

SOCIAL CLASS, TV SERIES AND RESISTANCE: THE RECEPTION OF TURKISH DRAMAS BY GREEKS

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ABSTRACT

Turkey has a leading role on the international media scene as far as the export of serial dramas is concerned. Turkish soap operas represent the preoccupations of poor persons

and their (mis)adventures following their encounter with wealthy people. They thus combine the representation of the lifestyle of the wealthy classes with messages that, at the same time, criticize it and validate the lifestyle of the working-classes. Since the economic crisis, Greece is among the countries that systematically import Turkish soap operas. Through this article, the author analyzes how Greek audiences negotiate the power relations imposed on them by the capitalist system through the viewing of Turkish television soap operas. This research has revealed that the resistance of meaning receivers toward the hegemonic system is not always opposed to the media text.

1. INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of the 2000s, the production and exportation of Turkish soap operas is in constant development. First diffused in countries that were under the influence of the ancient Ottoman Empire (which means the Balkans and the Middle East), Turkish soap operas have attracted heterogeneous audiences fairly quickly, accrediting to the Turkish serial industry a leading role on the international media scene. The transnational success of Turkish soap operas has motivated many researchers to study the impact of these productions on local audiences as well as their importance in a geopolitical perspective (Yanik, 2009, Salamandra, 2012, Kaynak, 2015, Constantinou and Tziarras 2018; Vitrinel 2019, Algan and Kaptan 2021, Larochelle 2019, 2021, 2022).

Relational and love problems as well as conflicts between people of different socio-economic status are the favorite themes of these soap operas. More precisely, by focusing on the daily life of people from disadvantaged backgrounds, Turkish soap operas represent the preoccupations of individuals belonging to the working-classes as well as their (mis) adventures following their encounter with wealthy people. Turkish soap operas thus combine the representation of the lifestyle of the wealthy classes with messages that, at the same time, criticize it and validate the lifestyle of the working-classes. In this context, Turkish soap operas allow viewers both to observe the lifestyle of people with affluent backgrounds and to view their values, habits and lifestyles valorized.

Greece is one of the countries that systematically import Turkish soap operas. Turkish soap operas have been broadcast in Greece since 2004¹. However, the importation of Turkish soap operas from the neighboring country has been intensified during the period of the economic crisis. During this period, local production in Greece has significantly diminished creating a fertile environment for the growth of Turkish soap opera consumption (Moore 2013). Through this article, I aim to analyze how Greek audiences negotiate the power relations imposed on them by the capitalist system through the viewing of Turkish television soap operas. The results presented in this article are based on fifty in-depth

1 *Yabancı Damat* is the first Turkish soap opera ever to have been aired by a Greek television channel (Mega Channel) in 2004, whose plot revolves around the “forbidden” love between a Greek man and a Turkish woman. This soap opera enjoyed great success in terms of audience ratings (Koukoutsaki-Monnier and Vovou 2007) initiating the importation of Turkish soap operas to the Greek television market which was to be intensified during the economic crisis.

interviews with individuals (especially women²) of various socio-economic backgrounds residing in different geographical areas in Greece³ aged from 17 to 89 years old. Interviewees were recruited on a voluntary basis and through the snowball method. The thematic areas discussed during the interviews were as varied as the representation of gendered identities, of love and marital relations, of Turkish society, of social classes, etc. In addition, I analyzed the social class representations projected by Turkish soap operas diffused in Greece. In the following pages, I first consider a brief summary of social class representations projected through Turkish soap operas. I then present the results of my empirical research on the reception of Turkish soap operas by Greek audiences.

2. THE “VIRTUE OF POVERTY” AND THE TURKISH DREAM

2.1. The stereotypes of “rich but unhappy and dishonest” and “poor but happy and honest”

TV series quite often project negative representations of wealthy people while at the same time they depict disadvantaged people with positive attributes. These representations are based on well-established stereotypes within contemporary Western societies that legitimize existing social inequalities. More precisely, low social and economic status becomes much more tolerable when the person who possesses it believes that those at the top of the social and economic hierarchy are not happy in ways analogous to their income (Lane 1959). In this sense, Western societies have established a cliché according to which economically disadvantaged people, or those with a lower status in the social hierarchy, receive a certain number of gratifications inaccessible to people belonging to the upper classes of society. Thus, the common perception persists that disadvantaged people are “happy in their own way”, carefree, able to enjoy the “simple pleasures” of life and so on (Kay and Jost, 2003).

2 The vast majority of the participants were women. More precisely, among the fifty interviewees there were only three men. This over-representation of women is consistent with related literature observations about the “female” characterization of serial fiction, whether in terms of choice of subjects, type of narration or audience profile (Ang 1989; Geraghty 1991; Brown 1994; Blumenthal 1997; Brunsdon 2000; Hobson 2003).

3 Athens, Thessaloniki, Chalcis, Komotini.

The presumed inverse relationship between satisfaction and standards of living has been the object of study for several researchers in the humanities and social sciences who have analyzed the social and psychological functions of stereotypes attributed to the rich and disadvantaged (Lane 1959, Lerner 1977, 1980, Hunyady 1998, Jost et al. 2001, Kay and Jost 2003, Oldmeadow and Fiske 2007, Jost et al. 2011; Crossley and Polytechnic 2012). Stereotypes of the *poor but honest and happy* and *rich but dishonest and unhappy* not only help the disadvantaged feel better about their status (Lane 1959, Lerner 1980, Jost et al. 2011), but they also contribute to increase the perception that society is fair and that inequality is legitimate, in the sense that each class gets what it deserves (Kay and Jost 2003). Thus, although these stereotypes are belied by reality⁴, they are often mobilized to legitimize social injustice. More precisely, the illusion that society is fair is in reality a defense mechanism mobilized by individuals within an unpredictable, uncontrollable and unjust world. Living in such a world would be unbearable without the perception that everyone deserves their suffering (Lerner 1977, 1980, Furnham and Gunter 1984, Dion and Dion 1987).

This phenomenon is intrinsically linked to the socialization process of social subjects (Lerner 1977, 1980). The socialization process of children dictates that they should hold back their immediate impulses and invest in practices that lead to long-term outcomes. In this context, children develop a contract whereby they hold back their immediate impulses and work to maximize their long-term rewards. In exchange, the child expects results that are supposed to be earned, since he/she has complied with the terms of this contract and has invested in achieving important and rewarding goals. In this context, the child learns that his/her world is a space where additional investments lead to better outcomes that are “earned” and that this way he/she will get what he/she desires. In this sense, the principle that one “deserves the results of one’s actions” is integral to the dominant socialization process (Lerner et al. 1976).

In this context, TV series quite often attribute virtues such as happiness and morality to individuals belonging to disadvantaged social groups, while at the same time they attribute unhealthy behaviors and negative situations such as unhappiness, loneliness or dishonesty to advantaged people. Thus, the “virtue of poverty” - that is, the stereotypes that the *poor are honest and happy* and the *rich dishonest and un-*

happy - functions as an ideology to justify the prevailing social system: the one who has everything materially is socially dispossessed and the one who has nothing is actually happy.

Through these representations, the ordinary power relations are reversed. In these serial fictions, success is not prescribed in terms of material possessions and power is not held by the economically and socially successful, but it is reserved for the less fortunate. Series such as *Columbo* are characteristic examples of the power relations reversal through TV series (Mathieu 2013). The interest of this serial lies not in solving the crime⁵ but in the way the modest⁶ detective Columbo - son of immigrants and visibly from a working-class background - will solve the murder and will thus prove not only that there is no perfect murder, but also that everyone is finally equal in front of justice. In this context, successful and often arrogant rich people are going to be unmasked by an unrefined but modest and intelligent lieutenant.

2.2. Social class representations through Turkish soap operas

The encounter of working-class individuals with wealthy people is generally a popular theme in Turkish soap operas. A good number of the soap operas projected in Greece such as *Fatmagül'ün Suçu Ne?* (*What is Fatmagül's crime?* 2010-2012), *Kara Sevda* (*Dark Love* 2015-2017), *Kuzey Güney* (*North South* 2011-2013), *Kara Para Aşk* (*Black Money Love* 2014-2015), *Fazilet Hanım ve Kızları* (*Mrs. Fazilet and Her Daughters* 2017-2018), etc. deal not only with love problems, but also with the encounter of people with different socioeconomic status. In these soap operas, wealthy individuals are usually portrayed as villains and are attributed with negative behaviors, such as arrogance, meanness or dishonesty. On the other hand, working-class individuals are usually represented in a positive way and are attributed with attitudes, such as honesty, modesty or kindness. There is one exception to this common narrative pattern in cases where a character from a modest background may behave badly. However, this is always due to the fact that this person has been “corrupted” by money and the affluent lifestyle. Thus, although these secondary characters often regret it afterwards and return to the “modest but moral” way of life, Turkish soap operas show the harmful consequences of the pursuit of money in the lives of poor people.

4 Many individuals in Western societies still lack access to basic human rights (e.g., health care, education, etc.) because of their socio-economic status.

5 The murderer is known from the first scene of each episode.

6 The modest origin of the lieutenant is detected not only by his modest clothes but also through his manners or even his unrefined food tastes.

On this point, it should be noted that wealthy people may be economically powerful but this power has most often been granted to them either in a hereditary or in an illegal way. In this context, very often the characters from privileged backgrounds are portrayed not only as villains, but also as immature, quite lazy, selfish and arrogant. In opposition, people from disadvantaged backgrounds are rather mature, hardworking and modest. Thus, quite frequently, characters initially deprived of wealth, manage - thanks to their virtues - to acquire economic power and finally reach the top of the social hierarchy. In a society marked by increasing inequality, such a representation is a way of rendering justice in a ruthlessly unjust and unequal world. If the initially powerless person reached a privileged position in the social hierarchy, it is because this person respected the socialization contract according to which everyone “deserves the results of their actions” and thus not only worked hard but also remained modest. If, on the other hand, a wealthy person has lost everything he/she owned, it is because he/she acquired power without working for it and because he/she was arrogant and mean. The world of Turkish soap operas is thus marked by the “Turkish dream”. Anyone can succeed if he/she works hard and stays humble.

Thus, it does not matter how economically powerful the wealthy person is: at the end of the story, the ordinary man from a modest background who has remained humble and good will always be the “winner”, in the battle with the wealthy person(s). While the viewers witness throughout the story the misadventures of the ordinary man - usually due to the intrigues set up by the rich - in the end, the ordinary man succeeds in defeating his enemy and therefore, justice is rendered. The world proposed by Turkish soap operas may not be without injustices⁷, but in the end the wealthy characters are represented as subject to the same treatment and rules as the less fortunate. Although they are economically powerful, they are not invulnerable, since in the end they are punished for their mistakes.

People with economic power may have succeeded professionally but it seems that they have not succeeded within the private sphere. Rich families are not represented without problems. Family rivalries, tensions, infidelity or toxic behaviors are some of the problems that are common among the wealthy. However, these problems do not always seem to concern people from disadvantaged families where love

7 Quite often Turkish soap operas depict the corruption of the social system in Turkey and the many ways in which wealthy people take advantage of it.

and solidarity prevail. In this context, it seems that while the disadvantaged are deprived of economic power, they are socially powerful.

It thus becomes clear that happiness in Turkish soap operas is described by the preoccupations of the popular classes. The success of the poor but honest, the punishment of the wealthy but evil, and the non-priority of economic power and instead the emphasis on personal happiness, seem to be the constitutive elements of the world proposed by Turkish soap operas. It is a world - in contrast to the real world - that is fair and in which everyone finally receives in one way or another what they deserve.

On this point, it is worth mentioning that the lifestyle of the wealthy represents a “Westernized” way of life that is far from the traditional one. On the contrary, the lifestyle of the working classes embodies the traditional way of life. This is evident not only by the food and clothing choices of the characters, but also by the relationship the characters maintain with the family hierarchy and/or religion. In this context, practices such as taking off one’s shoes when entering the house, praying often or drinking tea (or more rarely raki⁸) are habits that are anchored in the traditional Turkish way of life and maintained by people from working-class backgrounds. On the other hand, dressing in a “modern” way, drinking coffee (or sometimes wine/whisky⁹) or maintaining a number of practices that reflect a lifestyle far removed from tradition (e.g., going to nightclubs, having premarital sex¹⁰, etc.) are “Westernized” habits practiced by the elites. In this context, the positive representation of the popular classes whose way of life is in accordance with tradition and the “demonization” of the elites who have adopted the “Western” way of life, is in line with the vision of Turkishness promoted by the government currently in power in Turkey. This vision of Turkishness is influenced by traditional norms and a morality based more and more on Islamic values (Larochelle 2019).

Finally, Turkish soap operas are marked by the spectacularization of rich people’s lives. The affluent and their behavior may provoke irritation. However, their lifestyle is an aspect that invites viewers to get acquainted with a milieu

8 A habit reserved for male characters in particular.

9 Although the representation of alcohol consumption is prohibited by RTÜK (Radio and Television Supreme Council), rich individuals and/or villains are often depicted drinking alcohol. However, glasses containing alcohol are always blurred.

10 On this point, it is worth noting that it is always the rich individuals or characters that are attributed negative behaviors who engage in premarital sex. When a poor and/or good person makes the “mistake” of having sex outside the institution of marriage, that person is most often portrayed as the “victim” of the rich person.

they have probably never frequented and thus to escape into an unknown world. The world of the rich thus becomes a side-show that particularly affects women (Dyer, 1973). Luxury cars, beautiful villas on the Bosphorus or extravagant dresses and jewelry are omnipresent elements in Turkish soap operas.

3. THE RECEPTION OF SOCIAL CLASS REPRESENTATIONS BY GREEK AUDIENCES

Before presenting the results of my survey, it is necessary to briefly present the analytical framework in which my findings will be presented. Taking under consideration the theories on media reception and resistance (Fiske 1987, 1989, 1992, 1998, Buckingham 1987, Morley 1992, Condit 1994, Ang 1996, Abercrombie and Longhurst 1998, Schröder 2000), I should note that in my analysis, I consider resistant readings to be the reactions of the audience, which not only escape or oppose the dominant meanings of the soap opera (Fiske's evasive and semiotic resistance), but also manifest an awareness and a conscient deliberation on behalf of the viewer (Schröder 2000). Moreover, the reader of this article should take into consideration that as Jenkins (1992) has noted, readers are not always resistant¹¹ and not all resistant readings are necessarily progressive readings as social subjects do not always recognize their conditions of alienation and/or subordination.

In addition, it is worth mentioning that despite the importance of Stuart Hall's "encoding/decoding" model (Hall 1980), I will not apply it to the presentation of my results for reasons that have already been discussed by several scholars. More precisely, many researchers doing empirical surveys have pointed out the rigidity of Hall's "dominant/negotiated/oppositional" decoding typology and the inadequacy of these categorizations when the researcher is faced with the reality of the field (Morley 1980, Abercrombie and Longhurst 1998). Furthermore, Hall's concept of "preferred reading" also seems problematic as even in the case of non-fictional texts, the identification of a single preferred reading is epistemologically dubious and presupposes the absolute objectivity and neutrality of the analyst (Schröder 2000). Moreover, the analysis of the reception of non-hegemonic texts according to the model proposed by Hall would be very complex. Given

11 Not all women who participated in my survey proposed resistant readings. However, the great majority did. In this section I focus only on women who through their reading of the texts discussed during the interview resisted to the hierarchies imposed by the capitalist system.

these elements mentioned above, I chose to analyze my results under the prism of resistance rather than applying the "encoding/decoding" model. Thus, among the 50 individuals interviewed during my survey, 21 people consciously and deliberately associated their viewing of Turkish soap operas with the rejection of the norms imposed by the capitalist system.

3.1. Turkish soap operas and Greek audiences: between legitimization of the capitalist system and social criticism

An important number of the individuals who participated in my survey interpreted Turkish soap operas through the prism of social class conflict. To be more accurate, they put the emphasis on the conflictual relations between wealthy characters and those without economic power. Thus, some of the interviewees rejected the social class representations proposed by Turkish soap operas (semiotic resistance). For those who rejected these representations, Turkish soap operas are tools used by the dominant class in order to legitimize and thus perpetuate unequal social relations. Through this type of reading, the interviewees oppose the unequal power relations and the exploitation of the dominated by the dominant.

Some of the interviewees were not only opposed to the representations of social classes but they also identified in them an ideological intention. In other words, they considered that Turkish soap operas are tools used by the dominant to "fool" the dominated and thus legitimize their exploitation. Aware of the fact that the production process of these soap operas is controlled by the elites and is therefore ideologically conditioned, the interviewees perceive Turkish soap operas as propagandist means of the capitalist system aiming to impose its ideology on people lacking economic power. In this context, the opposition of social subjects to these representations constitutes an act of contestation of the capitalist system.

Although several interviewees rejected the social class representations projected through Turkish soap operas, some identified an intention for social criticism through the narratives conveyed by these series. Such an example is that of a 60-year-old housewife who, in regard to the melodramatic soap opera *Fatmagül'ün Suçu Ne?*, states:

In *Fatmagül* they showed something that happens in every society. The rich escape justice and it is the

poor who pay the price. It has always been like this; it is not something new or something that is unique in Turkey. Corruption exists everywhere. The rich remain unaffected and it is always the poor who pay the price. Turkish (series) show and criticize this phenomenon (interview conducted in 2016, Athens - Greece).

Similarly, a 17-year-old woman who is high-school student, said:

These series show very well the great social inequalities that exist in Turkey. They show the poor who are starving and living in misery and the extremely wealthy who have everything. The rich have the power to do whatever they want and also get whatever they want without always using ethical means. So, Turkish series show and denounce corruption. (Interview conducted in 2018, Chalcis – Greece)

Thus, many respondents have identified, through the representation of unequal power relationships, a desire to represent in a realistic way the injustice that characterizes contemporary societies. In a world marked by social inequality, Turkish soap operas reflect reality by depicting the suffering imposed on the dominated by the dominant. Furthermore, some of the interviewees identified through these texts the intention not only to realistically represent the injustice of contemporary societies, but also to *criticize* this phenomenon. Thus, for these people, Turkish soap operas are counter-hegemonic texts that represent and criticize the reality of capitalist societies. By adhering to these texts, the people in question not only affirm their ideology, but also challenge through their viewing activity a profoundly unjust world, where the attribution of justice depends on the existing power relations and where the poor are exploited by the economically powerful.

3.2. The appropriation of gender representations through the prism of social classes

Some interviewees attempted to make a connection between the representation of gendered identities and social class. One such example was a 28-year-old woman who works as art conservator-restorer. She noted the different representation of women from affluent and working-class background,

and she also associated women's social status with their submission (or not) to the power relations prescribed by the patriarchal system. Specifically, she explained:

In *Anne (Mother 2016-2017)* they show two completely different worlds. On the one hand, there was the mother with the three daughters who belonged to the high society...such a woman you cannot intimidate her easily because she belongs to the high society, because she is a lawyer...there you cannot manipulate or intimidate her easily; but when we talk about Şule¹², a simple and ordinary woman, on the one hand she will not accept intimidation because she is wild but on the other hand you can easily manipulate her. Turkish series show different worlds and therefore different women. In Turkey there are two worlds. When a woman understands that she can't do anything, she starts doing things indirectly because she also wants to survive. She also wants to succeed, she wants not to be punched, not to be abused, not to be killed... she wants to do something. Do you know how many days she stays hungry because she said something her husband didn't like? In this case, she too must act differently. In this case, we have the evil element and we see the evil Turkish woman but we don't know if she is actually responsible for what is happening or not (interview conducted in 2018, Athens - Greece).

Similarly, a 52-year-old teacher declared:

There is a major difference between women who represent the urban and European way of life and women who represent a more traditional way of life even if they live in a big city. (...) On the one hand, there are those who are very rich with big cars, swimming pools, villas and on the other, there are the poor and ordinary people who live in small houses. Poor women are always veiled... (...) poor women are more traditional while rich women are often more dynamic and educated. Rich women are more emancipated (...). Interview conducted in 2016, Athens – Greece.

12 Central female character.

These interview extracts are representative of the reading of gender representations made by some of the women interviewed during my survey. The socio-economic status of female characters seems to be, according to some of the interviewees, at the origin of female submission (or not) to the male domination within the patriarchal and capitalist society. In this context, according to the interviewees, the “poor” are by definition more vulnerable to intimidation and manipulation. Yet, poor female characters do not appear to be without agency. These women, despite being poor, want to succeed and act against their oppression. Thus, several interviewees spotted through the figure of the “evil” woman a tactic put in place by poor women aiming to challenge male domination. However, it should be noted that this is not a tactic used by women in general. It is a tactic used by “simple and ordinary” women who do not belong to the “high society” and lack economic resources, but still want to survive. The contestation of the patriarchal system is thus an affair of the ordinary women from the working-classes. In opposition to women from affluent backgrounds, who are by definition protected from men by their economic resources and status¹³, poor women mobilize their agency to survive in a male-controlled world where they are subjected to violence and manipulation. This victory of women against the patriarchal system and male domination is thus a *victory from below*, that is, by ordinary women. In this context, the women interviewed not only celebrate the victory of women over male domination, but also celebrate the victory of ordinary people over the unequal power relations imposed on them. Thus, by adhering to these representations, they challenge the patriarchal system, but also the capitalist system that dictates the subordination and exploitation of the “poor”.

3.3. The victory of the ordinary men and the symbolic redistribution of power

Some of the individuals who participated in my survey identified a pedagogical intention on behalf of the meaning producers. This pedagogical intention consists of two elements: 1) money does not guarantee happiness and 2) individuals, regardless of their socioeconomic status, cannot escape justice.

More precisely, as mentioned above, in Turkish soap operas poor people are subjected to several difficulties because of those who hold economic power and therefore respected social status. In this context, the punishment of the rich peo-

ple in the course of the story is of major importance. This element ensures that the poor and the rich are subjected to the same rules. Whether they are beautiful or rich, women in Turkish soap operas are subject to the same rules as the viewers. The world in Turkish soap operas is profoundly fair and unlike real life, no one can escape justice, regardless of one’s social status. Turkish soap operas thus grant justice, but not just any justice. It is the “justice of the poor”. While in real life the poor “pay the price” of social injustice, in Turkish soap operas the rich are no longer sheltered from the judicial institution.

The individuals interviewed seem to particularly appreciate the role of the poor in this process. Specifically, regarding the soap *opera Fatmagül’ün Suçu Ne?*, a 55-year-old housewife states:

Look, the other three guys¹⁴ wouldn’t have committed this crime if they hadn’t been drinking that night... of course they regretted their action. What was it that kept them from moving forward? It was money. It (the soap opera) wanted to show us that money could cover everything, but Kerim’s¹⁵ so-called mother, who was poor and a decent woman, did not allow it. (...) In *Fatmagül*, how a girl suffers and why the law should be on her side, but in the end, she is even accused. (...) It was a rape and they all had to be punished, even the parents who with their money covered up the crimes of their children. This kind of thing happens in Turkey... if they rape you, it’s your fault and you have to marry your rapist. In *Fatmagül*, the rich forced her to marry Kerim to cover up the act of their rich children while Kerim who was poor was victimized even though he had not actually raped the girl.¹⁶ (Interview conducted in 2018, Athens – Greece).

13 According to women who participated in my survey.

14 She refers to the rich men who participated in the rape of the young woman.

15 The male character who participated in the rape of the young woman and comes from a modest background.

16 One narrative element of this soap opera that is quite important to note is the definition of rape. While the four men assaulted Fatmagül, the three (the rich ones) performed the sexual act while Kerim (the man from a modest background) did not. While he was the one who caught Fatmagül, and he witnessed her being raped by his friends, in the end he could not perform the sexual act. Rape is thus represented as an act that is defined exclusively by the penetration of the male sex into the female body. The protagonist’s complicity in this crime is thus minimized. This and other narrative elements contribute to the “legitimization” of the rape suffered by the young woman (Larochelle, 2017).

Through this statement, the interviewee addresses an element that proves to be of fundamental importance. A distinction is made between Kerim's adoptive mother (Ebe Nine), who is "poor" but also "a decent woman", and the parents of the three rich men who "with their money covered up the crimes of their children". Here, the woman interviewed does not simply oppose the value system of people from working-class backgrounds to that of privileged people. She also refers to the crimes committed by rich people and their intention (and ability) to cover them with their money. Moreover, she refers to the struggle of the disadvantaged to obtain justice. They may be poor but they are "right" and do not let injustice go unpunished. The figure of Ebe Nine thus represents the resistance of the poor against the corruption of the rich. If justice is rendered in Turkish soap operas, it is because an ordinary person, from popular background, leads a fight against the powerful and thanks to his strength, his determination, his honesty and his intellectual abilities manages to get justice.

The viewers thus not only witness the process of rendering justice but also the victory of the ordinary man. In this context, the symbolic struggle between the social classes is transformed into a struggle for justice. At the end of this struggle, it is not those who possess capital who win, but those who, although subjected to injustices, have remained fair and humble. Therefore, Turkish soap operas are, for some of the interviewees, counter-hegemonic texts because of their denunciation of the crimes committed by the rich, but also because during this struggle for justice described above, they are on the side of the poor. The poor are thus the "winners" at the end of each story. It is them, and not the (often corrupted) judicial and/or police institutions, who restore justice. In Turkish soap operas the poor who are "correct" manage to condemn the corrupted rich. The world of Turkish soap operas is thus characterized by an *inversion of power*: it is the poor who hold real power and not the rich. In this context, for some of the interviewees, it seems that adhering to the narratives proposed by Turkish soap operas is not only a way of challenging the existing power relations but also a means of *redistributing power* symbolically.

3.4. Reversing pleasure and redefinition of happiness

Some of the subjects interviewed associate to their viewing activity a *reversing pleasure*. I define as reversing pleasure *the pleasure derived from the inversion of the established social*

order and which eventually may lead to the contestation of the current power relations. One such example of the reversing pleasure is the following declaration of a 19-year-old man who is a university student:

It pleases me when the rich people suffer too. I like that they are not invulnerable. (...) The series project an ideal way of life. The rich have everything they want, cars, beautiful houses... but they show that the rich also suffer, that they are like us and that, although they are rich, they also have problems (Interview conducted in 2016, Athens – Greece).

This interview extract is representative of the fact that some of the individuals interviewed satisfy themselves by looking at representations that question the invulnerability of privileged people. Here the young man explicitly states that his pleasure is not only due to the victory of the ordinary man but also to the fact that the rich are also vulnerable to suffering and pain. Thus, some of the interviewees take pleasure by viewing people who, although they have everything the viewers may not have (e.g., a wealthy lifestyle, expensive cars, nice houses, etc.), are just like them.

There are thus two widespread dimensions that characterize the pleasure that social subjects associate with their viewing activity. The first dimension is that of *reassurance*. Specifically, some of the interviewees take satisfaction in observing that the rich also have problems in their lives as they also do. The second dimension of pleasure consists in a *redefinition of happiness* operated through Turkish soap operas.

The economic crisis had a deep impact on the lives of many Greeks who have seen their socioeconomic status change very quickly and who continue to suffer the consequences of this turbulent period. In this context, the representations of Turkish soap operas function as sources of reassurance for the subjects interviewed as some of them feel better about their own status by observing the suffering of the rich through Turkish soap operas.

By adhering to texts that question the omnipotence and the invulnerability of the rich and by taking pleasure by their suffering, some interviewees challenge existing power relations as they redefine happiness through their viewing. If happiness is no longer defined on the basis of material possessions and economic power, power in society is no longer held by those who are economically successful but by those who are satisfied with their status. The redefinition of happiness that takes place through the viewing of Turkish soap operas

grants power to the working classes who, within the capitalist system, are deprived of it. Some of the viewers interviewed seize this opportunity provided by these texts and question the established social order through their viewing.

The redefinition of happiness has been an aspect addressed by several individuals during my research. Happiness, which within capitalist societies is defined to a large extent by economic success and the possession of material goods, in the world of soap operas is defined according to the concerns of the poor. In this sense, a 53-year-old beautician, in reference to the soap opera *Gümüş* (*Silver* 2005-2007), said:

She was modest. She never wanted to be rich and lead a luxurious life. He wanted to own boats. She coveted his love and made him understand that with the simplest things we can be happy. She made him appreciate the simplest things. She taught him modesty. She made him understand the importance of things that cannot be paid for, like love. (...) He became modest too and I liked that a lot. He understood what really matters in life. This series taught me to be happy with simple and ordinary things. It is a series that has reconciled me with reality. (Interview conducted in 2016, Athens – Greece)

Through these words of my interviewee, it becomes clear that the victory of the ordinary man does not only consist in the victory in the process of attributing justice. It is also a symbolic victory since it is the worldview of the poor, their values and concerns that serve as the basis for the definition of happiness in the frame of Turkish soap operas. Thus, through her reading of the soap opera *Gümüş*, the woman interviewed celebrates the victory of the poor, whose concerns are not only valued and appreciated, but they also serve as the basis on which happiness is defined. Turkish soap operas deal with the social conflict between the rich and the poor. As a result of the conflict between the two worldviews, the world of ordinary, modest men prevailed and served as the basis for the definition of happiness.

Therefore, the social class representations projected through Turkish soap operas challenge the hegemonic (capitalist) system according to which happiness is intrinsically related to consumption. Thus, the woman interviewed by adhering to these soap operas, adhere to texts that convey her ideology. However, this ideology was not always that of the interviewee. If the media text in question led her to reconcile herself with reality, it is because before viewing it, she

was suffering from her status and financial situation. In fact, her “suffering” was induced by the economic crisis. In this context, through the viewing of Turkish soap operas - and in particular of the soap opera *Gümüş* - the interviewee has reconciled herself with reality. This reconciliation due to the series consists in the fact that, like the protagonist of this soap opera, she understood that the things that matter in reality cannot be bought. It is the redefinition of happiness proposed by the Turkish soap operas that has reconciled some of the viewers with reality.

In this context, the emancipatory dimension of Turkish soap operas consists in allowing members of the working classes to cope with the feeling of insufficiency felt in relation to their status but also to redefine on a new basis the notion of happiness. If happiness defined within capitalist society in terms of economic success and material possessions seems unattainable, happiness as proposed by Turkish soap operas constitutes an accessible alternative for those deprived of economic capital.

However, we should consider to what extent these representations constitute a hegemonic strategy to legitimize and reconcile the dominated with the hegemonic system. If the hegemonic system imposes the subordination of the poor to the economically powerful and the exploitation of the dominated by the dominant, to what extent does this reconciliation of the interviewees with their situation prevent them from making claims in real life? If the respondents oppose the norms imposed by the hegemonic system and challenge the system in question at a symbolic level, to what extent do they do so in reality? Without information about how viewers challenge the dominant system in their actual daily lives, any attempt to answer this question would be speculative. However, it should be emphasized that we have taken into consideration the fact that, if for some subjects these representations have an emancipatory dimension, for others they are likely to contribute to reconciling them with the hegemonic system.

3.5. *Libido cognoscendi* and abolition of barriers between social classes

Turkish soap operas propose a utopian world which, although characterized by the omnipresence of material goods and luxurious lifestyles, accords great importance to the values and concerns of the working classes. Within this context, viewers can satisfy their *libido cognoscendi* (thirst for knowledge)¹⁷

17 See in this sense François Jost (2011).

for a universe that is unknown to them and which is characterized by the abundance of expensive goods and luxurious lifestyles. However, at the same time they can also see their concerns and worldviews valorized. Thus, by escaping into the imaginary world offered by Turkish soap operas, Greek fans can both experience a different milieu and at the same time challenge it. In this context, a 43-year-old woman who works as head chef said:

What I liked about this series¹⁸ was the predominance of feelings. There were values, romance, love, trust. They show that you can't buy everything with money. All the feelings were there. Hate, abandonment, revenge, romance. How to explain... they focus on the human being (...) I also liked to look at the villas, the clothes, the cars... you know to see a bit of how the rich live (she laughs). One reason I was watching *Aşk-ı Memnu* (*The Forbidden Love* 2008-2010) was to see the house...the furniture, the rooms, all of it. And Bihter's¹⁹ clothes too. Ah, even her robes were particular. I loved her clothes! (Interview conducted in 2016, Athens - Greece).

The interviewees watch Turkish soap operas "to see a bit of how the rich live" but also because they are products that "show that you can't buy everything with money" and that "focus on the human being". This statement - which may seem contradictory at first - is representative of the double function of Turkish soap operas: 1) the importance accorded on the concerns and lifestyle of the working-classes and 2) the satisfaction derived from the "secondary show".

Specifically, some of the interviewees initially take pleasure in escaping into a world characterized by the valorization of their concerns and the victory of the ordinary people. Thus, by escaping from reality through these texts, social subjects escape momentarily from the control of the hegemonic system (capitalist system) and the norms imposed by it. However, the pleasure of the interviewees does not end there. Through the viewing of Turkish soap operas, viewers can also discover an environment that they cannot know in real life. In this sense, apart from the primary show offered by the text and which constitutes the first aspect of pleasure for the viewers (e.g., love story, revenge, victory of the ordinary man, etc.) there is also a second form of show. This second

form of entertainment - which particularly affects the female characters - is also a major source of pleasure. Extravagant dresses, fine jewelry but also luxurious villas are some of the elements that compose this secondary show. In this context, the viewers interviewed do not only challenge the dominant system by escaping into an imaginary world that valorizes feelings instead of money, but they also satisfy their curiosity.

Turkish soap operas offer a secondary show but also a utopian world characterized by the abolition of traditional barriers between social classes. While in the real-world people from the working-classes have very few opportunities to get to know and exchange with wealthy people, the world of Turkish soap operas is characterized by increased social mobility. Love plays a prominent role in this process as a vehicle for social mobility. In this sense, the archetype of Cinderella constitutes one of the major features of the utopia proposed by the Turkish soap operas. In that respect, it is not only the secondary show that makes the social subjects escape from reality but also the story of Romeo and Juliet. If the real world is characterized by the perpetuation of social inequalities and limited social mobility, the storyline of Romeo and Juliet offers an alternative where love almost always wins over social inequalities. This archetype that defies the barriers between social classes also functions as a source of pleasure for many of the interviewees.

4. CONCLUSION

Through this article, I examined how Greek viewers negotiate the power relations imposed on them by the capitalist system through the viewing of Turkish soap operas. A fairly large proportion of the interviewees (21 individuals) proposed a contesting reading of the social class representations projected through Turkish soap operas.

Nevertheless, on this point, I must underline an important element: not all readings are resistant, since a significant part of the respondents (29 people) did not contest through their readings the dominant hierarchies imposed by the capitalist system. However, the purpose of this article is to highlight the complexity of resistance in the reception process and the ways this resistance occurs through the reading of complex texts such as Turkish soap operas. For these reasons, through this article I have chosen to focus on the resistance of the fans of these soap operas without considering that all the interviewed subjects are critical, resistant and capable of subverting the ideology introduced in the texts by the dominant elite.

18 She refers to the soap opera *Kara Sevda*.

19 Central female character of the soap opera *Aşk-ı Memnu*.

This empirical research revealed that meaning receivers' resistance to the hegemonic system is not always opposed to the media text. It should be noted that I do not claim that this contestation necessarily results in political action. Still, it is important to mention that the contestation of existing power relations by Greek viewers of Turkish soap operas shows that, as Michel Foucault pointed out, "Where there is power, there is resistance" (Foucault, 2010/1976: 125). In other words, existing power relations are constantly negotiated. The meanings given by the interviewees to the narratives they consume constitute one facet of their protest activity, which operates first (and perhaps foremost) at a symbolic level.

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TV Series

- Anne (2016-2017)
Aşk-ı Memnu (2008-2010)
Columbo (1986 – 2003)
Fatmagül'ün Suçu Ne? (2010-2012)
Fazilet Hanım ve Kızları (2017-2018)
Gümüş (2005-2007)
Kara Para Aşk (2014-2015)
Kara Sevda (2015-2017)
Kuzey Güney (2011-2013)
Yabancı Damat (2004 – 2007)