WHY SO SUCCESSFUL?

AN AUDIENCE RESEARCH ON TURKISH TV SERIES IN GREECE

Eleni Pothou
Istanbul Bilgi University
elpotg@gmail.com

Abstract: The circulation of Turkish fictional television programs among different countries worldwide has been increased crossing over to wider audiences of different cultural regions. Over the last years there has been a rising production of Turkish series dealing with the foundation and the history of the Ottoman Empire, militaristic series as well as drama series that run in parallel to the country's trade expansion in the region, foreign policies, Neo-Ottoman ideology and recent political events.[1] This study deals with a specific set of practices found in Turkish drama series that enable them to be cross-culturally consumed with the example of their success in Greece. The audience research presented in this paper indicates cultural proximity as a succorer for this consumption.

Keywords: popular culture, cultural proximity, Greek audience, Turkish TV series, Greece

1 Turkish TV Series: An Example of Popular Culture

The Turkish TV series have entered the international market of selling and distribution of TV entertainment programs, claiming a counter flow to the dominant American TV products in the last decade. Only in 2017, Turkey was the second country worldwide in television series exports after the U.S, gradually entering the European market too. Turkish content is available on different platforms worldwide, while Netflix launched its first Turkish original series in 2018.[2] The exports of Turkish series were only $10M in 2008 reaching a ten times higher revenue of $100M in 2012[3] and $350M in 2018[4] targeting to reach a revenue of $1B by 2023.[5] Undeniably this makes Turkish TV a successful product of the current popular culture and Turkey the main distributor of cultural commodities in the region of Eastern Europe and near Middle East. Apart from that, Turkey is now entering Spain and Italy,[6] expanding its activity in Western Europe.

The patriarchal representation of family, the seldom – if any – scenes of intimacy and the traditional cultural expressions are some of the characteristic elements which construct Turkish drama series' idiosyncrasy. The distinctiveness of its example lays on the fact that it is found in a limbo between modernity and conservatism that is apparent in patriarchal family structure, gender roles and collectivism as expressed in the series together with a number of Islamic rituals.

1.1 The example of Greece

One of the most successful and interesting examples of the distribution and the popularity of this Turkish canned content within the European context is Greece. Its idiosyncrasy lays on the sensitive Greek-Turkish relations and the establishment of a negative representation of Turkey in the Greek public sphere.[7] Starting from 2005, when the first Turkish series (*Yabancı Damat)* was aired on Greek TV, Turkish TV series started entering the Greek market, and from 2010 onwards are among Greek audience's choices.[8]

This study adopts the structuralisms and post-structuralisms approach of signifying practices and suggests that in order to understand Turkish TV series' success in Greece, we should focus on the concept of cultural proximity defined by Joseph D. Straubhaar as the tendency "to prefer and select local or national cultural content that is more proximate and relevant to [the audience]".[9] The main idea of the concept is that audiences do tend to choose programs with which they feel more culturally relevant and proximate.[10] Cultural proximity has multiple levels which correlate with people's multilayered, complex cultural identities.

Research on soap operas and telenovelas has pointed out that the audience engages on different levels of proximity with the cultural content depicted depending on their cultural capital. Moreover, Straubhaar notes that melodrama as a genre enables an easier trespass of regional national borders due to the archetypes entailed in it.[11]

Focusing on the Turkish dramas, it can be argued that they compose a hybrid genre, because it does not only consist of the characteristics of romantic drama and melodrama, soap opera and telenovela,[12] but it also diverges from them. Oztürkmen suggests that Turkish drama series have now established itself as a genre of its own, starting from the mid-1990s and shaping in the 2000s, proposing the word *dizi*, namely "series" in Turkish, as the name of the new genre. Taking into consideration that genres "are constructed *a posteriori*",[13] the diversity of Turkish drama series' content and format, the confusion of categorizing them under a specific genre and the viewing patterns of foreign audience which differentiate according to the airing time and the product's format constitute an idiosyncratic text.

Thus far, the research made on the Turkish TV series' in Greece justify its success as a symptom of exoticism, soft power diplomacy, nostalgia and economic crisis, in which identity negotiation occurs.[14] Numerous articles written in Greek newspapers also tried to explain the audience's preference. Some of them focus on Turkish TV series' success as an escapism from financial crisis[15] while other articles argue that it is a tool of soft power diplomacy[16] or justify their success by drawing parallels with the family values of the Greek and Turkish society,[17] wondering what is the common factor between an Arab and Greek audience[18]. It needs to be highlighted that in many of the above-mentioned articles the entrance of Turkish TV series in Greek TV is described as an 'invasion' constructing a bias against them.

While there are sufficient and strong elements that can support these approaches, the purpose of this study is instead to focus on the interplay of cultural proximity. Apart from language, factors that can determine cultural proximity can be gender images, lifestyle, knowledge about other lifestyles, values, education, family, personal and group networks, travel, religion, and organizational affiliations.[19] Consequently, in the quest of understanding the reasons behind a Greek audience's preference for Turkish drama series, this study explores two factors as indicators of cultural proximity that positively influence a Greek audience's preference; family values and interpersonal romantic relationships.

This leads to two hypotheses:

H1: A Greek audience that prefers to watch Turkish drama series affiliates with the depiction of conservative family values as an indicator of cultural proximity.

Under the term conservative family values, a portrayal of a conservative family structure, practicing rituals is considered. Eating breakfast all together, listening to the advice of the elders, rarely/never talking back or disrespect the parents, protecting the honor of the family are some examples of these rituals. The conservative family structure refers to a patriarchal structure, were men are in charge of the family, leaving little if no space to the women to take responsibilities that concern serious family decisions. Males protect the females. Mother figures can be intervening but do not play a decisive role. Important terms in this concept are 'namus', namely the honor of the family members and especially the girls and 'sahip çıkmak', namely the obligation that the male members of the family have to protect and defend their family whatever the cost.

H2: A Greek audience that prefers to watch Turkish drama series affiliates with the romantic depiction of interpersonal relationships between men and women depicted as an indicator of cultural proximity.

Under the term romantic depiction of interpersonal relationships between men and women, a conservative, romantic depiction of gender relations is considered. Even though there is a portrayal of an emancipated woman protagonist, when it comes to romance conservative gender roles revive. The protagonist's character embodies both a romantic, sensitive side and a possessive, jealous side, which can also be expressed in a violent way in order to protect the female protagonist. The female protagonist on the other hand like Penelope waits faithfully for her Odysseys to overcome the difficulties before they can be together. She might help him overcome the difficulties but stays always one-step back. Intimacy is implied but never shown. Important terms in this concept are 'yuva kurmak', namely to start a family, which entails that the couple should get married in order to start living together and 'sahip çıkmak', which, within this concept, has the meaning of the male protecting his romantic relationship from aspirant suitors.

2 Methodology

In order to understand and explain the reasons behind this engagement a survey was conducted from 23/10/2017 to 26/02/2018. The mixed-methods analysis was based on a semi-structured questionnaire, whose qualitative open-ended questions were optional except for one open-ended question included in the demographics. Open-ended questions were optional in order to further understand the feelings, the attitudes and the opinions of the interviewees without obliging them to answer so as to minimize the chances of completely missing values. The proportional spread of the 708 respondents throughout Greece gives a representative sample to this study.

The type of administrative method applied to this survey was web-based and was posted on the online survey software Survey Monkey. Victory Entertainment S.A., the main distributor of Turkish TV series in Greece, shared the survey on different pages of their administration via Facebook. It was also posted by the researcher on a Facebook fan page of Turkish series with a large community of active members.[20] 4 popular Turkish TV series have been selected: *Endless Love* (2016-2018) (*Kara Sevda; Turkish broadcast: 2015-2017*), which won the award for Best Telenovela at the 47th International Emmy Awards, *Black Money Love* (2014-2015) (*Kara Para Aşk; Turkish broadcast 2014-2015*), *Love and Punishment* (2011-2012) (*Aşk ve Ceza; Turkish broadcast 2010-2011)* and *One Thousand and One Nights* (2010-2011) (*Binbir Gece; Turkish broadcast 2006-2009*).[21]

Video 1. *Endless Love* (*Kara Sevda*), Emmy award winner for Best Telenovela in 2017,
Promo video from the official YouTube channel of the production company.

These series were drama series aired totally or partially on different Greek television channels between 2011-2017. By partially we refer to the practice of airing only the first episodes. The price of the rights of distribution and reproduction that the Greek distribution company gets are higher if all the episodes are aired on television. Therefore, in order to maximize the profit, the first episodes of a Turkish series are aired on TV and then the rest of the episodes are distributed through weekly television magazines or through individual DVD-box sets. It is worth to noting that the length of the episodes are generally being readjusted to the Greek viewership standards of a 45-60 minutes episode instead of the original Turkish episode, which can last up to 2:30 hours. The prices for a DVD box set of 20 readjusted episodes can reach up to 88 Euros, as in the example of the price for the first DVD box of *Endless Love*.[22]

Video 2. Example of the DVDs sold in weekly television magazines. The series' spots are produced by the series' distribution company in Greece and are reproduced both in TV and through Social Media.

Scenes from the selected series were extracted and used in the questionnaire. There were two parameters for the selection; the variables in question would clearly be defined in the scenes and the respondents were not expected to have prior knowledge in order to understand what the scenes were all about. Five from the selected scenes refer to the family values and three to romance. The videos for family values were outweighed, because of it being a composite issue, therefore it needed to be investigated from different perspectives. Each participant was asked, after having watched the video, to rank their preference on a 3-point Likert scale. Providing their preference, participants were asked to optionally justify their level of agreement or likeableness to eight scenes extracted from the series through an open-space where they could write their comments.

Video 3. *Love and Punishment (Aşk ve Ceza),* episode 18. An example of the scenes included in the survey that were upload to my personal YouTube channel.

2.1 Scenes selected

Family values Q1, *Love and Punishment (Aşk ve Ceza),* **episode 18**: In this scene, the mother tells her daughter that "when you get married to someone you have to accept his/her family too". This expresses a belief that the families can exercise authority in the marriages as a continuation of the traditional contract made between them[23]. The aim was to measure the extent to which families' complicity in a couple's marriage is agreeable.

Family values Q2*, Love and Punishment (Aşk ve Ceza),* **episode 33:** The man uses a Turkish proverb, namely that "the hands which mess with flour (women) should not mind men's business". That establishes a conservative patriarchal family structure where men are expected to be dominant and women obedient[24]. The extent to which this is agreeable was measured.

Family values Q3, *Black Money Love (Kara Para Aşk)***, episode 28:** In this scene, the older woman advises the young man to leave the house because "it is not proper" since her nieces are still unmarried. This reflects the negative connotation of males cohabiting with females. The extent to which the family interferes in individual's social activity[25] by constraining them because of gender roles is likeable was measured.

Family values Q4, *Endless Love (Kara Sevda)***, episode 3:** In this scene, the son tells his father that he will never do something that would dishonor him and the family, expressing his deep respect to his father and the values inherited by him[26]. Therefore, the extent to which respecting the father and the values inherited by the family is likeable was measured.

Family values Q5*, Endless Love (Kara Sevda)***, episode 7:** In this scene, the mother is preaching to her daughter about the dangers that exist in life. This is an example of how family indicates the social behavior of their children[27]. The extent to which the mother's guidance to her daughter's social behavior is likeable was measured.

Romance Q1, *Love and Punishment (Aşk ve Ceza),* **episode 41:** In this scene, the male makes a romantic surprise to his beloved one. Verbal intimacy is expected to be carried out by males, because of the gender roles presented and the concept of modesty for women[28]. The aim was to measure the extent to which the romantic way a man is expressing this love is likeable.

Romance Q2, *1001 nights (Binbir Gece)*, **episode 10:** In this scene, the male makes a marriage proposal accompanied a highly romantic love confession. It is the male that is supposed to carry the verbal intimacy, while the female is expected to be quiet[29]. In this way, the extent to which a romantic marriage proposal is likeable was measured.

Romance Q3, *Black Money (Love Kara Para Aşk),* **episode 13:** In this scene, the girl's boyfriend expresses to her his jealousy in a dominant way by pulling her out of the restaurant. The extent to which a dominant behavior of a man expressing his jealousy towards his girlfriend in public is likeable.

3 Findings

3.1 Demographics

The vast majority of the sample was women (Table 1). The majority of the respondents ranged from 45 to 54 years old with a small representation of people older than 65 years old (Table 2).

Table 1.   Gender of the respondents

Frequency			Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	Woman	662	93.5	96.1
	Man	27	3.8	3.9
	Total	689	97.3	100.0
Missing	System	19	2.7	
Total		708	100.0	

Table 2.   Age of the respondents

Frequency			Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	18-24	96	13.6	13.7
	25-34	129	18.2	18.3
	35-44	140	19.8	19.9
	45-54	187	26.4	26.6
	55-64	128	18.1	18.2
	65+	23	3.2	3.3
	Total	703	99.3	100.0
Missing	System	5	.7	
Total		708	100.0	

As the Table 3 shows, the significant majority (approx. 70%) were High School, Vocational Training or Technological Educational Institute graduates. Moreover, the majority of the respondents were working in the private sector (24.7%), as civil servants (14.1%) or was self-employed (12.4%).

Table 3.   Education level of respondents

Frequency			Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	Elementary School Graduate	19	2.7	2.7
	Junior High School Graduate	47	6.6	6.7
	High School Graduate	193	27.3	27.4
	Vocational Training	120	16.9	17.0
	Technological Educational Institute	193	27.3	27.4
	BA / College Graduate	69	9.7	9.8
	Master's Degree	54	7.6	7.7
	Doctorate Degree	9	1.3	1.3
	Total	704	99.4	100.0
Missing	System	4	.6	
Total		708	100.0	

As the Table 4 shows, the majority of the sample was living in big urban regions, namely Attica or Thessaloniki, which are the most densely populated regions in Greece. Regions with a Turkish population or regions close to Turkey were categorized within the same group in order to examine if the geographical proximity would indicate any differentiation in the results. Comparing the sample with the last population census made in 2011 in Greece[30] the proportional spread of the sample throughout Greece has a strongly representative value.

Table 4.   Residence of the respondents

Frequency			Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	Attica [Athens, Periphery and Peiraias]	289	40.8	43.2
	Thessaloniki	127	17.9	19.0
	Orestiada, Kavala, Aleksandroupoli, North Aegean, Dodecanese, Komotini, Ksanthi	**59**	**8.3**	**8.8**
	Central Greece [Aitoloakarnania, Voiotia, Evoia, Evritania etc]	16	2.3	2.4
	Peloponnese	39	5.5	5.8
	Crete	19	2.7	2.8
	Thessaly, Epirus, Ionian Islands	43	6.1	6.4
	Rest of Macedonia	45	6.4	6.7
	Abroad	32	4.5	4.8
	Total	669	94.5	100.0
Missing	System	39	5.5	
Total		708	100.0	

3.2 Viewership Profile

The results in this section indicate a strong engagement of the audience to the Turkish series in question. With the exception of *Black Money Love (Kara Para Aşk)*, a big majority of the respondents had watched the series selected for this research (Table 5), ranking *1001 nights (1001 Gece)* first in order of preference followed by *Endless Love (Kara Sevda)* (Table 6).

Table 5. Viewership percentages of series in question

	Valid Percent
1001 nights (1001 Gece)	75.5%
Love and Punishment (Aşk ve Ceza)	60.4%
Black Money Love (Kara Para Aşk)	41.0%
Endless Love (Kara Sevda)	69.7%

Table 6. Preference of the series

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	1001 Nights (1001 Gece)	257	36.3	37.5
	Love and Punishment (Ask ve Ceza)	120	16.9	17.5
	Black Money Love (Kara Para Ask)	53	7.5	7.7
	Endless Love (Kara Sevda)	255	36.0	37.2
	Total	685	96.8	100.0
Missing	System	23	3.2	
Total		708	100.0	

As depicted in Table 7, the vast majority was watching other Turkish series as well. The open-ended question following this question indicated that the series *Istanbullu Gelin, Anne, O Hayat Benim* and *Içerde* were watched the majority at the time the research has been conducted.

Table 7. "Are you currently watching any other Turkish series?"

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	Yes	555	78.4	79.5
	No	143	20.2	20.5
	Total	698	98.6	100.0
Missing	System	10	1.4	
Total		**708**	**100.0**	

As Table 8 indicates, approximately 65% was accessing Turkish series free from the Internet or was buying DVDs included in weekly magazines or directly from the distributor. At this point it would be noteworthy to remember the policy of the distributor of Turkish series in Greece, namely that in order for the profit to rise, the first episodes of a Turkish series are aired on Greek TV and then the rest of the episodes are distributed through weekly television magazines or through individual DVD-box sets. Therefore, the high percentages of these accessing methods highlighted a big engagement to the Turkish series.

Table 8. "How to you access Turkish series?"

	N	Percent	Percent of Cases
TV	343	35.3%	49.4%
Free from Internet	483	49.6%	69.6%
From DVD's in Weekly Magazines	122	12.5%	17.6%
From DVD Boxset bought from distributor	25	2.6%	3.6%
Total	**973**	**100.0%**	**140.2%**

a.Dichotomy group tabulated at value 1

Moreover, "Scenario" and "Cast" were respondents' most favorite elements of Turkish series.

Table 9. "What do you like most in the series?"

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Scenario	1	6	**2.76**	1.585
Cast	1	6	**2.82**	1.548
Scenes of Istanbul	1	6	3.30	1.785
Production	1	6	3.43	1.366
Turkish Language	1	6	3.54	1.745
Other	1	6	3.94	1.878

Note. SD = Standard Deviation

3.3 Family Values

Table 10. Results of responses on Family values

	Agree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree
Q1	35.7	29.9	34.4
Q2	11.0	69.9	19.1
	Like	**Dislike**	**Neither Like or Dislike**
Q3	14.6	59.1	26.4
Q4	61.4	4.8	31.1
Q5	44.1	25.1	30.9

As Table 11 demonstrates for Q1, the majority agreed with the family intervening in a couple's marriage and exercising authority in the marriages and the life of their children. From the comments extracted, it is noteworthy to highlight that even when individually disagreeing, the audience agreed that this practice is also to be found in Greece. This indicated that while individually disagreeing, watching Turkish series is not something "exotic", but something culturally proximate, even if not agreeing with it or believing it is dated. Moreover, the majority of the comments indicated that, the audience recognized a cultural proximity, accepting this truism as representation of a well-established reality:

> *(n90) "If the mother in law does not like the bride then it will turn her life into a torture until the couple gets divorced"*

The illustrative Bar Chart below shows that when results of this section are examined in association with age, then there is a variation in the results of the audience aged 18 to 24. The respondents aged 18 to 24 tended to disagree with the scene, while in the other age categories' respondents tended to agree. Still, the variation is not significantly different. from the main results.
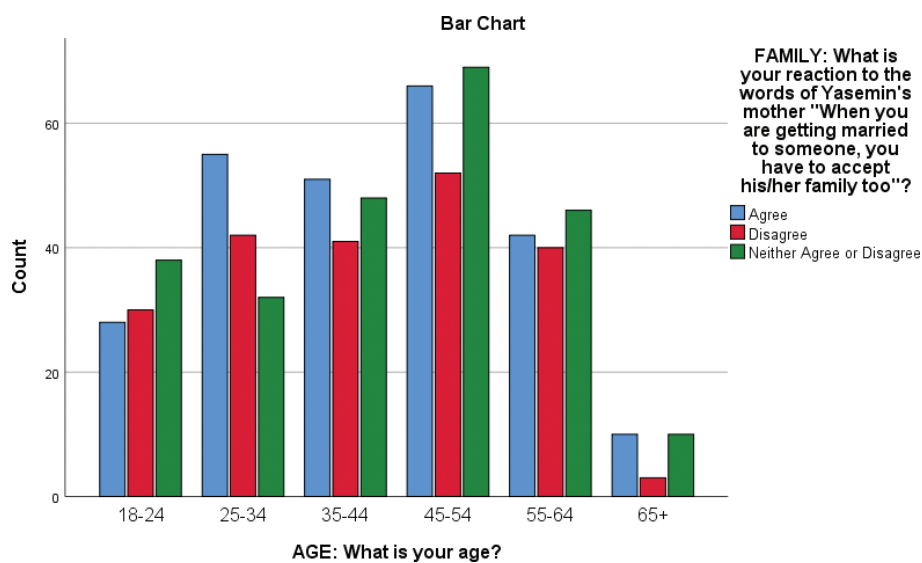
Bar Chart

FAMILY: What is your reaction to the words of Yasemin's mother "When you are getting married to someone, you have to accept his/her family too"?

Agree
Disagree
Neither Agree or Disagree

Figure 1.   Family Question 1: Results according the age of the sample.

In Q2 a large majority disagreed with the representation of a patriarchal family structure where woman are obedient and gender issues arise. The majority of the comments following the question indicate that this representation was found "discriminative", "sexist" and "outdated".

In Q3 a large majority disagreed with the representation of the extended family interfering in an individual's social activity by constraining them because of gender roles. The representation of gender issues and women-oppression raised the rates of disagreement significantly. From the comments extracted, it was indicated that the representation of a traditional, women-oppressed lifestyle is not in consonant with the audience's perception; on the contrary, the comments highlight that it was found "outdated" and "conservative".

In Q4 a large majority liked the representation of respect to the older members of the family. From the comments extracted, it can be further stated that respecting the older member of the family was regarded as an important, embedded, realistic value.

(n98) "I like it because it underlines values like the father-son relationship, the honest expression of emotions and being proud for your origins".

In Q5 the majority agreed with the representation of the family guiding the social behavior of their children. The majority of the comments further indicated that this representation was found realistic.

(n97) "Typical mother. It doesn't diverge from what every human is wishing and it saying to his/her child."

3.4 Romance

Table 11.   Results of responses on Romance

	Like	Dislike	Neither Like or Dislike
Q1	75.9	3.2	20.9
Q2	78.3	7.8	13.9
Q3	35	32.2	32.8

A significant majority liked the romantic way a man is expressing his love and the representation of a romantic marriage proposal in Q1 and Q2. From the comments extracted, it can be stated that an important factor for liking the scene was the representation of the expression of emotions.

(n198) "Like most of the Turkish series they have dialogues that create intense feelings in the soul.

However romantic a Greek series might be they never have such dialogues that create such an intense shiver in our soul."

In Q3 a small majority liked the representation of the dominant behavior of a man expressing his jealousy towards his girlfriend in public. The analysis further indicated a variation of the results within the sample.
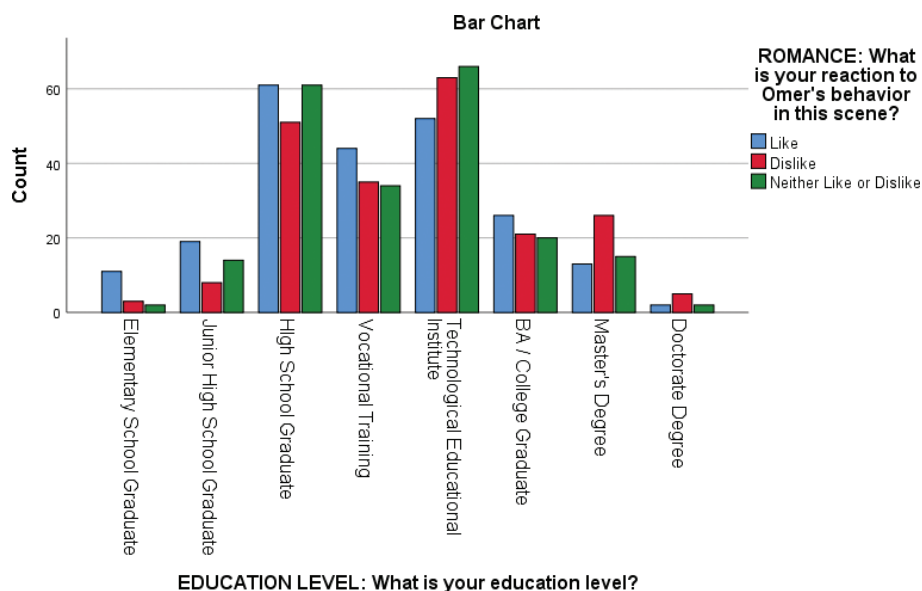

Figure 2.   Romance Question 3: results according to the age of the respondents.

The illustrative Bar Chart below shows a variation of the results when analyzed in association with the age of the audience. The majority of the respondents aged 18 to 24 and 25 to 34 disliked or neither liked or disliked the scene, while the majority of the rest of the respondents liked the scene.

Moreover, as reflected in the Bar Chart below, there was a variation of the results when analyzed in association to the education level of the audience. The majority of those holding a Master's or Doctorate Degree as well as the graduates from Technological Educational Institutes disliked the scene.
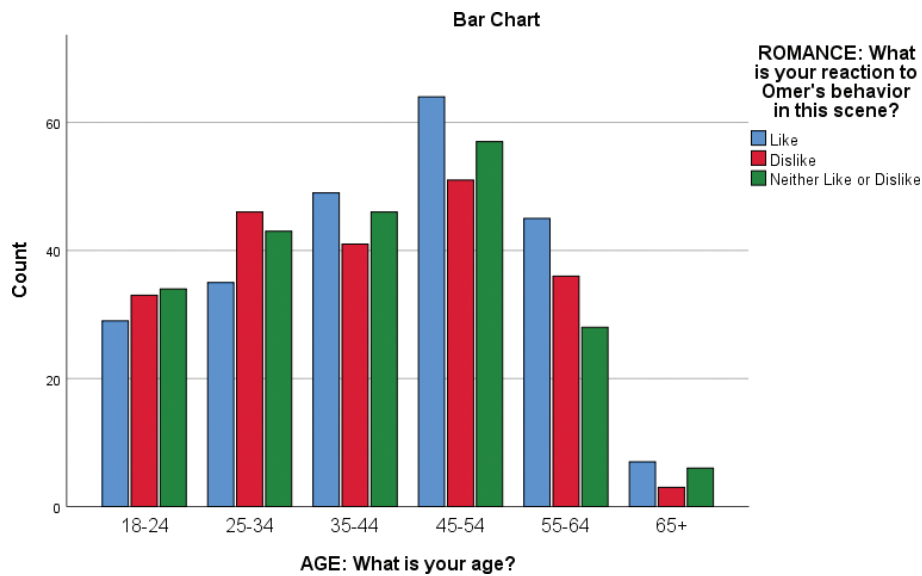
Figure 3. Romance Question 3: results according the education level of the respondents.

Additionally, the majority of the sample who was accessing Turkish series from the Internet and through DVD's liked the scene, while the majority of the respondents accessing Turkish series from TV disliked the scene.

Table 12. Romance Question 3 results compared with the medium accessing Turkish series

Access Turkish series from:	Like RQ3	Dislike RQ3
TV	98	117
INTERNET	172	130
DVD weekly	51	26
DVD distributor	9	2

3.5 Family Values, Hypothesis 1

A small majority (36%) agreed with the family intervening and exercising authority in the marriages and the life of their children. From the comments extracted, it is noteworthy to highlight that even when individually they did not agree, the audience was recognizing that this practice is also to be found in Greece. Moreover, the majority of the comments indicated that the audience recognized a cultural proximity, accepting this truism as a representation of a well-established reality.

A big majority (64%) liked the representation of giving respect to the older members of the family. Moreover, the majority (44%) agreed with the representation of the family guiding the social behavior of their children. From the comments extracted, it can be further stated that respecting and honoring the older member of the family was regarded as an important, embedded, realistic value.

The representation of gender issues and women-oppression raised the rates of disagreement significantly. A big majority disagreed with the representation of a patriarchal family structure where women were obedient and gender

issues arise (70%) and with the representation of the extended family interfering in the individual's social activity by constraining them because of gender roles (59%). The majority of the comments following the question expressed the belief that this representation was found "discriminative", "sexist" and "outdated". From the comments extracted, it was indicated that the representation of a traditional, women-oppressed lifestyle is not in consonant with the audience's perception; on the contrary, the comments highlight that it was found "outdated" and "conservative" for the Greek standards. Yet again, an amount of the comments indicated that even if not agreeing, they recognized that this representation is still to be found:

> *n677 (NAND): Because it reflects a mentality of the older generation. I do not agree with it but I recognize that it still exists.*

Therefore, H1 was partially verified.

3.6 Romance, Hypothesis 2

The results indicated that the representation of men expressing their love in Turkish series appealed more than any other variable of the research to the respondents raising questions about the genre proximity that will be discussed in the next section. The comments of the respondents who agreed indicated that the way emotions were expressed engaged them with these scenes. However, the results indicated that when this representation enclosed dominant behavior against women, then the percentage of agreement plummeted.

Moreover, differences between the samples arose in the third question. Young respondents and respondents with higher than secondary education degree disliked the dominant representation of romance. On the other hand, respondents with bigger engagement to Turkish series, mentioned that they accessed Turkish series through the Internet or from DVD's, liked the scene, while respondents with smaller engagement who were accessing Turkish series through TV disliked the scene.

Still, apart from the variations in the results of Question 3, the results of the other questions when analyzed in association with the age, the education level, the city of residence and the methods of access no significant difference was to be found.

Comparing the results of this section with the results of the questions associated with family values, it can be indicated that when gender issues arise and discrimination against women is at stake, the preference of the respondents tended to be negative in both variables.

Therefore, Hypothesis 2 was also partially verified.

4 Conclusion

Cultural capital turned out to be an important factor towards (family) or away from (gender) cultural proximity to the Turkish series. The representation of family structure and hierarchy in the scenes as well as the authority exercised by the family members tended to be culturally proximate to the respondents' views, because of the agreement of the signifying practices depicted and the family practices and family networks of the respondents. Even when some of the respondents did not individually agree on the signifying practices depicted, they still acknowledged their existence in their own culture as expressed in the comments.

When the representation of the conservative family structure encapsulated gender issues and depiction of gender discrimination, the results plummeted. Considering that, the majority of respondents were female, a representation of obedient women, whose family members have the right to interfere in their social activity was depicted, increased cultural distance and decreased cultural proximity. The conservative representation of gender issues led to a chasm between the audience and the signifying practices depicted. Therefore, gender turned out to be an important variable that influenced the results. Moreover, age also indicated that the affiliation of younger participants with the gender representation tended to differentiate from the rest of the sample, yet this differentiation was not consistent and significant.

The results concerning the variable of romance lead on to the question of whether it was the genre proximity that enabled the affiliation of the audience to these scenes. Yet, even though on its surface it covers a big range of cultures, genre proximity cannot solely explain the results, since, apart from Turkish series, Spanish and Italian telenovelas were also aired on Greek TV, but could not have an equal or lasting success.

Consequently, the question raised is why the audience continues to be engaged to the Turkish series even when not affiliated with the representation of gender, which is an important element of cultural capital. Conditions of dependency may explain this engagement. If countries do not have the ability to produce their own content then the audience's "second best option" would rather be content with which they could affiliate, from "nearby or similar cultures".[31] Therefore, even though the audience was partially cultural proximate to the representation in Turkish series, it was more proximate than the equivalent products available at the time.

Cities and regions that had a Turkish minority population or were close to Turkey have been separately examined in order to test if geographical proximity would have caused differentiation of the results. Surprisingly, there was no differentiation from the main results, indicating a homogeneous sample on the one hand and no geographical proximity on the other.

Existing research has focused on different notions to explain the success of the Turkish drama series in Greece, such as Soft Power Diplomacy, Nostalgia, Exoticism and Economic Crisis. Certainly, there are sufficient and strong elements that can support these approaches; still as a multilayered phenomenon the interplay of cultural proximity should not be ignored.

This study suggested that, the notion of Soft Power Diplomacy comes into contradiction with the established negative representation of Turkey in the Greek public sphere and therefore cannot solely explain the audience's preference even if coexisting with Turkey's distribution of cultural products and cultural hegemony in the region of Eastern Europe and the near Middle East. As Papailias states "the soap phenomenon shows a fragile cultural engagement between two nations, and a recognition of their fraternal similarities alongside their deep historical grievances".[32]

The notion of Nostalgia cannot also solely explain the preference, since the results of this study point to no significant generational difference among the participants. Nostalgia for the "Missing Byzantium"[33] specifically and/or towards the days before modernization[34] can possibly explain the proximity of the older participants but not of the younger ones. Moreover, "Scenes of Istanbul" came third in preference (Table 10) indicating that even if important, it still was not the most important reason for the audience's engagement.

The comments of the respondents indicated that even when not agreeing to the representations depicted, they recognized their existence as "common truth", putting into question the notion of exoticism. The notion that Turkish TV series' success was a result of the economic crisis in Greece, where in favor of lower cost Greek production has moved to the distribution of Turkish TV series explains the entrance of Turkish TV series in the Greek media but cannot solidly explain the reasons behind their success, especially when considering the results of the research which show that the audience has access not only through television but also through the Internet, DVDs and weekly magazines, highlighting an engagement to them.

The essence of this engagement lays on the fact that for whatever the reason the distribution of Turkish series in Greece has been started, it has been successfully consumed by the Greek audience to this day. This preference is located, as this research proposed, also in elements of cultural proximity. Therefore, the present research presents sustainable evidence that can lead to further research, paving the way to an unexplored terrain in the literature.

The present study examined only two variables as indicators of cultural proximity of the Greek audience to the Turkish series; further research on more indicators is needed. Moreover, there is an inconsistency between the theoretical definitions of cultural proximity and its operationalization.[35] Further enrichment on the literature of the operationalization of cultural proximity will enable more accurate research on this topic. Lastly, this survey was limited to a computer literate sample with Internet access. A problematic coverage error because of the Web based survey may be raised; still it is reasonable to believe that the results might represent the tendency in the computer-illiterate population of older aged groups. The homogeneous sample and its overall consistency can confirm this notion.

Whilst Turkish series are popular, the research made on this field is not proportionate. Yet, the results of the existing ones can indicate that Turkish series may act as a transnational conveyor of different cultural proximities in different countries, which at a glance would not seem proximate to each other outlining a miscellaneous transnational audience. For instance, the cultural proximity for the Qatari audience seems to come along with the notion of modernity,[36] while for the Greek audience with the notion of conservatism. As Turkish series continue to be internationally popular in this rapidly shifting media environment, researching different audiences' engagement will help us further comprehend this phenomenon.

Notes

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6. Fatima Bhutto, "How Turkish TV is taking over the world," *The Guardian*, September 13, 2019. **https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2019/sep/13/turkish-tv-magnificent-century-dizi-taking-over-world**
7. Ioanna Kostarella, "Framing the other: Turkey in the Greek press," *GMJ: Mediterranean Edition* 2, no. 1 (2007): 23-32.
8. Data provided by the Nielsen Audience Measurement Greece and the departments of "Audience Research" of the TV stations Antenna and Mega Channel (Yorük and Varikiotis, 2013) for 2010-2012 confirm Greek audience's indicative high interest for Turkish TV series. For example, *Yabancı Damat* during summer had a 47.8% share, during prime time in net seasons 23.1%. *Binbir Gece* share on prime time on weekdays was 29.6%. *Dudaktan Kalbe* aired on weekdays at 17.00 reached a 35.1% share, *Gumus* 32,1% share and *Ezel* 32.9% share. *Aşk-I Memnu* while on prime time 22.1% share and when on weekdays at 18.00 28.2% share. *Ask ve Ceza* had a prime time share of 25%, when aired on weekdays at 18.00 it reached 33.2%.; Dimitra Laurence Larochelle, "Questioning Soft Power. An Empirical Approach of the Reception of Turkish Soap-Operas by Greeks," *Art & Culture International Magazine*, (2019): 83-101; Georgios Mihalakopoulos, "The Greek audience 'discovers' the Turkish soap-series: Turkey's 'soft power' and the psyche of Greeks," in *Greek Research in Australia: Proceedings of the Ninth Biennial International Conference of Greek Studies*, eds. Michael Tsianikas, Nina Maadad, George Couvalis, and Maria Palaktsoglou, (Flinders University Department of Language Studies - Modern Greek: Adelaide, 2013), 179-91.
9. Joseph D. Straubhaar, "Beyond media imperialism: Asymmetrical interdependence and cultural proximity," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 8, (1991): 43.
10. Antonio C. La Pastina and Joseph D. Straubhaar, "Multiple proximities between television genres and audiences," *Gazette* 67, no. 3 (2005): 273.

11. Ibid.
12. Soap operas are story driven, whereas dramas are character driven. This implies that emotion in soap operas is constructed on the story, while in dramas on the individual stories and the characters. Soaps have been, traditionally, daytime broadcasts, which are usually aired every day and completely apart from Primetime television, while drama are always on Primetime; another important factor is its pace; details are not offered quickly. Soap operas have always a cliffhanger ending and by means of plot the emphasis lays on family life and romance. Telenovelas, which also deal with romance, on the other hand have a finite number or episodes and are broadcasted in afternoon or prime time.
13. Donald Sassoon, *The Culture of the Europeans: 1800 to the Present* (London: HarperPress, 2006), 1223.
14. Ostensive literature on this topic: Dimitra Laurence Larochelle, "The Greek Fandom of Turkish Soap Operas and the Tourism Industry: Traveling through Borders, Realities, and Identities," *The Journal of Popular Culture* 52, no. 6 (2019): 1472-93.; Zafer Yörük and Pantelis Vatikiotis, "Soft Power or Illusion of Hegemony: The Case of the Turkish Soap Opera Colonialism," *International Journal of Communication* 7, (2013): 2371; Dimitra Laurence Larochelle, "The Greek Fandom of Turkish Soap Operas and the Tourism Industry: Traveling through Borders, Realities, and Identities," *The Journal of Popular Culture* 52, no. 6 (2019): 1472-93.
15. Stella Tsolakidou, "Turkish TV Series help Greeks forget Financial Crisis," *Greek Reporter,* January 7, 2012, **http://greece. greekreporter.com/2012/01/07/turkish-tv-series-help-greeks-forget-financial-crisis/**.; Katerina Serafeim, "The Rise and Fall of Turkish TV Series on Greek Television," *CST Online*, April 18, 2014, **https://cstonline.net/the-rise-and-fall-of-turkish-tv-series-on-greek-television-by-katerina-serafeim/**; Tina Messaropoulou, "Poso telika stihizoun ta tourkika sirial?" [How much do Turkish series cost eventually?], *TV Pathfinder*, July 2010, **http://tv.pathfinder.gr/news/2219798.html**.
16. Popi Diamantakou, "I diplomatia tis Sehrazat kai tou Onour" [The diplomacy of Sehrazat and Onour], *Ta Νέα.gr*, April 13, 2012, **http://www.tanea.gr/news/lifearts/article/4711169/?iid=2** ; Dimitra Laurence Larochelle, "I Ipia ishis tis Tourkias [The soft power of Turkey]," *Institute of Research and European Affairs*, January 6, 2013, **http://www.irtea.gr/?p=374**.
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19. Joseph D. Straubhaar, *World Television: From Global to Local* (London: SAGE Publications, 2007).
20. **https://www.facebook.com/groups/365605233476871/about/**
21. The selection of these series was based on multiple factors. Firstly, the year of their broadcast in Greek television was taken into consideration. In order to have a better understanding of the viewership throughout the years that Turkish series are been broadcasted in Greece and to understand if any relation between "old fans" and "new fans" is to be found. The series that have been broadcasted with an interval of at least one year on Greek television were selected. Secondly, all series are taking place completely or mostly (*Aşk ve Ceza*) in Istanbul. This decision was taken, in order to understand if there is any correlation with the depiction of Istanbul as a key factor of Greek audience's preference. Moreover, series with a historical background or a historical plot were excluded from the research, i.e. *Suleiman the Magnificent.* This could be a distracting factor while measuring the variables of family values and romance due to the possible connotations of the historical framework in which the stories took place. Furthermore, *Ezel* and *Karadayı* were also eliminated, because their script was based on the male character rather than the relation between him and the female character. Finally, *Aşk-I Memnu* was not included since the issue of adulterous relationship between a married woman and the nephew of her husband could have created misleading connotations. Taking into consideration the ratings and the popularity of the series left, the final selection was made and then verified by Victory entertainment S.A., the main distributor of Turkish series in Greece. During our collaboration, there has been a debate over two series, namely *Kara Para Aşk* (*Black Money Love)* and *Kaderimin Yazıldığı Gün* (*The Day My Destiny Was Written)*. Both have been of a great success and they have been broadcasted the same year in Greece, still *Kara Para Aşk* (*Black Money Love)* had an intertemporal success even after starting been distributed only through DVDs. Except for that, *Kaderimin Yazıldığı Gün* (*The Day My Destiny was written)* deals with the issue of surrogacy, which could distract the orientation of the research.
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34. Zafer Yörük and Pantelis Vatikiotis, "Soft Power or Illusion of Hegemony: The Case of the Turkish Soap Opera Colonialism," *International Journal of Communication* 7, (2013): 2371.
35. Sabine Trepte, "Cultural Proximity in TV Entertainment: An Eight-Country Study on the Relationship of Nationality and the Evolution of U.S. Prime-Time Fiction," *Communication* 33, no. 1 (2008): 7.
36. Miriam Berg, "The Importance of Cultural Proximity in the Success of Turkish Dramas in Qatar," *International Journal of Communication* 11, (2017): 3425.

Biography

Eleni Pothou holds a B.A. in Greek Philology with major in Linguistics from Kapodistrian University of Athens and an M.A. in Media and Communication Systems from Istanbul Bilgi University. Her M.A. dissertation focused on the success of Turkish TV drama series in Greece under the scope of cultural proximity. Her research focuses on issues of popular culture, collective memory, and identity.