*, mentioning the Arab icon artists Fairouz, Majida al-Rumi and Umm Kulthum as loved not only by Arabs but Turks too in what was described as a “manifesto in the love of Arabs.”

The launch of an Arabic-speaking Turkish channel stems from Turkey’s foreign policy realignment in the Akp era, and signaled the membership of a political confident and economically powerful Turkey into the select club of great powers operating Arabic-language satellite channels. Whereas most Western and some Turkish politicians and journalists have reacted with alarm towards Turkey’s perceived Eastward shift, reactions in the Arab world, particularly among Turkey’s neighbors, have been overwhelmingly positive. Arab pundits have welcomed Turkey’s new foreign policy, and commented favorably on Turkey rapprochement with Arab countries. Recent surveys have documented shifts in Arab public opinion towards increased support of Turkish policy and have noted Arab admiration of Prime Minister Erdoğan and other Akp figures. For example, in a 2010 poll, Arabs named Erdoğan the world leader they admired most because of his criticism of Israeli actions against Palestinians. Nonetheless, Arab public opinion of Turkey and Arab media coverage of Turkey’s changing foreign policy in the Middle East remain under-researched and misunderstood. To remedy this situation, several questions need to be addressed: How has Turkey’s recent overture to the Arab world succeeded in overcoming hundreds of years of fraught relations and mutual negative stereotypes between the two sides? To what extent has Turkey’s neo-ottoman policies shaped this rapprochement? How large of a role did Turkish popular culture play in the improvement of Turkish-Arab relations? What role have Arab media played in promoting positive opinions of Turkey on the Arab street?

A vibrant pan-Arab media scene has played a decisive role in constructing a sympathetic image of Turkey and its policies in Arab public discourse. That role is not restricted to pan-Arab satellite news channels like Al-Jazeera and national state-controlled broadcasting systems, but extends to the popularity among Arab viewers of Turkish television drama series dubbed in Arabic, and films inspired by these series. In addition, Turkey’s launching of the Arabic-language televi-

sion channel, Trt7 al-Turkiyya, was welcome in Arab public discourse as a signal of Turkey's genuine desire for friendly relations with the Arab world, and as a manifestation of Turkey's rise to great power status similar to that of other non-Arab major states with international Arabic-language channels like the United States, Russia, France, Germany, China and Iran.

On April 4, 2010, the Turkish government launched an Arabic-language satellite television channel, Trt7 al-Turkiyya, transmitting on Arabsat and Nilesat satellites.

The channel was one of many in the line-up of the Turkish Radio and Television Corporation (*Türkiye Radyo ve Televizyon Kurumu*), known by its acronym Trt. Founded in 1964, Trt is officially Turkey's public broadcaster, financed by taxes on utilities and fees on television sets.

The move did not come as a surprise, because first, it fits within the transnationalization of Turkish media ongoing since the late 1980s, and secondly, because having an Arabic-language satellite channel covering the Middle East has become one of the trappings of Great Power status. Turkey was joining the United States, Iran, France, Germany, the United Kingdom and China in launching a television channel courting Arabs in their own language.

Clearly, Trt7 al-Turkiyya's raison d'être is to bolster Turkey's "zero problems with neighbors" policy with a mediated charm offensive towards the region's 300 million Arabic speakers. The channel faces a daunting challenge: it has to compete not only with hundred of Arab channels but also with the US-funded al-Hurra, the British Bbc Arabic, the French France 24, the German Dw-tv Arabic, the Iranian Al-Alam, the Russian Rusya al-Yawm [Russia Today] and the Chinese Cctv Arabic. The managing director of Trt7 al-Turkiyya, Sefer Turan, an Egypt-educated Arabic speaker who previously worked for the Islamic 7 channel of the now defunct al-Rafah Islamic Party, acknowledged the challenge: "There are 750 satellite channels in Arabic," he said. "We are going to be the 751st. We have to do something new in terms of format and content ... but we want to go further and co-produce television programs with Arab countries. The story can start in Istanbul, then continue in Damascus and end in Cairo." Reflecting his channel's embroilment in larger geopolitical dynamics, he added:

as a result of its active foreign policy, Turkey has become a country that people are increasingly curious about. This curiosity not only relates to its politics, but goes beyond that; its culture, tradition,

art and geography are also starting to generate interest... While we introduce Turkey, we will never ever use the language of propaganda; that would not be the correct approach. We want to show our country's industry, politics, culture and art, and leave the decision to the audience.

Turan's choice of words is telling about the style and tenor of Turkey's public diplomacy: it promotes the country and its regional interests in a soft sell stylistically emblematic of *Neo-Ottoman Cool*. Indeed, Trt7 al-Turkiyya is based in Istanbul and Beirut, the trendy style capital of the Arab world whose fashion, cuisine, nightlife and pop stars are popular among Arabs. The channel broadcasts a mix of news and entertainment, most importantly popular Turkish television drama. A production company owned by Ayse Böhürler, a journalist and founding member of the Akp, makes Trt7 al-Turkiyya's most costly program, reflecting the channel's ties to the Turkish pious bourgeoisie.

Arab media discourse about the launch of Trt7 al-Turkiyya mirrored Arab media coverage of Turkey's foreign policy: It received a warm welcome from the Arab press, with the major exception of Saudi-owned media, especially the pan-Arab daily Al-Hayat. Immediate reaction to the channel's launch consisted of speculation about Turkey's reasons for launching the channel, focusing on whether Ankara sought to expand its role in the Middle East and reap the fruits of favorable Arab public opinion that welcomed Turkey's newly strained relations with Israel, or whether Turkey was trying to take advantage of the huge success of its television drama in the Arab media market to attract Arab investment. Other journalists focused on the need for cultural exchange between Turkey and the Arabs. Abdulhamid Belegi, from the Turkish Cihan News Agency, wrote that the "time has come for direct dialogue" between Arabs and Turks "without mediators." The channel's manager, Turan Sefer, was quoted echoing the same idea when he said:

for a long time relations between the two (Arab and Turkish) societies have been perpetuated via intermediaries, by translators. This situation caused many misunderstandings and moments lost in translation. With Trt7 al-Turkiyya we aim to correct this as much as possible. We want to talk directly about our geography, education, art, culture, everything. We want to remove the intermediaries from our communication. We want to explain Turkey to the Arab world properly.

The spectrum of Arab media coverage of the launch of Turkey's

Arabic-language channel ranged from Al-Jazeera's exceptionally positive coverage to the cynically critical reaction of Al-Hayat. Al-Jazeera gave extensive coverage to the launch of the channel in a dedicated episode of *Hiwar Maftuh* [Open Dialogue] that was shot in Trt7 al-Turkiyya's studios in Istanbul and broadcast on 4 April 2010. The channel's Beirut bureau chief, Ghassan Bin Jiddu, hosted for the occasion Al-Jazeera's Damascus bureau chief 'Abdulhamid Tawfiq and Islamist Egyptian writer Fahmi Huwaydi in addition to Arab reporters and staff working at the new Turkish channel.

At the other end of the spectrum, the London-based, Saudi-funded and Lebanese-edited daily newspaper Al-Hayat paper was critical of Trt7 al-Turkiyya. It criticized the channel's editorial line which "heavy-handedly forced praise of Turkey onto the content of programs" in a way that was not done, according to Al-Hayat by equivalent channels such as the Iranian Al-Alam and the American Al-Hurra. Al-Hayat was also critical of Al-Jazeera's coverage of the launch and of reactions by Arab pundits, who were interviewed by Trt and praised Prime Minister Erdoğan as "the Arab leader" (*al-Zaim al-Arabi*) and "the knight of Anatolia." Al-Hayat criticized the channel's programs for focusing on cooking and tourism, thus addressing Arabs "by appealing to their stomachs." The same story mocked the quality of programs and the low level Arabic language used by the channel. Al-Hayat also criticized the fact that Turkish soap operas have only been dubbed into the Syrian dialect of Arabic and not the Egyptian, Gulf or the North African dialect. Even a "candid camera" program was criticized as dour and contrived. Al-Hayat also claimed that the 25 to 30 employees of the new channel were underpaid by Turkish standards, the highest salary is \$3,500 a month, said Al-Hayat. It described the channel's political talk shows as contests on which Arab pundits "can shower more praise on Turkey and its foreign policy and influential regional role ... without hosting anyone who would offer an alternative viewpoint or opinion." The same article also criticized the name Trt al-Turkiyya [Trt the-Turkish-one], saying it should be Trt al-Arabiyya [Trt the-Arab-one] instead, since according to him the channel's Turkish identity was already evident in the name Trt.

Other news outlets speculated on whether the channel reflected a neo-Ottoman policy, and quoted heavily from Turkish sources evincing that Ankara's soft power went hand-in-hand with its geopolitical aspirations. Muhammad Khayr wrote in Al-Akhbar that the repetition of the name "Istanbul" in several of the titles of the channel's programs evoked the historic importance of the city, as the

Ottoman capital, as opposed to Ankara, the modern Turkish capital. Singling out Trt7 al-Turkiyya from other foreign-owned Arabic language channels, he added that Arab channels faced real competition because the Turkish outlet provided not only news but entertainment as well. In the words of Mete Cubukcu, an editor at the Ntv news channel and an expert on the Arab world, “Turkey now wants to be an actor in the Middle East. (Trt) is one element of this policy” of re-balancing Turkish diplomacy which for years followed an exclusively Western-oriented path.”

An Arabic-language Turkish channel will never be able to compete head-to-head with the best indigenous Arab media productions across the spectrum of media genres (news, music, talk-shows, drama). Rather, the importance of Trt7 al-Turkiyya resides primarily in helping establish Turkey as a regional superpower with the cultural and media trappings of a Great Power, but also in signaling to Arabs that Turkey is interested in courting them. In this context, it is logical that Trt7 al-Turkiyya emphasizes soft news and entertainment at the expense of hard news, with the former associated with attracting viewers to Turkish cultural, social and political life, while indirectly promoting Turkey’s political and economic interests, rather than directly pushing these interests through explicit editorially slanted news coverage.

In this regard Trt’s emphasis on Beirut as, next to Istanbul, the second headquarters of Trt7 al-Turkiyya, is significant since Beirut remains an Arab style—but not necessarily news—center, and with many pan-Arab media incorporating “Lebanese elements,” i.e. attractive female media workers, informality and humor in presentation, and potent channel and program branding, in their programming strategies to woo Arab viewers. Also, Lebanon’s pluralistic society is in tune with neo-Ottomanism tolerance towards minorities, and among other benefits the country provides Turkey with a gateway to woo Shi’i Arabs. That Arabs welcomed Turkish soft power, in sharp contrast with the derision meted upon Western attempts to win Arab hearts and minds, testify to the power of indirect, soft-sell, influence through media and popular culture, rather than direct, hard-sell communication through directed news and information programs that smack of propaganda.

The situation has undergone a radical transformation in the 3 years since the launch of Trt7 al-Turkiyya. In hindsight, Turkish Prime Minister Rejep Tayyip Erdoğan April 4, 2010 “fingers of one hand” speech can be understood as the apex of Turkish soft power in

the Arab world. Since then, the onset of the popular uprisings that unseated dictators in Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, and Yemen, and the ongoing violence in Bahrain and Syria, in addition to continuing upheaval in Egypt, have spectacularly upended Turkey's "zero problems with neighbors" foreign policy, and fatally undermined Turkish soft power in the Arab world. This affects Trt7 al-Turkiyya directly because it is closely associated with the Turkish leadership. It is therefore fair to assume that perceptions of the Turkish channel among Arabs closely reflects the standing of Turkish leaders in Arab public opinion, especially Erdoğan himself.

Turkey's embroilment in the Arab uprisings and the ensuing chaos went from bad to worse. The country's involvement in the Libyan crisis was not too costly because that affair ended quickly. Turkish entanglement in Syria, however, caused a deterioration of the security situation within Turkey, with thousands of refugees crossing into the country, explosions rocking border cities, and instability emerging along Turkey's border with Syria. Nonetheless, one can say that at least in the case of Syria, Turkey's stance is in sync with majority Sunni Arab public opinion. With the June 30, 2013 coup in Egypt that removed elected president Mohammed Mursi and put in his place an army general who went on to order a general repression of the Muslim Brotherhood, which is close to Turkey, Egypt fell squarely in the Saudi camp, against Qatar and Turkey. In the ongoing Saudi-led media campaigns against the Muslim Brotherhood and their defenders, including Turkey, a diminished Trt7 Al-Arabiyya is not sufficient to promote and defend Turkey's perspective in an Arab communication order increasingly dominated by the Saudis and their allies.

The Prime Minister and the Sultan: Sacred history and expression collide in Turkey

Joshua Carney



Suleiman the Magnificent was the longest-reigning Ottoman sultan, holding power for 46 years and overseeing massive expansions of the Empire's territory during the 16th Century. His tv counterpart, Turkish actor Halit Ergenç, has actually conquered more of the globe, but his reign over ratings has been threatened by the man some are calling Turkey's next sultan, Prime Minister Tayyip Erdoğan.

On 25 November 2012, while speaking at the opening ceremony for an airport in the city of Kuthaya, Erdoğan veered from his remarks on the progress Turkey has seen under the past decade of his Akp rule to lambast one of the country's most popular tv shows, the sometimes sultry Ottoman costume drama *Magnificent Century*. Noting that opposition leaders had criticized his government's foreign policy, Erdoğan responded by saying, "We know our responsibilities. We'll go everywhere that our [Ottoman] ancestors went, but I think some may be imagining the ancestors in *Magnificent Century*. People watch that show and believe it's a documentary. We don't recognize that Suleiman. The real Suleiman spent 30 years of his life on horse back, not in the palace like you see on the tv show. I condemn the directors and the owner of the channel and, since they've been warned, I expect a judicial decision on the matter."

Though the Prime Minister didn't detail his concerns with the show, he tapped into a discourse about respect to sacred figures that has plagued *Century* since its premiere. Critics feel that the show delves too deeply into speculation on the Sultan's private life, particularly with regard to his interest in women and the significance of harem intrigues. They are also worried that the Turkish public takes the show as fact, and is therefore getting a skewed sense of this heroic figure.

Erdoğan is arguably the most popular and powerful Turkish leader since the founder of the country, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, so when he speaks, things happen. Within a few days, a tour guide from the city of Konya had filed a law suit against the show, claiming that it misrepresents history and distorts Turkish values. The following week, an Akp MP, Oktay Saral, introduced legislation to amend the constitution of the country's censorship board, Rük. Taking cue from a statute that already protects the memory of Atatürk, this new law was to ensure that, "historical events and characters that contribute to national values shall not be diminished, disrespected, or shown in manners other than they were." Days later, Saral appeared on tv promising that *Century* would be taken off the air in 2013 and, the following day, Turkish Airlines canceled its plans to offer the popular program as in-flight entertainment.

Erdoğan's opponents were far from silent on the matter. Many claimed that this was simply another example of the Prime Minister trying to distract the public from more pressing issues. Just as six months prior he had come out against abortion to silence critics of a military operation that killed 34 Kurdish civilians, critics said, he

was now trying to divert attention from increasing Turkish/Kurdish tensions and serious problems on the border with Syria.

Some historians pointed out the Prime Minister's historical nescience, saying that archive documents indicate Suleiman spent about eight years on (horseback) campaign rather than 30, and suggested that his speech was simply an attempt to rewrite Ottoman history for political ends.

A number of critics noted that iconoclasm was nothing new for Erdoğan. On a visit to the eastern city of Kars in 2011 the Prime Minister had attacked a sculpture dedicated to Turkish/Armenian friendship, calling it an "abomination" both because it was ugly and because it was near a religious site. The sculpture was quickly torn down.

Perhaps the most damning critique, however, linked the Prime Minister's attack on *Century* with a December 2012 report on press freedom by the Committee to Protect Journalists, which noted that Turkey had more journalists in prison (49) than any other country in the world. Adding to these the hundreds of students, politicians, and activists rounded up on questionable charges of terrorism, critics claimed that Erdoğan's volley was just the latest in a series of Akp attacks on freedom of expression in recent years.

At present, the fate of tv's Suleiman looks brighter than that of the journalists. The show, which reaches an estimated audience of 150 million viewers in 44 countries throughout the world, made some quick changes to its format. Female characters began to dress more modestly in the weeks after the Prime Minister's remarks, and Suleiman's wife, Hürrem, took to praying. Whether in response to these actions or not, the so-called "Suleiman" law seems to have stagnated in parliament, at least for the moment. The show is slated to end in June of 2014, and it is unlikely that any law will come into effect soon enough to harm it, though such a law could be a concern for the latest big-budget Ottoman drama, *Fetih*, which premiered in September of 2013 and tells the story of Istanbul's conqueror, Mehmed II.

Suleiman, Mehmed II's great grandson, was called "magnificent" throughout the world for the strength and expanse of his empire. In Turkey, however, he is known as the "law maker" because he codified a set of rules regarded as strict on the one hand, but also as reasonable and just. Erdoğan, Turkey's strongest leader in years, may be pondering his own epithet as he contemplates his abortive assault against the Sultan of the airwaves.



Silver and light: Turkish drama shines brighter abroad

Joshua Carney



Recipe to change a region: one spoiled young man, one naive but witty girl from the country, one grandfather who runs both his household and his business with the same firm hand, and a family of misfits whom we could all relate to if not for their vast fortune. Place in a beautiful historical mansion on the shores of Istanbul's Bosphorus and let simmer over every possible intrigue and twist in the tv drama playbook.

Gümüş (Silver) was a mildly successful program when it hit screens in Turkey in January 2005. Though it never topped the ratings, hovering around 20% of the market share at best, it did manage to stay on the air for a full run of two and a half years (100 episodes) in the fiercely competitive Turkish market, introducing heartthrob Kıvanç Tatlıtuğ to the world in the process. The show's big break came when it was purchased by Saudi broadcaster Mbc, dubbed into colloquial Syrian Arabic, and began airing across the Middle East in April of 2008. Within a month, *Noor* (Light), as the show was renamed, had become the talk of the Arab world, and when audiences tuned in for the final episode on August 30th of that year, they massed 85 million.

Gümüş is the story of Mehmet (Tatlıtuğ) and Gümüş (Songül Öden) or, for the Arabic-speaking world, Mohannad and Noor, a couple pushed into an arranged marriage by Mehmet's business-tycoon grandfather, Mehmet Fikri. They warm to each other, fall in love, and suffer a series of mishaps that threaten to tear them apart from time to time, not least due to the conniving of jealous family members. Along the way Gümüş evolves from innocent, small-town seamstress to savvy, fashion business manager and Mehmet sloughs off some of his spoiled rich-kid habits while learning to love his wife and family. Key side plots include the story of Mehmet's sister, Pınar, who has an illegitimate child by his best friend, Onur, and the couple's eventual marriage; a love triangle involving Mehmet's otherwise quite composed cousin, Bahar; the continuing foibles of her inept and power-hungry brother, Berk; a struggle between Mehmet's mother, Şeref, and Mehmet Fikri's new wife, Dilruba; the abortion of a child by Gümüş' childhood friend, Rukiye, along with her subsequent breakdown and eventual recovery; and the revelation that Mehmet's first love, Nihan, not only survived a car crash presumed to have killed her but also gave birth to Mehmet's son some months later.

Alongside this usual soap-opera fare, the show tackles some less conventional issues of social significance in Turkey. When Mehmet is knifed by thugs at the behest of a relative, he loses both kidneys, introducing the topic of organ donation to the plot. Two parents who might save the life of Mehmet and others by donating their brain-dead son's organs ultimately decide against it, but not before compelling reasons for donation are spelled out clearly for viewers. Since donation is relatively rare in Turkey (only 3.7% of the population was registered to donate in 2011) this twist was a big step for the show to take. Ultimately, Gümüş learns that she is

an acceptable donor and manages to save Mehmet's life with one of her kidneys. Of even greater impact is Gümüş' own brush with breast cancer. Though it turns out that the lump she finds is non-malignant, she alters an entire line of clothing in her design business to participate in a breast cancer awareness campaign. This becomes a central focus of the program in latter episodes, and it actually ties in with a campaign that was taking place in Turkey at the time of the original airing.

While these consciousness-raising aspects of Gümüş may have set the show apart from other programs in Turkey, they were not the most salient points for viewers in the Arab world. The *Noor* phenomenon has been the subject of numerous academic studies focusing on both audiences and media discourse, with many finding that the program's recipe for success was the unique combination of the foreign and familiar that media analysts Marwan Kraidy and Omar Al-Ghazzi have dubbed "neo-Ottoman Cool." In the case of *Noor*, it seems to have been the combination of an Islamic backdrop, a powerful patriarch, and the typical plot twists such as interpersonal intrigues and the return of dead characters that made the show familiar to Arab-world viewers. If the Muslim identity of the characters and the role of the grandfather made *Noor* more "local" than US dramas and Latin American telenovelas, though, it was nonetheless the focus on female emancipation and the openly affectionate, mutually supportive relationship between lead characters that made the show stand out among programming from the region. Indeed, investigators at Ka Research found that 52% of female viewers in Saudi Arabia changed their views on female employment as a result of the show, while 63% felt that *Noor's* popularity reflected a general dissatisfaction with the freedoms and rights granted to women in the Arab world.

While these elements may have been key to the show's success, they were not the only factors that set *Noor* apart from typical regional fare. The breaking of sexual taboos such as premarital sex, children outside of marriage, and infidelity were all dealt with to varying degrees (sometimes repeatedly) in *Noor*, and were the source of much controversy. Although Arab-world viewers generally reported that they didn't appreciate these aspects of the program, their reaction was of minor significance compared to that of various religious authorities, a number of whom issued fatwas either against *Noor* or against the networks broadcasting it. Though some of these were low-key suggestions that the show be censored or that people

should not pray in shirts depicting characters from the show, one fatwa actually forbade show and, eventually, Sheikh Saleh al-Lohaidan, head of the Saudi sharia court, proclaimed that the owners of the channels broadcasting “indecent and vulgar” programs could be put to death through a court proceeding.

Religious figures were concerned that *Noor* would change the values and norms of the region. While it would be hard to judge whether this happened on a moral level, the norms of Turkish programming certainly did take hold in the wake of the show. In the months and years after *Noor*, broadcasters bought up Turkish dramas left and right and, more recently, local producers have started toying with variations on the Turkish formula to cater to viewer expectations, courting their own controversies along the way. The rising

Reality (tv) in Wolve's Clothing? Valley of the Wolves

Joshua Carney



For the past three to four years, tv industry conversations in the Middle-East North Africa region have been dominated by one theme: Turkish content. Such talk has often focused on programs targeting female audiences, with *Noor/ Gümüş* being the breakaway phenomenon of 2008 and *The Magnificent Century/Muhteşem Yüzyıl* taking the prize for most-discussed program in recent years. The dis-

criminating ear will note, however, that another program is almost always mentioned alongside the big romances. It's a franchise that's been airing for over ten years in Turkey and it's been making its way to the Balkans, the Arab world, and beyond in various forms for almost as long. Far from a romance, the program blends the genres of spy thriller, mafia drama, and even reality-tv, targeting a primarily male audience. As controversial as it has been successful, the program has been subject to numerous penalties by the Turkish censorship board, RtüK, seen banning efforts in Germany, and contributed to international crises between Turkey and both the US and Israel. That program is *Valley of the Wolves/Kurtlar Vadisi*.

Valley began airing in January of 2003 on Turkish private channel Show tv. It tells the story of Turkish special services agent Ali Candan, who gives up his family and identity, undergoing plastic surgery and taking on the name Polat Alemdar in order to infiltrate and destroy the Turkish mafia. Alemdar is played by Necati Şaşmaz, who was working as an insurance salesman when producer/director Osman Sinav approached him about the role. Though many of the other lead actors were also novices, *Valley* was a runaway success, shooting quickly to the top of the ratings, and leading to the much-touted phenomenon of vacant streets across Turkey on Thursday nights, as audiences clustered around tv screens. By the end of the second season, Sinav left the project, making way for younger Şaşmaz brother Raci in the role of producer, and a series of directors that would eventually include youngest brother Zübeyr as well. As the Şaşmaz brothers, relative outsiders to the entertainment industry, infiltrated and gained power in the burgeoning sector of Turkish television, *Valley's* lead character, Alemdar, ran a parallel story, entering the mafia as an unknown and moving quickly to the position of kingpin by the December 2005 season finale. The final two episodes of the show featured Hollywood actors Andy Garcia and Sharon Stone, and revealed that Turkish organized crime was only fragment of a much bigger game involving shady international players.

The second installation in the franchise was the Serdar Akar-directed film *Valley of the Wolves Iraq*, a 2006 feature that opens with a real-life 2003 incident in which US troops in northern Iraq detained Turkish special forces agents. The thread of the plot from here is a largely fictional story in which Alemdar and his men travel to Iraq to extract revenge on the Christian zealot in charge of US forces. Boasting a budget of 10 million USD and taking in box office

receipts of about 24 million, *Iraq* was the most successful Turkish film to date when it came out, playing well not only to the general populace, but also to the political elite, with parliamentary leader Bülent Arınç praising the film's realism and, Prime Minister Erdoğan's wife, Emine, speaking of her "pride" after a gala screening. It was also released in Germany, where Turkish fans of the tv show came out in large numbers to watch, and in the Arab world, where the critique of US actions in Iraq had great appeal.

That critique is one of the most fascinating aspects of *Valley* because the plot weaves among depictions of US military cruelty that come directly from Turkish press stories. US soldiers firing on a peaceful wedding party early in the film echoed a similar incident from May of 2004 in Iraq, and the prisoner abuse at Abu Ghraib features prominently, including a reenactment of the famous pile of naked men and the photographing of that scene. There is even a section about the harvesting of organs for sale to Israel and the US, a story that, though never substantiated, did nonetheless appear in the Turkish press and receive much attention. This blending of "news" and fiction, along with the rampant anti-American message of the film, had US analysts and politicians alike deeply concerned about the show.

Indeed, the blending of fact and fiction has always been a hallmark of *Valley*. Many of the characters in the tv series bear names, occupations, and characteristics that are clearly references to characters from the worlds of Turkish politics, business, and crime, and events from the news often make their way into the plot of the show within a month. This relationship with reality isn't simply one of representation either. The show seems to foster its own reality in many ways, at least among fans, whose more creative activities have included taking out funeral announcements in prominent newspapers and holding moments of silence before major football matches in honor of characters who have died on the show. On a more serious note, the defense mounted by a young man who murdered a Catholic priest in 2007 included being "under the influence" of *Valley*, which had a subplot at the time about the shady work of Christian missionaries in Turkey.

The *Valley* franchise continued after *Iraq*, first with the short-lived tv show *Valley of the Wolves Terror*, which was taken off the air after the first episode because its direct tackling of the Kurdish conflict was deemed too controversial at the time. This was followed-up a month later with *Valley of the Wolves Ambush*, which

details Alemdar's struggles against the world of international big business, the Gladio-like Turkish deep state, and the work of meddling countries such as Israel and the US, which continuously plot to destroy the Turkish nation. *Ambush*, nearing its 200th episode, remains on the air today, and it has spawned three film projects. The 2008 comedy *Muro: Damn the Humanist Inside* follows a Kurdish revolutionary who is released from prison, while the 2009 drama *Valley of the Wolves Gladio* traces an insider's account of the Turkish deep state.

Of greatest impact on the international front was the most recent filmic offshoot, 2011's *Valley of the Wolves Palestine*, which begins with the 2010 Israeli raid on the Gaza flotilla and, like *Iraq*, traces Alemdar's path of revenge, as he and his small team take on and destroy a major portion of the Israeli Defense Forces. *Palestine* continued an established *Valley* tradition of lambasting Israel, a trend that received prominent attention after the broadcast of a 2010 episode featuring Alemdar's raid of the Israeli consulate to free a kidnapped baby. During the raid, he scolds consular officials for their part in Israeli war crimes and the suffering of Palestinian children before killing them summarily. The episode caused a diplomatic incident which very nearly led to the recall of the Turkey's ambassador to Israel. *Palestine*, coming after the ambassador had already been recalled as a result of the flotilla raid, had no such effect on relations, but it was the target of attempted bans in Germany, in respect to its perceived anti-Semitism. It was the third biggest Turkish film of 2011, with box office takings of about 13 million US dollars.

Though no stranger to controversy at home, where episodes of the initial *Valley* series were subject to repeated censures by R \ddot{u} k for its extravagant violence, the franchise seems in recent years to have found a cozy niche in the domestic political spectrum. Critics note that the plot of *Ambush* took on a decidedly pro-government tone after it moved in 2010 to Atv, a channel that, though private, is perceived to have strong ties with the Akp, which has been governing Turkey since 2002. The show now features regular characters representing Prime Minister Erdoğan and Foreign Minister Davutođlu, portraying the latter in a particularly heroic light. Recent episodes have focused heavily on Syria and, though the season finale gave no direct discussion about the ongoing protests in Turkey, *Valley* was not entirely silent on the matter, as lead actor Şaşmaz was granted a special audience with Erdoğan at the height of the

protests, purportedly to voice the concerns of the public. Both this meeting and Şaşmaz's follow-up press conference were widely criticized by protestors, but the very fact that it happened is a testament to the enduring legacy of *Valley*.

Just what form that legacy will ultimately take is a source of much debate in Turkey. In July the "Wise Persons Commission," a group of academics, journalists, and artists tasked with easing the way for Turkish/Kurdish peace, featured among its recommendations the removal of nationalistic, conflict-oriented tv programs from the airwaves. *Valley* was far and away the most prominent show on their list. Those who call the show divisive have plenty of evidence, from the half-baked plot of *Terror* to the valorization of a character named Kara, widely seen as a stand-in for one-time gendarme agent Mahmut Yıldırım, who is currently standing trial for the assassination of a Kurdish writer and is suspected of many other anti-Kurdish activities. On the other hand, one of the show's most popular characters, Muro, was a Pkk member who fought sincerely, if ineptly, for the cause of his people. The 2013 season finale was similarly equivocal in its Turkish nationalism. It featured a plot turn revealing that the (so-far) deepest level of the Turkish deep state is actually part of a pan-Islamic brotherhood that includes the Kurds, hinting that the show may be shifting its politics in line with those of the government's so-called "Kurdish Opening."

This recent revelation is not the only confluence between *Valley* and the Akp as of late. In what is for many critics a troubling reversal, various members of the party have begun explaining the Gezi Park protests with reference to conspiracy theories that resemble the plot of *Valley*. Prime Minister Erdoğan's claims that an "interest rate lobby" is trying to bring Turkey down have been presaged by similar claims on the show, and Deputy PM Beşir Atalay's remarks that "there are circles jealous of Turkey's growth uniting on the side of the Jewish diaspora" is the everyday material of a *Valley* script sheet. The most recent theory comes from Erdoğan's new chief advisor, Akp critic-turned-champion Yiğit Bulut, who claims that nefarious forces are trying to kill the PM with telekinesis. Though the latter has not yet appeared in a *Valley* plot, tracing the rationale behind it requires a set of mental contortions that perhaps only serious viewers of the show will be primed to perform. Such priming has long been the fodder of *Valley*'s critics, who have repeatedly worried that "naive" audiences would be lost in the show's blend of fact and fiction. Very few, however, had anticipated that the same

thing would happen to politicians. Whether these new theories represent the genuine beliefs of the ruling party or whether they are being used to pander to a specific populace, they speak to a broadening of conspiracy discourse in the public sphere, suggesting that *Valley* and its modes of storytelling are part of a much greater phenomenon.

CONCLUSIONS

Soap operas and foreign policy: how Turkey creates and promotes its image

di Stefano Maria Torelli



On the day of the last episode of the popular show *Gümüş* (in Arabic *Noor*) 85 million people throughout the Middle East were glued to their television screens. For the large part, these were Arab viewers outside Turkey. The spread of Turkish soaps throughout a large part of the Middle East is emblematic of a phenomenon, which has assumed more and more relevant dimensions and characteristics. Some have even begun discussing a “diplomacy

of soaps”, referring to their role in promoting Turkey’s image abroad. However, is it too risky to talk about *soft power*? Is it possible to attribute the significance of broadcasting Turkish series abroad to a policy of influence in the Middle East that the Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has pursued for the past decade?

From the Akp’s rise to power onwards, Turkey’s foreign policy has gone through a phase characterised by unprecedented interest in the Near East, and the Arab world in particular. Firstly, during the Cold War, and subsequently in the first ten years of regional readjustment that followed, Ankara always looked westwards rather than eastwards. This was due to its geopolitical positioning in the aftermath of World War II as a bulwark of Western and Nato interests vis-à-vis the Soviet Bloc. Furthermore, by looking at the history of the past few centuries it is clear that few motivations existed for Turkey to be on good terms with Arab countries. Indeed, for almost 500 years, up to World War I, Turkish power, the Ottoman Empire, had reigned over Arab lands by the sword and was perceived as a coloniser. Ankara’s rapprochement to the Arab world – weaving diplomatic relations, making investments, participating in regional political assemblies – has been perceived by some as a sign of neo-colonialism, neo-Ottomanism, directed at “reconquering” those areas. Others have pointed the finger at Turkey’s so-called about turn from being an ally of the West to a dangerous interlocutor for countries such as Syria, and further east, Russia and Iran. Despite these interpretations, it should be noted that if Ankara has begun to focus on its south eastern borders it is for much more practical reasons. Firstly, to expand business opportunities in a more open world, to find the necessary primary resources to support its growth and consumption, to develop good relations with neighbouring countries with the ultimate aim of extending its influence and prestige in the Middle East. In other words, Turkey aims to pave the way for the entire region’s development. It is here that the famous definition of *soft power* coined by Joseph Nye in 1990 re-emerges as useful. Here *soft power* is defined as a means to obtain influence not by force and coercion (*hard power*), but by exercising a power of attraction by other means. Of these *other means*, media and mass culture are the most significant.

To underline how these tools influence people is nothing new in the public debate on the role of mass media and what they transmit. Moreover, here in Italy, we are living in the era of television, an era in which criticism is frequently directed at mass media, or

more specifically, at its owners. The latter have been accused of using means of communication in order to broadcast biased messages and obtain personal advantages. This process extends from economics to the electoral sphere. These critiques indicate how fundamentally important the issue still is. This occurs in the West, as well as in other parts of the world, but to varying degrees, in both authoritarian and democratic countries. From a phenomenon of entertainment to a national one, in merely a few years these series have become a symbol of Turkey's *soft power*. Turkish soap operas have rapidly become one of Ankara's foreign policy tools, thanks to their visibility not only in the Balkans and south Asia, but throughout the Arab world.

The figure of the "Turk", traditionally associated as an oppressor of Arab people, has not only been removed, but has become an actual point of reference. Yet, in soaps such as *Noor* it appears as though the Turkish man makes Arab women dream. All this, just as the most popular political leader in the Arab world, until recently, was Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, despite not being an Arab himself. Following the Arab Spring, Turkey can no longer pursue its regional policy of "no problems with the neighbours". Indeed, many Arab countries (not necessarily their people) have started to view Ankara with a certain degree of suspicion. However, in the past decade, Turkey has worked hard to promote its image throughout the region. Furthermore, the means it has employed have not been weapons but "soft" tools, such as investment and culture. In this context, the establishment and diffusion of the Yunus Emre Institutes is emblematic of this process, having been founded by Erdoğan in 2007, with the clear objective of working as soft power instruments on an equal footing with Germany's Goethe Institute or Great Britain's British Council. The exporting of Turkish television series can definitely be seen as a means to bring this about, and in fact, a way of implementing foreign policy. A comparison with the Ottoman past gains ground when considering that aside from the Arab world, countries in which Turkish series are most popular are Romania, Bulgaria and other Balkan countries, in other words, the heritage of an empire that once was.

The effects of Turkish shows on Ankara's political-diplomatic relations began to manifest themselves in the past few years. In October 2009, it was a soap opera that acted as the prelude to the deterioration of relations between Turkey and Israel. Historically allied, both countries actually fell victim to a political crisis following

the broadcasting of *Ayrılık: Aşkta ve Savaşta Filistin* (“Separation: love and war in Palestine”). Just as relations between both countries had started to wane due to the Turkish government’s harsh critique of Israel’s intervention in the Gaza Strip between 2008 and 2009 (so-called Operation Cast Lead), the thirteen episodes of this soap were being aired on Turkish television. According to Tel Aviv, certain scenes were defamatory and denigrating towards the Israeli state, consequently triggering a response from Israel. Aside from accusations of the soap having general anti-Semitic portrayals, there were images of Israeli soldiers mistreating and beating children and an elderly Palestinian man, culminating in the scene of a helpless girl being shot in the back by an Israeli soldier. These scenes sufficed to provoke Israel’s harsh reaction and, at an official meeting held at the start of 2010 with the Turkish ambassador and Israeli vice-Minister in Israel, Ankara’s diplomatic representative was seated on a chair lower than his Israeli counterpart and the Turkish flag was removed from the table around which the meeting took place. In diplomacy every small gesture is filled with meaning. Moreover, if it is true that the Macedonian parliament met to decide whether to ban Turkish soaps from the national programme schedule, for fear of excessive spreading of Turkish customs, the scandal around Turkish soap operas was not limited to Israel.

However, the success of these shows has also had positive effects. This emerged in the case of Greece. In 1999 there was talk of a so-called “earthquake diplomacy”, which momentarily buried under the debris the hatchet of historically bad relations between both countries. If, on that occasion, “earthquake diplomacy” resulted in exceptional mobilisation of the Athenian government to assist Turkey, struck by the Izmit earthquake disaster, now there is actually talk of soap opera diplomacy.

This applies to the case of the tragicomic soap *Yabancı Damat* (“The Foreign Groom”), the love story between a young girl – daughter of a *baklava* seller – in Gazientep in south-eastern Turkey, and the son of a rich Greek business man. This soap, also aired in Greece between 2005 and 2008 was a significant success particularly for the first two years. Tensions between Greece and Turkey were portrayed as never before in a comic vein, giving a sense of release to the tense climate between Athens and Ankara over the years. Moreover, it was the first time that Turkey entered Greek houses in a form other than through hostile news reports.

As a symbol of overcoming old tensions and in an attempt to

unify both nations, the son the young couple have after settling in Istanbul, is named Aegean, the sea separating the two countries. A sea, therefore, that does not divide but joins.

It is interesting to observe how differently these soaps are perceived in Greece and in Arab countries. For the Arabs the stories are entwined with modernity. Hence, Turkey embodies a model of modernity compared to Arab countries. On the other hand, in Greece, Turkish soaps are liked because of their naiveté. In other words, contrary to what occurs in most Arab countries, the soaps echo tradition and a conservatism that appears to have been lost in Europe. A nostalgic return to a few decades ago. Perhaps “being a bridge” between two cultures, as is frequently ascribed to Turkey, also signifies representing the new for the one and the old for the other, while constantly striving to find the right balance.

This is certainly a delicate balance, which is struggling to emerge even domestically. Political disputes over how the series portray Kurds are not lacking. Indeed, some series have been accused of stirring up alienation and violence against Kurds by employing stereotypes through which they continue to be represented. Furthermore, this public debate on the role and meaning of soap operas is also characterised by Erdoğan’s interference. In fact, *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* (“The Magnificent Century”) – the most popular and famous Turkish soap opera (the rights to which were sold in 47 countries for over 100 million euro) – has become an object of contempt for the Prime Minister. It is a show that explores the palace intrigues of the most famous Ottoman sultan, Suleiman the Magnificent.

Ultimately, the image Turkey wants to project, is that of a winning country, a dream model. A model capable of producing a “Brad Pitt *halal*”³, as Turkish actor Kıvanç Tatlıtuğ, main character of *Aşk-ı Memnu* (“Forbidden Love”) – a very popular kind of Turkish *Beautiful* – has been nicknamed in a Bbc editorial. Ultimately, it is crucial for Turkey to dissociate itself from the stereotype of being a backward and different country – as certain European nations consider it – while continuing to advance its own development model. Thus, in order not to exclude anyone, this model is and remains *halal*.

³ A term with which designates what is ‘allowed’ for a good Muslim, as opposed to what is *haram*, or ‘prohibited’ in Islamic law.

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