

CROSSING THE WESTERN BORDERS: WOMEN OF SON

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ABSTRACT

While Turkish television shows have been quite popular in the Middle East, the Balkans, and South America, Turkish producers have been less successful in exporting content to the Western European and North American markets. After

receiving moderate ratings in Turkey, *Son* (2012) was the first Turkish show to be sold to Western Europe when the Swedish public television stv2 purchased the rights to air it with subtitles. While the American adaptation, *Runner*, did not make it on air on ABC despite the pilot order, the Dutch and the Spanish adaptations were filmed in 2016 and 2017, respectively. *Son (The End)* remains the only success story among other attempts to introduce Turkish shows into these new markets. In this article, I argue that *Son*'s two opposing female characters offer a reflexive discussion of Turkey's identity, and that this allegorical representation, which anchors the story in the current geopolitical climate—mirroring Turkey's role as an east-west bridge—enables the show to challenge the existing borders of travel for Turkish TV shows.

While Turkish television shows have been quite popular in the Middle East, the Balkans, and South America, Turkish producers have been less successful in exporting content to the Western European and North American markets. After receiving moderate ratings in Turkey, *Son* (2012) was the first Turkish show to be sold to Western Europe when the Swedish public television network stv2 purchased the rights to air it with subtitles. Although a pilot was ordered by ABC, the American adaptation, *Runner*, did not make it to air; the Dutch (*Vlucht HS13*) and the Spanish (*El Accidente*) adaptations were filmed in 2016 and 2017, respectively. *Son* (*The End*) remains the only success story among other attempts to introduce Turkish shows into these new markets.

In this article, I argue that *Son* breaches the borders blocking Turkish television flows with its unique portrayal of Turkish femininity that allows for parallel East/West binaries, and its utilization of quality programming and complex television characteristics. The lead character Aylin (Nehir Erdoğan) deviates from the female identity model anchored in traditional roles of motherhood by following her desires. This distinguishes Aylin from the mainstream models of feminine identity that compete in domestic Turkish mainstream representation: the modern nation-state model, the more traditional identity associated with the ancient Ottoman regime, and the newly emerging neo-conservative version of the latter. Aylin, who appears to conform to the modern secular identity model at first glance, emerges as a new model. Iranian Leyla (Mehrnoush Esmailpour), whose Eastern-ness validates Aylin's Western-ness, acts as a crucial element of this identity construction. Aylin becomes more Western in Leyla's presence. This identity construction for Aylin's character, which posits her as a Western woman less bound to her duties as a mother, ends up enabling *Son* to move towards the Western European markets.

The models of femininity these two women represent also reveals the juxtaposition of "the Western modern" and "the Oriental other", providing European viewers an entry from "the Western" side. The understanding of the East-West dichotomy here is based on discourses of difference, and in order to avoid reproducing or essentializing these artificial discourses, it is important to first trace them. Building on Orientalist discourses, such discussions—mostly coming from the academic fields of political science and international relations (Fukuyama 1989, Huntington 1993)—construct the "West" as civilized, modern, secular, and democratic, whereas the "East" becomes backward, traditional, religious, and undemocratic. These descriptions, which appear in mainstream

media coverage (such as opinion pieces by Thomas Friedman) and are usually supported by academic expert opinion like Huntington's and Fukuyama's, ignore socio-political context and historical heritage to attribute the difference between the East and the West to their essences. After a close examination, the juxtaposition of Aylin and Leyla is evidence of the delicate nature of the West vs. East dichotomy. Aylin can only be Western in the presence of Leyla, whose Easternness is similarly proved by Aylin's presence. This mechanism helps *Son* become an easy text to transport to Europe because the show resorts to recognizable depictions of the East vs. West binary. The exact preservation of this dual representation in *Son*'s format adaptations explains how it contributes to the show's mobility. For example, in the case of the Dutch adaptation, *Vlucht HS13* (2016), simply substituting the Dutch character, Liv (Katja Schuurman), for Turkish Aylin and preserving Leyla as the "Oriental Other" makes the story work. Spectatorial expectations work in favor of West-bound flows since Liv and Aylin share Leyla as their common "Oriental Other", therefore making the story more palatable for European audiences.

This hybrid of family melodrama and political thriller bears resemblance to Anglo-American quality programming, and alongside the show's representation of the East vs. West binary, this plays a role in easing the process of adaptation. Generic, narrative, and aesthetic elements of quality programming increase the accessibility of the text outside of Turkey. The juxtaposition of the West and the East or the modern and the traditional becomes embedded in these generic, narrative and aesthetic elements of quality programming. Examples like *Homeland* (2011) and *The Honorable Woman* (2014) reveal how frequently these juxtapositions occur in quality programming.

Moreover, these dichotomies are familiar for European viewers, as Oriental discourses have been recurrent in European history since the 16th Century colonial campaigns, which were legitimized by the East's difference from the West. In Turkey, too, the identity of the Republican nation-state, founded in 1923, was constructed with the help of a similar juxtaposition, which posited the new Turkish identity as secular and modern in opposition to the Ottoman identity as religious and traditional. This representation has been visible on television screens throughout the Turkish Republic's history. While mainstream media discourses in Turkey have painted religiosity as an obstacle to modernity until now, political changes have started to challenge this hegemonic representation under the rule of the conservative

Justice and Development Party (AKP) since 2002. Increasing visibility of religiosity and changing dynamics of media ownership introduced to mainstream audiences a new identity discourse incorporating modernism and religiosity. These changing discourses in Turkey may explain the show's only moderate domestic popularity. In this new context, the depiction of Aylin does not fit in well with any of these identity constructions. The Republican modern, the conservative traditional, and the emerging neo-conservative version similarly prioritize family in women's lives. However, by putting her own desire to know before her family's well-being, Aylin deviates from all these versions.

By building upon the political context of Turkey's ongoing transformation, I will offer an ideological textual analysis of *Son* to show why, unlike other Turkish melodramas, it could travel towards the West. In order to survey how this happens, an ideological textual analysis is helpful to connect the text and the context of production. Textual analysis is a flexible method. It provides a chance to look at the form, style and aesthetics as well as the meaning they construct and/or represent. Glen Creeber lists the possibilities this method offers while explaining his interest in television: "What interests me the most about television studies are questions of aesthetics, ideology, discourse, narrative, genre, representation, camera work, music, casting, editing, the script, authorship and so on. In short, I can't get enough of the text" (2006: 81). As Creeber acknowledges by mentioning the works of Stuart Hall (1973/1980) and John Fiske (1987), the textual analysis method bears the risk of making assumptions about audiences and reproducing "preferred meanings" or "dominant ideologies" (2016: 82). While I am aware of this danger, I believe it is important to remember how these "preferred meanings" dominate mainstream media coverage and influence what type of content manages to appear on television screens and travel abroad. In other words, whether they are accepted by the audiences or not, these meanings have an impact on production and exports. Drawing on works of Douglas Kellner (1995) and Stuart Hall (1988), Jennifer Esposito (2009) also explains how popular culture represents and constructs cultural meanings and ideologies at the same time. Esposito argues that "[R]epresentations do not just reflect already determined meanings. Instead, they help contribute to discursive understandings" (2009: 524). My goal is to use representations to offer discursive understandings.

Therefore, I argue that what gives *Son* mobility towards Western Europe becomes the reason for its moderate performance in the Middle East, therefore making it a thought-pro-

voking case for analysis. In this context, I first explore the rising popularity of Turkish dramas in the Middle East. I discuss how both Neo-Ottoman academic arguments and mainstream media coverage attribute this popularity to the more egalitarian gender configuration offered by these Turkish shows. Then, I identify how this configuration interacts with identity discourses and representations prevalent in Turkish Republican history. In the specific case of *Son*, the juxtaposition between Turkish Aylin and Iranian Leyla provides an insight into changing dynamics between the modern/secular/Republican identity representation, the traditional/conservative identity representation inherited from the Ottoman Empire, and newly emerging neo-conservative identity representation associated with AKP rule as briefly mentioned above. This juxtaposition intertwined with Anglo-American quality programming standards is crucial in understanding why *Son* did not perform well in the Turkish market and did not gain popularity in the region, but proved to be the most successful Turkish scripted format in Europe.

1. TURKISH DRAMA EXPORTS AND NEO-OTTOMANISM

While the digitalization of content has increased the visibility of authorized and unauthorized forms of online viewing, the last twenty years has also witnessed an increase in the number of authorized transnational television flows. Although television content has traveled across borders before, the course and the content of flows changed dramatically after the 1980s. Increasing numbers of format adaptations and the rise of new centers of production like Israel, Korea and Turkey has instigated a new wave of discussions both in academia and mainstream media which question the impact of a newfound multidirectionality. These discussions have seen the emerging centers of production as evidence of a change in the global television market, which has long been dominated by Anglo-American production. I argue to the contrary, and explain how this Anglo-American hegemony has retained its power despite the emergence of new centers of production. This is because Anglo-American quality programming standards became the defining factor that allowed content from these new centers to travel to North America and Western Europe.

Television flows have long been studied as a way to understand power dynamics between countries participating in the global television market. Theories of cultural imperial-

ism (Boyd-Barrett 1977; Mattelart 1979; Roach 1997) situate content flows from the core countries in the West to peripheral countries as an extension of hegemonic power. Earlier theories of cultural imperialism had used the lack of agency and the lack of multidirectionality as evidence of Western hegemony. Emerging from the critique of neocolonialism, theories of cultural imperialism described a new form of colonialism replacing the previously exercised politico-military forms of domination (Boli and Lechner 2007: 303). However, other scholars like Ien Ang (1985) and Elihu Katz and Tamar Liebes (1997) emphasized the importance of interpretive differences for consideration alongside the direction of flows. Moreover, the more recent rise of regional centers along with the multidirectional television flows associated with it raised questions about equating the movement of content with hegemony. As another model of media globalization, the “flows model” reflects a similar awareness of global mobility of television content.

In this context, Joseph Straubhaar (2007) and Silvio Waisbord (2004) have focused on the industry to study global television flows. These studies pay more attention to the course of flows and the elements of production such as low production costs, the tested success of shows originating from other countries and the role of trade fairs. Although the role of cultural proximity is acknowledged, aesthetic aspects receive less attention. The role of genre (Bielby and Harrington 2005) similarly comes up to study what travels better. Rather than being treated as stand-alone subjects, culture, language and narrative are studied as parameters of production even when the unequal nature of global flows is addressed (Thussu 2006). These macro analyses might mention aesthetic implications briefly, yet more extensive surveys of aesthetics focus on the national context instead of transnational flows. Format studies (Oren and Shahaf 2012) provide rare exceptions, and address both macro and micro levels of analysis by touching upon aesthetics to discuss cultural specificities. Looking at format trades (Chalaby 2015a, 2015b) also helps to explore categorical differences between different types of content such as reality formats, scripted dramas and comedies while questioning theories of globalization. However, in-depth surveys of aesthetics mostly remain tangential instead of being incorporated at the center. Even when the narrative and aesthetic influences of flows beyond format adaptations (Creeber 2015) are discussed, the emphasis remains on the production perspective rather than the importance of cultural relativity. Studies focusing more on cultural relativity (Brunsdon 1998; McCabe and Akass 2007)

take a closer look at content as a text while paying attention to aesthetics. Nevertheless, connections between those macro and micro levels of analysis are not fully explored in the context of global television flows. My project is an intervention in this distinction.

In 2012, the year of *Son*'s release, the domestic market in Turkey had already become very competitive as power dynamics changed following an important rise in Turkish television exports. After being situated at the receiving end of global television trades for a long time, Turkey has gained prominence as a finished program and format exporter in the last decade. While Turkish reality formats such as *Gelinim Olur Musun?* (*The Perfect Bride*, 2004) first started to circulate as templates for adaptation, Turkey's rise became more prominent with the increasing popularity of dubbed Turkish melodramas in the Middle East. The popularity of earlier examples like *Gümüş* (*Noor*, 2005-2007) paved the way for the new wave of finished exports. Between 2004 and 2012, the worth of such finished exports climbed from \$10,000 to \$200 million (*Hurriyet Daily News*, 2014). Later, the success of Turkish finished melodramas managed to expand beyond the surrounding region as depicted by the famous example *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* (*Magnificent Century*, 2011-2014), which aired in over 40 countries.

The desire of the governing Justice and Development Party (AKP) to exert more influence in the region intensified during the 2000s, coinciding with the increase in the number of exported TV shows. With these new developments, the term Neo-Ottomanism became a recurring reference in academic and journalistic articles exploring the new regional popularity of Turkish content. Marwan Kraidy and Omar Al-Ghazzi (2013) build upon the notion of Neo-Ottomanism to describe this popularity as “Neo-Ottoman Cool”. Elsewhere they define Neo-Ottomanism as “a Turkey-centric policy of projecting Turkish self-confidence politically and economically” (Al-Ghazzi and Kraidy 2013b: 2344). This imperial association contributes further to the ambiguity of the Turkish case if we consider how the early Turkish Republican era held the Ottoman past in disdain, a stance shared by other countries in the region. Calling attention to the shared desire to establish a new identity different from the Ottoman identity, Kraidy and Al-Ghazzi explain in their discussion of “Neo-Ottoman Cool” that “Ottomanism served as the antiquated Other both for Kemalist Turkey and Arab countries born from the collapse of the Ottoman Empire” (Kraidy and Al-Ghazzi 2013: 18). However, the AKP rule conjured up imperial memories and challenged the other-ization of Ottoman identi-

ty in the domestic public sphere while promoting Ottoman heritage as a way to connect with Middle Eastern countries. Oscillating between depictions of modernity and traditional values (Kraidy and Al-Ghazzi 2013, Cetin 2014, Kaynak 2015), Turkish dramas seem to mirror Turkey's ambiguous identity, caught in the middle of the Oriental divide between the East and the West.

According to press coverage (Matthews 2011), Turkish shows travelling across borders manage to remain culturally relevant for Arab audiences while incorporating elements of aspirational modernism, which provides a proximate version of modernity that does not ostracize religion and tradition. For example, these Turkish shows present a more egalitarian relationship between men and women without showing as much sex as do American shows. According to mainstream news coverage, such depiction inspires women to demand more from their husbands. This aspirational gender equality is attributed to Turkey's secular democratic model, which differs from the Islamic nature of other Middle Eastern regimes. Alongside the Western praise for the Turkish model, the Turkish Republic's desire to become more influential in the Middle East endorses Neo-Ottoman Cool as "modern enough" for the region. In other words, according to these explanations, a less threatening version of modernity presents an alternative to Western content in the Middle East. These claims of cultural relevance invoke theories of cultural proximity (Straubhaar 1991, Yesil 2015), which link the success of exports with the cultural similarities between the country of origin and the receiving country. The degree to which Turkish television shows have altered the expectations held by Middle Eastern women towards their partners has also become a recurring topic in newspaper articles about Turkey's rise as a new center of production. In this context, how women live and how they are represented on television becomes an important part of the conversation. Discourses of modernism and traditionalism (Göle 1997, Abu Lughod 1998, White 2003) are mapped on women's bodies, which become ideological symbols for different identities both in domestic and regional contexts.

Despite Neo-Ottoman arguments describing Turkish shows as potentially aspirational progressive texts, and mainstream media coverage supporting such an aspirational connection, these shows preserve a conservative understanding of family. For example, celebrated as a female-oriented drama (Cevik 2014), *Gümüş* became a target for conservative critics including clerics and religious authorities in the Middle East, who publicly condemned the show for being immoral.



FIGURE 1. CARTOON IMAGE: MEN CHASING KIVANÇ TATLITUĞ, THE STAR OF *GÜMÜŞ* (NOOR). THE WRITING CAN BE TRANSLATED AS "THE SHOW THAT CAUSES FAMILY PROBLEMS: NOOR".

At the same time, media coverage (Moussley 2008) described the show as progressive for depicting a strong female lead. A closer look at the text shows that this strong female lead is still embedded in a traditional system of values. While questioning the extent of female emancipation attributed to the series, Kaynak elaborates how *Gümüş* reinforces traditional family relations:

With respect to gender codes, for example, Noor and the stories of subsequent soaps involve traditional roles emphasizing obedience to elders and family. Noor's first episode starts with her being married off to Muhannad through a family arrangement; through the rest of the story, she struggles to be accepted by his upper-class family. The older and religious characters provide the moral anchor; those that deviate from traditional codes find their punishment in the form of death, loss, or social exclusion (Kaynak 2015: Kindle Locations 5446-5453).

As Kaynak explains, the family patriarch Fikri Bey (Ekrem Bora) almost always has the last say in family affairs. Female characters are defined by their status as wives and mothers even when they work outside the home. Maybe more importantly, the story, which begins with the arranged marriage between Mehmet (Muhannad) and *Gümüş* (Noor), flash-for-

wards to show all the couples married with children in the future. In other words, a traditional family remains a celebrated societal unit even if some traditional elements are challenged.

The preservation of these traditional elements rarely finds its way into the mainstream media coverage of the popularity of Turkish dramas in the Middle East. While Neo-Ottoman arguments describe Turkish modernity as an aspirational model for Middle Eastern viewers, they do not acknowledge the role of traditional familial relationships in this configuration. In other words, while a more egalitarian relationship becomes desirable, the point of connection is still the traditional family structure.

Son's departure from mainstream Turkish melodramas helps reveal that omission. A delicate balance between representation of the modern and the traditional is essential for the aspirational connection attributed to this success. *Son's* unique depiction of Aylin and its depiction of Iran as a cautionary tale distance Turkey from the East by underlining their differences. Aylin's deviation from a female identity anchored in traditional roles of motherhood especially raises questions about the extent of the acceptable difference for such connection. The cultural proximity between Turkey and the Middle East—which presents Turkey's democratic model as close enough to achieve—gets lost because of these differences when the emphasis on traditional roles gets toned down. In other words, by challenging the familial roles ascribed to women so prevalent in regionally popular dramas, *Son* distances Turkey from the East to an extent that the aspirational connection is not possible. The same difference also explains the reason for the show's mobility towards the West.

Reconfiguring Turkish Identity with Anglo-American Quality

Gender configuration in *Son*, which is embedded in Anglo-American quality programming elements, emerges as a key to understanding the show's domestic performance and global journey. *Son* begins with a plane crash, which sets a series of unexpected events in motion. Aylin, who believes her husband Selim (Yiğit Özşener) died in the crash, finds out that he never got on the plane. The unfolding story, told through flashbacks, reveals that Selim had an affair in Iran years past, and he was at the airport to pick up with whom he had the affair, Leyla, and their son. Selim mysteriously goes missing after that point, leaving Aylin as well as his adopted brothers Halil (Engin Altan Düzyatan) and Ali (Erkan Can) looking for

him. Despite melodramatic elements of this family drama, the past lives of the characters involved soon give the story a new turn. The result is a political thriller interwoven with volatile familial relations.

In addition to complex narratives, complicated characters, and heavy use of flashbacks and dream sequences, this limited series incorporates themes like global espionage and terror—favorite themes for quality TV. These elements, which underline the show's similarity to Anglo-American quality programming, not only help the show travel well as a finished program, but also ease the process of adaptation as a format. What makes *Son* a successful finished program export makes it an easier format adaptation at the same time. In the case of the Dutch adaptation, *Vlucht HS13*, these globally recognizable elements quickly make their way onto the screen. This version is quite condensed compared to *Son's* twenty-five 90 minute-long episodes. *Vlucht HS13* has ten episodes—all running 43 minutes except for the 83 minute-long premiere episode. Some characters and their storylines are omitted for the sake of time, but flashbacks and stylistic choices such as surveillance technology coverage used in the Turkish version are preserved. The Dutch version even builds upon quality programming elements and introduces a globally recognizable trope when Simon (Daniël Boissevain)—the Dutch counterpart of missing Selim— becomes suspected of carrying out a terror attack.

Post-9/11, with terrorism recognized as a global concern, it is not surprising to see global references to terror attacks in television content. Globally popular shows like *24* (2001-2010) and *Homeland* (2011-) are very well-known examples of this trend. Television content and media discourses around global terror have traveled extensively and it is also important to acknowledge the role of digital technologies in increasing circulation of such content. Both informal (pirated) and authorized online streaming services expose viewers to foreign content which otherwise would not make it to the television screen. This especially favors quality content not geared towards mainstream consumption. Digital technologies give niche content the chance to find viewers around the globe, and the halo effect of increased online circulation paves the way for TV exports and format adaptations.

Scholars like Charlotte Brunson (1990) and Janet McCabe and Kim Akass (2007) have previously contested “quality” as an objective analytical category to study television. Without a doubt, the definition of quality is clearly informed by subjective preferences as well as the context of use. Nevertheless, in the Anglo-American context, scholars, tradespeople, and

viewers have a similar image in mind when a program is described as a quality show. Higher production values, involvement of film directors and actors, in-depth character building, complex narratives, and social critique (Logan 2016) are associated with this type of programming, which can also be called “HBO-type quality”.

While he uses the term “complex television” instead of “quality television”, Jason Mittell (2015: 48-9) mentions similar narrative and aesthetic elements in his book *Complex TV*. According to Mittell, there are certain storytelling strategies which are more common in complex television shows: “Complex narratives also employ a number of storytelling devices that, while not unique to this mode, are used with such frequency and regularity as to become more acceptable narrative norms rather than exceptional outliers”. He identifies these devices as “analepses, or alterations in chronology”, “dream or fantasy sequences”, “retelling of the same story from multiple perspectives”, “breaking of the fourth wall”, and “more ambiguous use of voice-over narration”. After comparing these to art cinema’s storytelling preferences, Mittell argues that despite the danger of becoming confusing, these shows promise a “payoff” for the audiences, who patiently watch until the end (Mittell 2015: 50).

Although Mittell acknowledges the overlap between his complex television and quality television elements prevalent in literature, he overtly abstains from equating both terms (2015: 216). This decision is understandable considering his emphasis on not accepting “complexity as marker of quality” (Mittell 2015: 290). While discussing Sarah Cardwell’s treatment of quality as a genre instead of an evaluative category (2015: 212) or explaining his choice to approach melodrama as a televisual mode instead of a genre (2015: 233), Mittell makes it clear that he focuses on storytelling modes instead of genre categorizations. Therefore, he does not approach complex television as a genre and instead describes it as a mode of storytelling, which allows genre hybridization (Mittell 2015: 233).

Son bears many of these indicators of “complexity” or “quality”. It hints at the dark relationships between bureaucrats, police, military figures and spies while exploring characters’ moves between Iran and Turkey. The famous playwright Berkun Oya emerges as a showrunner since the show’s marketing materials almost always refer to him. The show’s director Uluç Bayraktar, who started his career in cinema, contributes to the cinematic aesthetics. Like Mittell’s examples of complex television, the show hybridizes two genres: political thriller and family melodrama. Mittell’s discussion of quality programming, melodrama and complexity is also

very useful for understanding *Son*’s unique nature. The show not only “mixes genres”, but also “mixes genders” by switching back and forth between Selim’s and Aylin’s stories to achieve complexity and quality. Quoting Newman and Levine (2012), Mittell explains the same situation as using melodramatic modes of storytelling while mixing genres and masculinizing melodramatic seriality to enhance complexity (2015: 246). Mittell also argues that the popularity of serial melodramas might have contributed to the incorporation of melodramatic elements in “traditionally masculinist genres” (2015: 248). Either way mixing genres and genders is an indicator of complexity according to his categorization.

Moreover, alterations in chronology through flashbacks and the use of dream sequences, as well as the telling of the story from multiple perspectives, place *Son* in Mittell’s complex television category.

Independent of scholars’ decisions to define complex television and quality programming as genres or modes, as Mittell acknowledges, the storytelling strategies he lists are popular in shows classified in the quality programming category by scholars, journalists and fans. Therefore, Mittell’s classification is quite similar to Elliott Logan’s survey of quality television. As previously mentioned at the beginning of this section, after an impressive survey of the literature, Logan (2016) identifies controversial storylines, auteur-like showrunners, higher production values, cinematic style, involvement of film actors and film directors, genre hybridity, self-reflexivity, complex narratives and in-depth character development as common elements of this type of programming.

Quality programming has become increasingly important for the American market as digitalization has enabled satellite channels and time-shifting technologies. With the rise of cable (Thompson 1997, Banet-Weiser et al. 2007), niche programming, which is associated with quality content, gained strength. Netflix and other streaming platforms seem to be following premium cable’s lead and reproducing similar standards.

Although the rise of quality programming has been a popular topic within the domestic U.S. market, there is not much interest in the global repercussions of this change. Having passed beyond the regular borders of Turkish influence, *Son* becomes evidence of the globalization of Anglo-American quality. While it failed to survive in the U.S. market, the show still managed to travel there as a pilot adaptation thanks to its globally accessible generic, narrative, and aesthetic characteristics. Furthermore, this failed



FIGURE 2. SIMON AND HIS TWIN BROTHER SEEN IN HOME VIDEO ARTIFACTS IN OPENING SEQUENCE.

American pilot paved the way for two Western European adaptations—an unprecedented situation for Turkish dramas.

Son's mobility is demonstrated in two ways: by its capability to travel towards the West as a finished program, and its transnational adaptability as a format. This dual mobility, however, is not solely dependent on its generic, thematic, and aesthetic qualities associated with easy-traveling Anglo-American quality programming. The show builds upon a unique identity representation which makes it more accessible to Western audiences both as a finished program and a format adaptation. Interestingly, though, this identity representation, which aids European adaptations, makes the show less appealing in the Turkish context.

By presenting Aylin – a modern Turkish woman – in contrast to Leyla – who is constrained by the traditional Iranian society she is living in – *Son* does three things at once. First, it situates Aylin and Turkey at the Western end of a dichotomy opposing the modern, Western, and secular with the traditional, Eastern, and conservative; in doing so, it provides Western European viewers a strong point of identification with the female lead Aylin. Second, it complicates Aylin's modern but family-oriented femininity through her struggle with her roles as a wife and a mother. Third, and finally, Aylin's complicated version of femininity, by challenging the modern vs. traditional dichotomy, acts as an exception to the norm in the domestic market. With such a self-reflexive perspective on identity, *Son* captures the complexity of its context of production, which is dominated by a major political transformation.



FIGURE 3. NEWSPAPER ARTICLE ABOUT SIMON BECOMING A SUSPECT OF A TERROR ATTACK.

3. NATION-STATE, MODERNISM, AND IDENTITY CRISIS: WHAT'S WRONG WITH AYLIN?

At first glance, Aylin appears to be a happy wife and mother. She lives with her husband Selim and son Ömer (Emir Geylan) in a rich neighborhood. She owns an architecture firm with Halil—Selim's adopted brother and best friend. On the surface, she is a “lean-in” woman who works but maintains a happy family life. While critics like Angela McRobbie warn against neo-liberal implications of this identity, lean-in womanhood has become a popular representation on television in the West. McRobbie (2013) traces an emphasis on neo-liberal feminism in the West through her study of *Revolutionary Road* and Sheryl Sandberg's book. Shani Orgad's (2016) study of *The Good Wife's* optimistic representation of Alicia as a working mother who manages to have it all also demonstrates the rise of “lean-in woman” identity in media discourses.

In her article on post-feminist TV criticism, Amanda Lotz (2011:107) argues that TV “televises feminism” as the feminist struggle continues in the U.S. context: “Feminist discourses on television tend to correspond to aspects of feminism explored by US culture as women's roles [are] renegotiated [...]”. In the Turkish case, the same role renegotiation makes itself visible on television. However, what appears on television is not just the representation of ongoing feminist struggles. The Turkish Republic's conscious utilization of women's images both to legitimize the Republican Revolution and to provide evidence for the change promised by the same revolution.

Aylin clearly conforms with the Republic's definition of modernity as a happily married working mother. In this context, it is necessary to remember traditional and modern identities are both anchored in heterosexual motherhood, yet

the latter encourages a work life outside the home. However, a closer look at Aylin reveals that she deviates from the prioritization of motherhood. Her identity is more defined by her love for her husband Selim than her motherhood. Her son and family are important for her, but she goes to great lengths to find the truth about her husband's disappearance. While doing that, she endangers many lives, including hers.

One of Aylin's lines anchors her identity in this prioritization. At the very beginning of the story, Aylin quotes her mother (1.03) to describe her own relationship with Selim. She explains that her mother told her:

There are three types of women in the world, my daughter. Those who are married to their husbands. Those who are married to their children. Those who are married to their homes. Be one of those who are married to their husbands, my daughter.

Aylin, then, adds how she followed that advice and put Selim at the center of her universe, so losing him shakes her to the core. Thinking he is dead and thinking that he left her are equally torturous for her, and she is willing to risk everything to find him.

Women's identity has been an important part of nation-state building projects. Family and maternal roles are emphasized in post-colonial nation-state discourses, as examples from Turkey, India, and Egypt reveal (Mankekar 1999, Abu Lughod 2005, Akinerdem 2005,). In these cases, women and their bodies become symbols of political transformation and identity reconfiguration. The state's main priority is to establish its difference from the previous regime and legitimize its rule. Despite emphasis on emancipation and modernity, heterosexual marriage and motherhood remain essential for women, so the main difference between the traditional identity model and this modern one is the latter's decision to open the door to work life for women. Nevertheless, even in that case, the modernist-nationalist discourse requires the act of balancing family life and work life for women. Nukhet Sirman coins this model as "familial citizenship" and explains:

This [familial citizenship] indicates a gendered discourse in which the ideal citizen is inscribed as a sovereign husband and his dependent wife/mother rather than an individual, with the result that position within a familial discourse provides the person with status within the polity (2005:148).

While providing the overall framework of her analysis, Sirman traces the birth of this model to the rise of nation-state in the Turkish case:

Thus, rather than start from the universal discourse of the citizen, this chapter will attempt to delineate the discourses and practices under which the Turkish nation-state was first produced. It will argue that the production of an imaginary of the nuclear family took place in tandem with the creation of the nation-state as modern. This preoccupation with modernity is what I would identify as the post-colonial condition, which as Hall argues, means that we have to read the discourses and practices of particular locality in relation to the "Euro-imperial adventure" (1996: 252).

As Sirman explains, the nuclear family becomes the building block for Turkish nationalism. Women are important for such imagination as they are the ones responsible for preserving the unity of family, which is the basis for the unity of the nation. This concealed conservatism is in line with Kandiyoti's (1987) argument that secular reforms of the Turkish Republic were not enough to liberate women despite legal emancipation. Following legal emancipation, family emerges as an important structure that anchors women in conservative gender roles.

I argue that this form of familial citizenship promoted by the new Republic is transforming under the AKP regime. Since 2011, there has been a different type of emphasis on women's roles as mothers. Aylin's character does not conform with this change; her priority is her husband, whom she loves, and she puts him before her son and her work. She refuses to be confined to a domestic sphere when she decides to travel to Iran on her own. The family remains the building block for the nation, yet the women who are supposed to protect that unity are pushed towards a more conservative domestic realm. President Erdogan, who has been spearheading this change, has been vocal in encouraging women to have more children. Although he started with calls for couples to have at least three children, he soon raised the number to five (*Evrensel* 2012), saying technology makes it easier to take care of kids and do housework. Meanwhile, according to Ministry of Family and Social Policies data (Karakoyun 2017), cases of complaints of violence against women heavily increased between 2003-2016. These developments have contributed to concerns about what this ongoing change means for women's rights in Turkey.

AKP's third term is a crucial marker for understanding the shifting discourses of femininity. The release time of the show follows a tumultuous election year, 2011, and precedes the Gezi Protests of 2013. The latter marks the beginning of increasing political tension in Turkey. Around that time, scholars and journalists started to voice their concerns in the domestic context. Increasing censorship and ownership concentration (Cetin 2014) went hand in hand with Turkey's rise as a content creator. The European Union and human rights groups expressed their concerns about the imprisonment of journalists, and freedom of press was further shaken by firings of critics of the government by mainstream newspapers and TV channels in the days leading to elections in 2011.

These developments continued at a slower pace and became less visible when the AKP won the general elections. The claims of censorship were not limited to the press; television content received its share of tightening control. Both the Prime Minister and members of the AKP openly criticized shows like *Behzat Ç.* (2010-2013) and *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* (*Magnificent Century*). The Supreme Council of Radio and Television (RTÜK) has enforced stricter rules such as banning the depiction of cigarettes and alcoholic drinks on screen. Profane language and sexual references led to large fines.

In the middle of this transformation, which paved the way for the AKP's consolidation of power, *Son* aired on pro-government ATV. Unlike the overtly political *Behzat Ç.* and the AKP government's least favorite historical drama *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* (*Magnificent Century*), it did not attract any political attention at all. Considering the political undertones of the story, this lack of attention can be understood thanks to *Son's* characteristics. The subtleness of its political critique, and its externalization of the modern vs. traditional dichotomy by imagining Iran as traditional instead of a domestic imagination, separates *Son* from the other shows. Aylin and Leyla become surrogates for this juxtaposition of the modern and the traditional.

The major tension within Turkey's discourses of identity is crystallized as the conflict between traditionalism and modernism. The Turkish Republic, which needed to distinguish itself from its predecessor—the Ottoman Empire—built its identity as the modern nation-state alternative to the traditional empire. In this context, secular emancipation—regardless of the real extent of liberation—becomes a marker of modernism. In other words, the introduction of emancipatory laws is accepted as a proof of progress—something Ottoman rule failed to achieve according to the Republican myth. Nevertheless, the extent of libera-

tion secured by these laws is rarely discussed in relation to women's rights. Melodrama as a genre fully embraces these tensions in the history of Turkey. There is a pedagogic and celebratory emphasis on women's emancipation by the Republican revolution while traditionalism is criticized. Öncü explains how this tension becomes visible on television:



FIGURE 4. IMAGE OF *KÜÇÜK GELİN*.

Since [the early decades of the Republic] the “backwardness of the East”, continuously produced and reproduced in juxtaposition to the “developed” West, has become a way of understanding and explaining decades of stark rural poverty, impoverishment and out-migration of Kurdish populations. Stereotypes of feudalistic blight among the Kurdish populations who inhabit the region have always been formulated as a problem of “backwardness”, rather than exclusion. Thus the notion of “the East” has become a generic construct, inscribed in dualistic opposition to the dominant order at multiple layers—geographically remote, backward, unchanging, pre-capitalist, tribal, simultaneously untamed and rebellious (2011: 52).

Unsurprisingly, throughout Republican history, there have been many examples of this pedagogic juxtaposition, which aims to establish the backwardness of the East as the reason for the Kurdish conflict. Shows like *Sıla* (2006-2008) and *Küçük Gelin* (2013-2015) build upon this binary between the East and the West to criticize arranged marriages and child brides in the East. These shows underline the importance of equal education opportunities for girls while also criticizing illegally practiced polygamy.



FIGURE 5. *ANALAR VE ANNELER* (MAMAS AND MOMS) AND *ANNELER VE KIZLARI* (MOTHERS AND DAUGHTERS) JUXTAPOSING URBAN/MODERN WITH RURAL/TRADITIONAL.

This representation of backwardness associated with the East of Turkey also appears in stories juxtaposing two women. Short-lived shows like *Analar ve Anneler* (*Mamas and Moms*, 2015) and *Anneler ve Kızları* (*Mothers and Daughters*, 2011) use a dual representation like *Son*, but they locate the traditional characters in Eastern Turkey instead of Iran. They juxtapose the urban and educated woman with the uneducated Eastern woman. This representation is gendered considering the emphasis on women's role as mothers, but it is also ethnicized to the extent that the urban educated woman is almost always blonde.

While these shows present a traditional and religiously conservative picture of the East, religiosity is usually attached to location in Turkish television and it appears more as the appendage of a provincial identity. Migrants moving to big cities in the West are represented in a similar light. Due to Republican attempts to control religious opposition, secular policies not only prevented the visibility of covered women on television but also avoided presenting a religious identity independent of geographical origin. Therefore, re-

ligiosity becomes a major indicator of traditionalism in this context.

Nevertheless, such depictions are losing their relevance as the context of production changes rapidly. Depiction of religiosity has been an important part of this change. Kumru Berfin Emre Cetin (2014) points to *Huzur Sokağı* (2012-2014) as the first mainstream TV show showing a covered character in 2012. After years of appearance on conservative channels or what Emre Cetin (2014: 2474) calls "ghettoized pious channels", this move to mainstream television is more telling about the transformation of Turkish politics than the transformation of Turkish society. Older depictions of traditionalism are now challenged by representations which say that religion is not an impediment to modernity. *Huzur Sokağı* aired on ATV, which belonged to Turkuvez Medya Group run by Erdogan's son-in-law Berat Albayrak at that time. In other words, religious visibility on mainstream television coincided with the conservative AKP government's strengthening ties with business.

With the consolidation of AKP's power, mainstream discourses of identity started to change. At this moment of political transformation, traditionalism, conservatism, and religiosity are no longer de facto indicators of backwardness. A new modern nation-state identity incorporating these elements is emerging. This change has paved the way for religious women to be visible onscreen, women who have long been ostracized from mainstream channels. It has also made binary representations confining religiosity to the traditional and non-modern realm less viable.

At first look, Aylin strongly resembles the secular modern identity model for women. A reference to Aylin's parents establishes that her upbringing is clearly a secular Republican one. While talking to her therapist Cem, she tells him how feeling fear is unbearable for her. She says, "I'm the daughter of a soldier. I was raised not to fear anything" (1.07). Her conversation with Cem not only reveals Aylin's complicated feelings and foreshadows what will happen next, but also helps to situate her within Turkish society. The army in Turkey has long been associated with the protection of secular republican ideals. Multiple coup d'états and attempted coup d'états have raised questions about the ways in which these ideals were protected by the military. The recent events of July 2016 revealed that the army itself was not completely monolithic in composition when non-secular groups in the army gained visibility during political turmoil. Nevertheless, the secular image associated with the army has long survived. The timing of *Son*, which was filmed between 2011-2012, coincides



FIGURE 6. AYLIN WAKES UP NEXT TO HALIL AND REALIZES SHE STILL HAS HER WEDDING RING ON.

with the height of the Ergenekon trials, which investigated the allegations of a secular nationalist coup d'état led by the army officers.

Aylin aligns well with this secular image attributed to army members and their families. She does not wear a headscarf. She has a successful work life outside her home as an architect, co-owning her firm with Halil. Aylin is happily married to her husband Selim, a doctor, and they raise their son Ömer together. On the surface, she fits into the modern representation of women. But as the story unfolds, she deviates from the family-centric modern nation-state model ascribed for her. She risks her life to find Selim although she knows that this might rob Ömer of both his parents. She challenges familial elements of this secular image further by going on a blind date with one of her friend's acquaintances, Barış (Kaan Urgancıoğlu), six months after her husband goes missing. She later goes on to begin a relationship with Halil despite her son Ömer's protests. In other words, Aylin moves beyond the borders of "emancipation without liberation" in Kandiyoti's terms, and she certainly does not fit in the mainstream televisual norms of womanhood. This deviation makes it harder to "identify" with her in the Turkish context.

Except for the older couple Ali and Feride (Ülkü Duru), all the other characters live their lives without being concerned about what others think. Drinking and partying are not unique to *Son*, but what makes *Son* unique is that it does not pass any judgment on these lifestyle choices, and there is no evidence of such choices being criticized or threatened

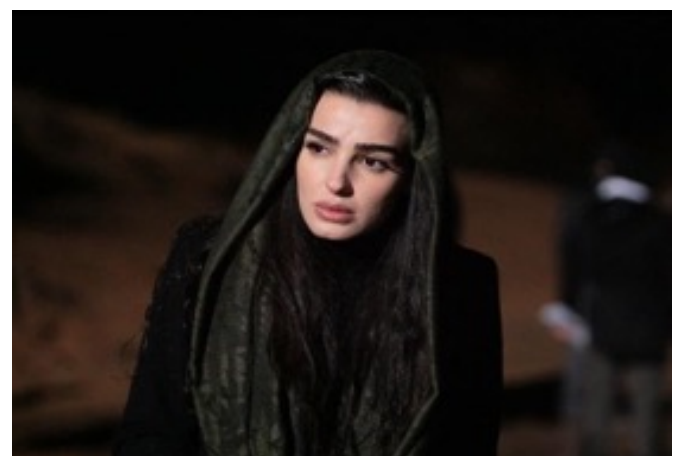


FIGURE 7. AYLIN (NEHIR ERDOĞAN)

FIGURE 8. LEYLA (MEHRNOUSH ESMAELPOUR)



FIGURE 9.: AYLIN ON A DATE WITH BARIŞ.



FIGURE 10. AYLIN AND ROZA IN THE RESTROOM DURING AYLIN'S DATE.

in the show. Other mainstream genres such as the romantic comedy *Kiralık Aşk* (2015-2017) have such scenes, but these characters refer to the need to hide their actions from their families and communities.

In short, *Son* presents a very specific segment of Turkish life in its storylines, though not an unrealistic or a pretentious one. Although that life experience exists for a small urban

population in Istanbul, since context is a defining factor for viewers' connection to the text, this privileged life experience is harder to identify with. While discussing representations of modernity and tradition on television, Feyza Akinerdem (2005: 53) argues – in regard to the relationship between text and context in television shows – that “for the television fictions, the viewer's position vis á vis the text is constructed within [a] wider social context, in which the text itself is also encoded”. Aylin's “Western-ness” becomes clearer within the context of identity representations—the Republican modern, traditional conservative and neo-conservative—as she deviates from the emphasis on motherhood prevalent in all three configurations. Therefore, Aylin's identity sets her apart from other women on television, making *Son* a unique example among other Turkish melodramas.

In this context, *Son* deviates from mainstream Turkish melodrama representations for two reasons. First, it does not conform to the secular, modern, and Republican depiction, which still prioritizes maternal duties. Aylin appears as someone who puts herself and her husband before her child. Secondly, the “backwardness” in this show is located outside of Turkey, with backwardness embodied in the depiction of Leyla, from Iran. As an Iranian “Oriental Other”,

she externalizes traditionalism; thus, Turkey's modernity is taken for granted. Nevertheless, Leyla is painted as a more complex character than reductionist Orientalist depictions in mainstream melodramas. She is a lovelorn single mother trying to keep her children with her in the present, but in the flashbacks, she is also a nurse and a political activist. In other words, Leyla herself is not "backward", yet the regime in her country is.

4. LEYLA "THE CAGED BIRD" OR AYLIN'S COMPLEX ORIENTAL OTHER

The decision to locate Leyla in Iran and outside of Turkey as the Oriental Other, while painting her as a complex character instead of a stereotype, separates *Son* from mainstream melodramas and distinguishes it from regionally popular shows associated with "Neo-Ottomanism".

This difference also reduces *Son's* potential for an aspirational connection in the Middle East, which is prevalent in regionally popular melodramas. As I discussed in relation to Neo-Ottomanism above, Turkish shows are associated with more egalitarian gender configurations, which challenge mainstream identity representations in the Middle East. However, *Son* utilizes Leyla for establishing Aylin's privilege in a way different than domestically and regionally popular Turkish dramas. Instead of depicting Leyla simply as "traditional", the show places her in a traditional society, which limits her freedom in multiple ways. Leyla pushes the boundaries in which an Islamist regime confines her, and she ends up suffering because of these boundaries.

The flashbacks reveal that Leyla faces more problems with the system after finding out about her pregnancy. She first tries to get an illegal abortion, but she cannot bring herself to go through with it. Then she marries Majid (Philip Arditti), another political activist, so that she can give birth without getting punished for being a single mother. Her fake marriage with Majid collapses when Majid can no longer hide his interest in her, and she decides to flee Iran with her twin sons. Leyla ends up leaving one of her sons behind in Iran. Later, despite the danger, she goes back to retrieve him. Unlike Aylin, whose devotion to her husband comes before her son, Leyla is completely devoted to her sons. She is a mother, not a lover. Leyla is still in love with Selim, who abandoned her years ago, but she has no hopes of being with him, and so she fully embodies the motherhood role assigned to her by both traditional and modern models of femininity.



FIGURE 11. LEYLA TRYING TO GET AN ILLEGAL ABORTION.



FIGURE 12. LEYLA IN JAIL IN IRAN AFTER GETTING CAUGHT AT THE BORDER.



FIGURE 13. SELIM FOLLOWING LEYLA TO HER HOUSE

In short, she is a modern woman trapped in a traditional system. Her confinement is mirrored on screen as she is almost always trapped physically and visually. She spends time in jail in Iran. She is taken into custody in Turkey. Half the time she is on screen, she is forced to hide both by Selim and

Halil. Besides narrative confinement, visually she is shown in tight frames. We see her through doors cracked open, and both men and the state monitor and try to control her. In an interesting manner, the male gaze alternates with government surveillance and Leyla is exposed to similar confinement in both the public and private spheres.

Seeing what Leyla lacks helps viewers understand what Aylin has: a protected independence. At first, this seems to be in line with Neo-Ottoman explanations of the Turkish dramas' popularity in the Middle East. Aylin's rights and freedoms might function as a model to emulate for viewers in neighboring countries. However, after a close examination, the difference between Turkey and Iran does not resemble the proximity defended in Neo-Ottoman explanations. Instead, the East becomes a cautionary tale, somewhere to be escaped from for both Aylin and Leyla.

Aylin's experiences especially depict Iran in a way similar to traditional Orientalist representations—a dangerous, barren place with no law and order, yet run by a repressive regime. She, herself, is no longer a safe median between the West and the East for Middle Eastern viewers. Aylin becomes the “Western Other” in two steps. First, she deviates from the familial role assigned to her, which endangers her symbolic proximity to viewers in the region. Without the overlap of a prioritization of motherhood which both the “modern” and “traditional” models share, Aylin loses her proximity to the East. Then, when she physically enters the East, she fully annihilates the potential connection by barely surviving the experience. Her departure from Iran becomes her salvation and she validates her position as a “Western stranger”. Therefore, she proves right Kudret's mysterious friend Simon (Martin Turner), who previously addressed her (1.01) as someone who is not familiar with the region: “The East, young woman, is always further east than you think. The further we get from the West, the more unreachable it becomes. Don't you wanna see the sunset? It's the only beauty here that's bulletproof”. This moment of reflexivity clarifies overall dynamics of identity construction in *Son*: Aylin belongs to the West. Therefore, *Son* differs greatly from domestically and regionally popular Turkish melodramas, and remains an anomaly for the Turkish market.

With Aylin becoming the “Western” woman, Leyla becomes the “Oriental Other”. Despite the attempts by Aylin, Simon, and Kudret to help, she cannot survive. While one of Leyla's sons eventually dies in Iran, she herself ends up being murdered in Istanbul by Halil. Leyla's origin be-

comes the defining force in the course of her life, for being an Iranian woman limits her choices and her mobility. Although she fights hard to challenge the limits, she ends up failing to leave Turkey for Norway with her twin sons. In a way, her “Eastern-ness” prevents her from entering Europe, whereas, despite all the difficulty, Aylin manages to cross the Iranian border back to her home. The difference between these two women's lives stands in for the difference between their geographies.

5. THE FISH OUT OF WATER INTO THE LAND OF DANGER: AYLIN IN IRAN

Aylin's first moments in Iran depict her looking for the hotel Leyla recommended for her. She walks in narrow streets of the city where Selim first met Leyla. Farsi written in Arabic script appears on the walls as a geographical reminder of location. After she checks into the hotel and enters the room, Aylin takes off the headscarf she has to wear in Iran. The headscarf here becomes the marker of transitioning between the two societies; we see that Leyla doesn't wear her headscarf after she makes it to Istanbul.

Aylin wears the headscarf again once she leaves her room in Iran, but her mannerisms reveal how unaccustomed she is to wearing it. She keeps walking in the city in desperation. Not being able to find any clues clearly upsets her. As she talks to an Iranian woman in veil, Aylin's headscarf finally slides down revealing her hair. The way Aylin acts makes her foreigner status obvious.

Getting no help from the Iranian women she talks to, Aylin ends up wandering on her own. A man approaches her and promises to lead her to Selim when she is alone. Eventually, it turns out that the man is an imposter. He tries to rape Aylin, who is later saved by Kudret (Uğur Polat), Selim's childhood friend. Aylin faces the same threat of rape when Kudret's friend Simon is trying to smuggle her across the border. Iran and the East appear as dangerous places for women. She finally understands that her persistence in looking for Selim might cost her life. As a mother, she decides she needs to return to her son, Ömer. In the end, despite moments of deviation, she embraces her role as a mother thanks to her experiences in Iran.

Aylin's unfamiliarity with Iran and the religious rule there provide an excellent template for the Dutch format adaptation *Vlucht HS13*, in which her Western-ness contributes to the show's adaptability. This version spends less



FIGURE 14. AYLIN IN HER HOTEL ROOM.

time in Iran. The missing husband's backstory with Leyla is not shown. Although we don't get to see much of Iran and most of the political elements, Majid (Alan Yedegarian), Leyla's Iranian husband, becomes the main culprit of all crimes in the Dutch version while the same character is not physically violent in the Turkish original. Although the murderer in the Turkish original is Aylin's business partner and her husband's adopted brother Halil, *Vlucht HS13* goes one step further in imagining the East as a dangerous place by making Majid a merciless murderer responsible for all crimes.

In one particular scene, Leyla (Sachli Golamalizad) teaches Liv (The Dutch counterpart of Aylin) how to cover her head. Once again, women's bodies become symbolic border checkpoints as Liv, like Aylin, dons a headscarf. Leyla prepares her for this rite of passage: When Liv asks if it's okay for some of her hair to be seen, Leyla comforts her saying that it won't be a problem (1.10). There is a didactic reflexivity in this moment. Like Liv, viewers find out about the acceptable standards of covering in Iran.

Iran is not an incidental choice for the representation of the East. Although the Oriental Other can be mapped onto other countries in the Middle East, Iran has always been the subject of such comparisons in the Turkish case. Discursively, it functions as an example of how the modern vs. the traditional can evolve in a predominantly Muslim country. "Will Turkey become Iran?" is a recurring question in debates about the threats against secularism.

Comparisons between these two countries have long been common not just in academic surveys but also in daily political discussions. Since both descended from regionally



FIGURE 15. AYLIN IN STREETS OF IRAN.



FIGURE 16. LEYLA TEACHING LIV HOW TO COVER HER HEAD.

powerful empires which went through periods of secular reforms, this is a valid comparison. In the Iranian case, the Khomeini-lead Islamic Revolution in 1979 reversed that process. Looking at the comparison between Turkish Aylin and Iranian Leyla at this very specific moment in time provides a chance to zoom in on the link between the representation of women and discourses of modernity. The revolution that led to religious rule in Iran has often been a cautionary tale told by critics of the conservative Justice and Development Party in Turkey. Therefore, Leyla's role in the story emphasizes Aylin and Turkey's difference from Iran and the East in general. In other words, Turkey, which has long been described as a bridge between the East and the West, claims its "Westernness" and "European-ness" by showing it is different from Iran.

In addition to holding a specific place as a reference within the Turkish context, Iran is a globally recognizable reference due to mainstream media coverage about the religious revolution and the Iranian hostage crisis. Betty Mahmoody's book *Not Without My Daughter*, and the film adapted from it, have further crystallized Iran's identity in the Anglo-American world as an Islamic nation. This identity is also embedded in earlier Orientalist discourses (Said 1978) which depict the East as an uncivilized place, becoming a token for legitimizing "Western" ways.

Therefore, *Son's* positioning of its lead character Aylin as a fish out of water in Iran, and Leyla as a woman exposed to the regime's oppression, help "Western" viewers identify with Aylin. With that, Turkey's "Other" easily evolves into the East—the never changing opposite of the West. Due to this, the show becomes more relatable as a finished program, and the format adaptation can simply substitute Aylin with

a European woman (Liv as we saw in the case of the Dutch adaptation). With such adaptability, *Son* challenges Turkish dramas' existing borders of influence. At the same time, it raises questions of what Turkey's changing identity means for the future of its drama exports.

6. CONCLUSION

As the Turkish political model loses its international appeal due to intensifying domestic turmoil, domestic television production and television exports have managed to preserve their strength. Exporting content beyond the former borders of the Ottoman Empire is the goal for Turkish producers. As of the summer of 2017, *Son* is the most successful show in achieving this goal. It is worth noting it achieved this while both deviating from a conservative understanding of the familial unit and still utilizing the dichotomy between the East and the West. This conservative understanding of family-based identity representation, which remains intact, has been a successful template for Turkish drama exports in the Middle East.

Aylin's prioritization of her own desires over her son Ömer for a significant part of the story allows *Son* to depict a different model of femininity, even though it unites Aylin's family at the end. Both her desire to find her husband Selim, and her decision to pursue a relationship with Halil, endanger Aylin's life, making her son Ömer face the possibility of losing his mother along with his father. In that context, Aylin deviates from mainstream representations of motherhood by following her desire to find the truth about Selim instead of creating

a safe home for Ömer. The show's melodramatic characteristics—such as an emphasis on familial relationships, personal secrets, and quickly shifting alliances—make it in some ways similar to other Turkish melodramas. Nevertheless, the quality programming elements that I discussed at the beginning grant *Son* a level of reflexivity and a complexity that becomes crucial in the show's configuration of feminine identities, making it depart from the norms of other such shows. Aylin, who appears to be raised at the “modern” end of the modern vs. the traditional identity spectrum, can easily be substituted with another “Non-Eastern” woman. This dichotomy helps the process of adaptation and consumption in Europe, but the ways in which Aylin challenges conservative remnants of this modern Turkish identity make her less identifiable within the domestic context. When the show's moderate performance in Turkey and in the Middle East is considered along with its ongoing success in Europe, *Son* shows how women's representation is not just crucial for identity construction of nation-states. Indeed, it becomes obvious that how women act or look not only defines where they go in real life, but also determines where they can travel on-screen. In that sense, *Son* emerges as a unique example for showing how questions of globalization, mobility, and identity are mapped onto the bodies of women both on screen and in real life.

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TV Shows

- Analar ve Anneler (Mamas and Moms, 2015)*
- Anneler ve Kızları (Mothers and Daughters, 2011)*
- Behzat Ç. (2010-2013)*
- El Accidente (2017)*
- Gümüş (Noor, 2005-2007)*
- Gelinim Olur Musun? (The Perfect Bride, 2004)*
- Homeland (2011-Present)*
- Huzur Sokağı (2012-2014)*
- Kıralık Aşk (2015-2017)*
- Küçük Gelin (2013-2015)*
- Muhteşem Yüzyıl (Magnificent Century, 2011-2014)*
- Son (The End, 2012)*
- Sıla (2006-2008)*
- Runner (2015)*
- The Honorable Woman (2014)*
- Vlucht HS13 (2016)*
- 24 (2001-2010)*