INTRODUCTION: CAPTURING THE NEW DYNAMICS OF TURKISH TELEVISION SERIES. DISJUNCTIONS AND CONTINUITIES

ECE VİTRİNEL
YEŞİM KAPTAN
ECE ALGAN

Name: Ece Vitrinel
Email address: evitrinel@gsu.edu.tr
Academic Centre: Galatasaray University

Name: Yeşim Kaptan
Email address: ykaptan@kent.edu
Academic Centre: Kent State University

Name: Ece Algan
Email address: ealgan@csusb.edu
Academic Centre: California State University, San Bernardino

After three-decades of financial success, Turkish TV series have been recognized as a compelling agent in the global cultural milieu. With their increasing consumption and popularity in over 150 countries in the past two decades (Türkiye's series exports 2022), Turkish television series have attracted attention both nationally and globally. Earlier studies have explained this popularity as a result of novelty, cultural proximity, and new technological developments in the TV industry, such as the rise of VoD services and digital platforms and a consequent increase in demand for more content. However, the fact that the Turkish television industry remains among the globe's top five exporters of scripted content urges us to

take a closer look at these dramas. The collection of articles in this special issue of *Series: International Journal of TV Serial Narratives* aims to focus on the national and global significance of Turkish TV series by critically examining their social, cultural and ideological implications in Turkey and across the world. Considering new dynamics of Turkish TV and its disjunction and continuities, the authors explore the development of Turkish TV series as a national product, their distinct narratives, and what these dramas mean for audiences and publics within and outside Turkey from historical, regional and global perspectives.

The global success of Turkish TV series raises new areas of inquiry into the changing contours of circulation, distribution and production practices among emerging national TV industries, including the novel narratives produced along with their impact on global audiences. The unique storytelling style and themes of Turkish dramas have been particularly sought after by audiences across the world (Öztürkmen 2022; Acosta-Alzuru 2021), causing political debates and igniting cultural rifts in Turkey and abroad. Turkish TV series have been both praised and criticized for their representation of Islam (see Erkılıç & Duruel Erkılıç in this issue), gender (see Ferreira, Çaylı Rahte and Larochelle in this issue), minorities (see Erkılıç & Duruel Erkılıç in this issue), social classes (see Larochelle in this issue), cosmopolitanism, history and memory (see Erkılıç & Duruel Erkılıç and Uğur Tanrıöver in this issue). The narratives of these dramas are far from static as new hybrid forms and narratives have emerged as a result of socio-political changes in Turkey and the industry's response to government censorship (see Uğur Tanrıöver in this issue). In the past decade, the increase in the variety of genres and narratives has also been due to the Turkish TV industry catering its content to the tastes and preferences of global audiences in order to compete in the international TV markets, while at the same time establishing a distinct place for itself as a producer of dramas with unique stories, style and format.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF TELEVISION IN TURKEY: FROM NATIONAL TO TRANSNATIONAL

The very first national TV broadcasts in Turkey started with the establishment of the state-owned Turkish Radio and Television Corporation (TRT) in 1964. Following the military coup of 1980, television gained importance in Turkish households at a time of great political turmoil and domestic retreat (see Uğur Tanrıöver in this issue). The country's TV drama industry has grown exponentially since the 1990s, which coincided with the years that marked the launch of private TV channels. In the mid-2000s, the Turkish TV industry has met with broad international success (Kaptan and Algan 2020; Çelenk 2018; Ogan 1992). In addition to transforming its content to feature bigger budget dramas and expanding its audience reach, Turkey's TV industry also experienced drastic changes in the production, distribution and exhibition of its dramas since then. For instance, the number of TV production companies and its supporting industries, such as fashion, advertising, and technology, burgeoned rapidly during this time (Algan 2020).

In the second half of the 2010s, emerging digital platforms have opened a new path for the production and exhibition of Turkish dramas in a wide variety of genres like thrillers, fantasy dramas, romantic comedy, suspense, detective and crime fiction. Digital platforms created a tremendous impact on the globalization efforts of the Turkish TV industry (Vitrinel & Ildır 2021). Within six years following its introduction in Turkey in 2016, Netflix has become a major player as a content buyer, distributor and producer of Turkish dramas in an increasingly important, fragmented and competitive OTT landscape, which currently includes local platforms such as BluTV, Gain and Exxen and other global giants like Amazon Prime and Disney Plus. The OTT services in the country are mostly popular among urban middle- and upper-class audiences who prefer content produced for these platforms as opposed to the heavily-regulated, conservative content of national networks (Ildır & Çelik Rappas 2022). However, since Turkey still has a very strong traditional television viewing culture with TV sets accessible via antennas placed in living rooms, it is too early to claim that the dominance of broadcast and cable television has been severely challenged by the introduction of digital platforms. Additionally, it is important to note that the VoD services also began facing increasing regulatory pressure following Turkish parliament's approval of a law that expands RTÜK's (Turkey's broadcasting regulatory agency) control over Internet distribution in March 2018.

A NEW PLAYER IN THE TRANSNATIONAL MARKETS: TURKISH TV SERIES

Even though the Turkish TV industry produces both scripted and unscripted content, scripted content, particularly TV dramas, are still its biggest exports. The narratives of Turkish dra-

mas display a thematic variety including romantic love, sexual harassment, marriage, adultery, family relations, social class issues, contrast between urban and rural lifestyles, religious beliefs, historical events, terrorism, mafia-government relations, and nationalism. The ways in which these themes are presented and represented, however, have been undergoing a significant transition due to a number of domestic factors. Such domestic factors are the launch of Netflix Türkiye and local streaming platforms, the shift of focus in AKP's domestic and foreign policies, the rise in dissemination of nationalist and religious content, increasing regulatory pressure over TV broadcasts, and the change in the TV ratings system that resulted in a measurement panel with a more conservative audience. Consequently, more conventional content that focuses on Turkish traditional family values and the 'glorious' historical past has flourished along with, what Iwabuchi (1998) refers to as, "culturally odorless" content through a wide variety of genres, such as thrillers, fantasy dramas, suspense, detective, and crime fiction. These changes in the domestic context have been further exacerbated by global demands, which compelled the industry to produce content for the global digital platforms that is capable of competing with a plethora of TV series in the international markets. The widening of the Turkish TV industry's global distribution has also resulted in Turkish TV series reaching diverse audiences from Europe to Africa, and from Latin America to Southwest Asia with various religious, cultural, ethnic, and national backgrounds.

This special issue addresses the problem of representation in Turkish TV series as well as the past and current dynamics surrounding their production, distribution, and reception. By employing a variety of methodological approaches and theoretical perspectives, the contributors provide a critical assessment of the local and global transformations involving the content, meaning-making process and identity politics as well as disjunctions and continuities in the narrative structures and formats.

Our special issue starts with Hülya Uğur Tanrıöver's article, which traces the historical development of Turkish TV series, from the very first production by TRT in 1974 all the way to 2022. Surveying 102 dramas, Uğur Tanrıöver offers a sociological reading of the way narratives in Turkish dramas have changed in response to unique political, technological and socio-cultural transformations in Turkey. This comprehensive study is not only impressive in its scale of inquiry, but also sheds important light on the integral and interdependent relationship between television content and society.

In their contribution, Hakan Erkılıç and Senem Duruel Erkılıç analyze *Ethos* (2020), the critically acclaimed Netflix original. Drawing on the concepts of nostalgia and cognitive mapping, the authors examine in depth the hybrid narrative of this series built on the socio-cultural divide within Turkish society. By identifying the intertextuality between *Ethos* and the films of the 1970s, the music of the 1980s, as well as the New Turkish Cinema, Erkılıç and Duruel Erkılıç demonstrate the ways in which nostalgia is used both as a creative tool and a call for social confrontation in a highly polarized society where the people's hope to coexist has been severely damaged.

Our contributors also illustrate the diversity of the responses of both diasporic and transnational audiences to Turkish dramas. By employing in-depth interviews with Turkish TV drama audiences and bloggers, and executives at the Swedish public service television company (SVT) and the media distribution company Eccho Rights, Emek Çaylı Rahte examines why Turkish TV series appeal to Swedish and diaspora audiences residing in Sweden. Çaylı Rahte also explores the public debates around Turkish TV series in social media. The topics range from gender representations and stereotypes to cultural and traditional values in both societies.

Dimitra Laurence Larochelle analyzes the reception of Turkish TV series in Greece by focusing on Greek fans' resistant reading of social class representations. Larochelle illustrates how Greek audiences reject the dominant class hierarchies imposed on them by the capitalist system through the narratives of Turkish soap operas, which have traditionally represented working classes with dignity, resilience, and power.

Relying on data collected through online questionnaires among Facebook fan groups and conducting in-depth interviews, Gabrielle Camille Ferreira's article examines the case of a nationally and globally successful Turkish drama, *Fatmagul* (2010-2012) and its reception in Brazil. Ferreira illuminates how Brazilian audiences perceive the melodramatic structure and moral values in *Fatmagul* concerning controversial issues such as rape, romance, family values and women's empowerment.

Studying Turkish TV series offers insight into the social groups depicted within the programs as well as into the people who consume them globally. Our special issue illustrates this by tracing the impact of Turkish dramas from their journey through the socio-cultural and political environment of their creation in Turkey to their reception in Sweden, Greece and Brazil. By doing so, it provides a deeper understanding of the controversial discursive spaces surrounding Turkish TV series both inside and outside Turkey.

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