

## Articles

# THE REPRESENTATION OF TURKEY THROUGH NARRATIVE FRAMING-SAUDI ARABIAN AND TURKISH NEWSPAPERS' COVERAGE OF THE ARABIC DUBBED TURKISH SERIES *NOOR*

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## Abstract

This study seeks to explore how Turkey is represented in the most widely circulated Saudi Arabian and Turkish daily newspapers that cover *Noor*, one of the most popular Arabic dubbed Turkish television series. The study suggests that the Saudi and Turkish newspapers differ in framing their coverage of *Noor* to fit specific agendas resulting in markedly different images of Turkey. Ultimately, it is underlined that the frames used to construct Turkey's image display the Turkish newspapers' promotion of a positive self-image against a largely negative representation of the Turkish cultural Other in the Saudi newspapers that cover *Noor*.

## Key Terms

Arabic dubbed Turkish series, *Noor*, image, narrative, frame.

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# ANLATILARIN ÇERÇEVELENMESİ YOLUYLA TÜRKİYE TEMSİLİ-SUUDİ ARABİSTAN VE TÜRK GAZETELERİNDE *NOOR (GÜMÜŞ)* DİZİSİ

## Öz

Bu çalışmanın amacı, yüksek tirajlı Suudi Arabistan ve Türk gazetelerinin Suudi Arabistan'da en çok izlenen Arapça dublajlı Türk dizilerinden biri olan *Noor (Gümüş)* dizisine dayanarak yaptığı haberler sonucu ortaya çıkan Türkiye imgelerini incelemektir. Çalışmada, söz konusu diziye ilişkin olarak Suudi Arabistan ve Türk gazeteleri tarafından kullanılan haber çerçevelerinin farklı Türkiye imgeleri oluşturduğunun altı çizilmektedir. Çalışmada, Türk gazetelerinin Arapça dublajlı dizi için kullandığı haber çerçevelerinin olumlu bir Türkiye imgesi oluştururken, Suudi Arabistan gazetelerinin kullandığı haber çerçevelerinin Türk kültürünün ötekileştirilmesine yol açtığı sonucuna varılmıştır.

## Anahtar Terimler

Arapça dublajlı Türk dizileri, *Noor (Gümüş)*, imge, anlatı, çerçeve.

## Introduction

### *The aim of the study*

Turkish television series have been enjoying popular success in the Arab world since the Middle East Broadcasting Company (hereafter MBC), a Saudi-owned pan-Arab satellite channel, aired *Noor* in 2008.<sup>1</sup> This study seeks to explore the discursive construction of Turkey's image in Saudi Arabian and Turkish news reports that cover *Noor*, which is seen as "the most significant case" of Arabized Turkish series that generated a "media revolution" in the Arab world (Buccianti, 2010, p. 4). The case study is based on the most widely circulated Saudi and Turkish newspapers that feature high readership and are influential in setting the tone for coverage in their respective countries.

<sup>1</sup> The title of the Turkish series that is named after the main female character Gümüş (i.e. "silver" in English) is changed into *Noor* (i.e. "light" in English) in the Arabic translation.

The research questions which will guide the case study are as follows:

- What image of Turkey is being promoted by the Saudi and Turkish newspapers' coverage of *Noor*?
- How are the narratives on *Noor* framed for the Saudi audience's reception? And how do such narratives fit in the larger narratives on Turkey circulating in the Arab world?
- How do the Turkish newspapers frame the narratives on *Noor*? And how do those narratives dovetail with Turkey's self-image?

In order to answer the research questions, the study will draw on imagology, or image studies, as elaborated by Manfred Beller and Joep Leerssen (2007). The study will examine how Turkey's image is constructed by the Turkish newspapers in order to explore Turkey's own image, or to use Leerssen's (2007) term, "self-image"/"auto-image" created within the context of *Noor*. As for the exploration of Turkey's "hetero-image" (Leerssen, 2007), the choice of Saudi Arabian newspapers over those published in the other Arab countries is motivated by the need to limit the scope of the analysis. The study focuses on the Saudi newspapers, since Saudi Arabia had, at the time when *Noor* was aired, a high number of viewers watching the series (Buccianti, 2010, p. 3). Furthermore, MBC, which dub and air the series, is owned by the Saudi businessman Sheikh Waleed Al Ibrahim.

The study will also draw on the concepts of narrative and framing as understood in social sciences. Since the media use certain frames in order to "promote certain connections in the minds of the readers" (Valdeon, 2016, p. 15), frames which are "strategic moves that are consciously initiated in order to present a movement or a particular position within a certain perspective" (Baker, 2006, p. 106), contribute to the construction of "the literally 'common sense' (i.e., widespread) interpretation of events" (Entman, 1991, p. 7). Therefore, the frames which are used to construct Turkey's image in the Turkish and Saudi news have a potential to socialize their respective readers into specific representations of Turkey that guide both their reception of Arabic dubbed Turkish series and their perception of Turkey.

## Key Concepts

### *Images and stereotypes*

Image is “the mental silhouette of the other, who appears to be determined by the characteristics of family, group, tribe, people or race” (Beller, 2007, p. 4). Stereotypes, on the other hand, “are concerned with explaining cultural and social patterns from a purported character” (Leerssen, 2000, p. 282). Stereotyping ascribes certain characteristics to a particular nationality as “typical” of the nation under discussion (Leerssen, 2000, p. 284). In this context,

[o]n the one hand, “typical” (as in “I saw a typically Spanish bullfight”) means that a certain type (Spanish) is marked and characterized and that the attribute or characteristic in question (bullfight) is representative of the type at large. On the other hand, typical means that the attribute in question is salient, nontrivial, remarkable, and noteworthy and that a bullfight is something that strikes the unwary observer as something out of the ordinary (Leerssen, 2000, p. 284).

Against the backdrop of these points, imagology seeks “to describe the origin, process and function of national prejudices and stereotypes, to bring them to the surface, analyse them and make people rationally aware of them” rather than explaining the characteristics of nations and/or nationalities (Beller, 2007, p. 11-12). Imagology also aims to foreground the difference between auto-images (i.e. “characterological reputation current within and shared by a group”) and hetero-images (i.e. “the opinion that others have about a group’s purported character”) (Leerssen, 2007, p. 342-343). In this context, it is useful for researchers who draw on imagology to explore the “dynamics” between the auto- and hetero-images (Beller and Leerssen, 2007, p. xiv) of a nation, since cultural differences may influence the way national images are constructed.

The image of one culture whose cultural product (for instance, among others, literary texts, films, television series) is translated into the language of another culture can be constructed (i) through the pre-translation stage at which a cultural product is selected for translation, which Luc van Doorslaer (2010, p. 63) refers to as “the image-setting stage of text selection”, (ii) during the translation stage at which the translation is modified in line with the image existing in the mind(s) of the translator and/or other translatorial agents, and (iii) during the reception stage which plays a significant role in

shaping the reception of the translated product and its interpretation in the receiving culture.

In line with its objectives, this study will limit itself to the relationship between translation and image-building during the reception stage at which certain presentational elements (i.e. paratexts) have a significant image-setting effect. Note here that paratexts serve to show how translations are “presented” to their recipients (Tahir-Gürçağlar, 2011, p. 113) and how they are contextualized. Hence, the study seeks to analyze how *Noor* is contextualized by Saudi and Turkish newspapers, which will in turn contribute to the exploration of how Turkey’s image is constructed through journalistic paratexts.<sup>2</sup>

### ***Narrative framing***

Narratives, which are “the everyday stories we live by” (Baker, 2006, p. 3), not only represent reality but also constitute it (Bruner, 1991, p. 5). Narratives enable people to dig into the larger narratives circulating in society (Baker, 2006, p. 19). Hence, it is significant to look beyond a specific image as constructed in a narrative, in order to explore its role in the elaboration of a broader set of narratives in society. Being “dynamic entities” (Baker, 2006, p. 3), narratives may shift along with new experience and new stories. Images are dynamic (Leerssen, 2000, p. 277), too, since they may change throughout time with changing socio-political conditions and hence with changing narratives.

Framing, a significant methodological tool of social narrative theory, also plays a decisive role in creating social reality. Baker (2006, p. 167) defines frames as “structures of anticipation, strategic moves that are consciously initiated in order to present a narrative in a certain light”. Hence, national images and stereotypes can be constructed, reinforced or contested through framing that is, in Baker’s (2006, p. 156) words, based on “[s]ome choices, particularly those relating to how we label an event, place or group, as well as the way we position individuals and communities in social and political space through the use of pronouns and adverbs of place, among other things [...]”.

Translation studies’ account of framing, as explained by Baker (2006), focuses on how textual interventions (e.g. additions, omissions, rewordings, and the like) in translations and paratextual commentaries on translations are related to the broader

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<sup>2</sup> Even though Leerssen (2007, s. 26) notes that journalistic texts are “more ephemeral sources” than works of literature for research on national image, van Doorslaer (2010, s. 62) argues that it is significant to take their “impact” into account.

narratives (for instance, religious, politico-historical, and so on) in which those translations are embedded. In this context, the construction of the way the narratives on Arabic dubbed Turkish series are presented by Saudi and Turkish newspapers can be seen as “paratextual framing”, to use Baker’s (2006, p. 133) term.

The notion of framing used in translation studies overlaps to some extent with the notion of framing used in communication studies in its emphasis on the fact that framing constructs how a narrative is to be presented in order to guide audience reception. In journalistic production, a frame is used as a structure that “essentially involves selection and salience. To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text” (Entman 1993, p. 52). A frame manifests itself in journalistic texts through several framing devices, such as metaphors, exemplars (e.g. historical stories from which lessons are drawn), catchphrases, depictions, and visual images (Gamson and Modigliani, 1989, p. 3-4); and “through repetition, placement, and reinforcing associations with each other, the words and images that comprise the frame render one basic interpretation more readily discernible, comprehensible, and memorable than others” (Entman, 1991, p. 7). This point also explains how national images can be naturalized through journalistic framing.

Since “many of the framing devices can appear as ‘natural’, unremarkable choices of words [...]”, it is necessary to focus on comparison which would reveal how the same narrative is framed in different journalistic texts (Entman, 1991, p. 6). The search for how a single narrative can be framed differently by different narrators is crucial, because, as Baker (2006, p. 22) suggests, “[e]very time a version of the narrative is retold [...], it is injected with elements from other, broader narratives circulating within the new setting or from the personal narratives of the retellers”. In this context, the present study suggests that the Saudi and Turkish newspapers would give valuable insights into the different representations of Turkey in their coverage of the Arabic dubbed Turkish television series.

### *Turkey’s image in the Arab world*

It is significant to consider national images in their historical contexts. Therefore, it is reasonable to explore Arabs’ perception of Turks in the past in order to reveal the dynamics that may still be at work in shaping Turkey’s image today. Turks who converted to Islam in the seventh century were regarded as barbaric at the initial stage

of the Arab–Turkish encounter (Jung 2005, p. 4). This image had, on the one hand, a positive connotation in that it emphasized the significant military role assumed by Turks to protect Islam against non-Muslims in Anatolia (see McDonald, p. 1998). On the other hand, the image of wild but courageous Turks turned, throughout time, into a negative image that portrayed Turks as “cruel and despotic power addict[s]” without any cultural sophistication (Haarmann, 1988, p. 176). This negative image prevailed as “a narrative of Turkish oppression” during the Ottoman reign (Jung, 2005, p. 5), which was also seen as “the nightmare of alien, uncivilized Turkish rule” and as “the cause for the depressing age of decadence, *inhitat*” (Haarman, 1988, p. 187). The image of “the terrible Turk” was linked to the narrative that Turks were the “violent suppresser[s] of Arab nationalism” (Jung, 2005, p. 3-4); hence, Arab nationalism was claimed to have emerged as a reaction to the Ottoman tyranny (Zeine, 1966, p. 142).

The demise of the Ottoman Empire following the World War I ended the four-hundred-year Ottoman rule over Arabs. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founding father of the new Turkish state, severed Turkey’s ties with Arabs. Atatürk’s westernization project, which was based on, among other things, secularism, purging Turkish from the words of Arabic origin, the latinization of the Turkish script, and the abolition of the caliphate, drove Turks apart from Arabs. Furthermore, Turkey’s recognition of Israel in 1949, its NATO membership in 1952 and partnership with the United States reinforced Arabs’ negative perception of Turks (Hale, p. 2000). As a result, “the Arab narrative of the ‘terrible Turk’ gradually shifted from the notion of Ottoman-Turkish oppression to Turkey as an instrument of imperialistic western interests” (Jung, 2005, p. 11).

Over the past decade, however, Turkish television series have played an extremely important role in creating, to a certain extent, a positive image of Turkey by displaying Turks as “a modern pro-Western but also Islamic nation” (Kujawa, 2011, p. 4-5). According to Jabbour (2005, p. 7), Turkish series promote an image of Turkey as “an ideal society where Islam coexists with modernity, where men and women are equal, and where capitalism and consumerism do not erode social and religious values”. Such an image is also in harmony with the Turkish government’s promulgation of Turkey’s self-image as a role model which is “intrinsic to its national brand in the [Middle East] region and part of its economic allure” (Kraidy and Al-Ghazzy, 2013b, p. 2349).

Turkish series have been adapted to the Arab world both through linguistic changes and through the modification of the content. The linguistic transformation of

Turkish series involves the alteration of the Turkish names of series and fictional characters into Arabic names. One reason for this might be MBC's desire to smooth out the estranging effect of Turkish series, which would in turn make Arab viewers identify themselves with the characters. Furthermore, Turkish series are dubbed into colloquial Syrian Arabic rather than classical Arabic, which was previously used for the dubbing of foreign television series. This has also enabled Arab viewers to identify themselves with Turkish characters and to interiorize the message of Turkish series, which gives rise to "a sense of proximity" between Turks and Arabs (Jabbour, 2015, p. 13).

As for the content modification, MBC has been heavily censoring the content of series to make them acceptable to a conservative audience. For instance, in the case of series which are based on the story of infidelity, virginity, premarital sex and the like that would breach social and religious norms of Arab society, MBC removes the scenes (Buccianti, p. 2010). One potential reason is that such scenes might offend the sensibilities of Arab viewers. It goes without saying that such modifications have resulted in the rise of Turkish series in the Arab world by reducing their alienating effect, as a result of which "Turkey has begun to exercise a big influence at Arab dinner tables, in boardrooms and bedrooms from Morocco to Iraq [...]" (Kimmelman 2010).

The popularity of Turkish series in the Arab world can be evaluated within the context of the "neo-Ottoman cool" frame (Kraidy and Al-Ghazzi 2013b, p. 2348). Neo-Ottomanism is concerned with projecting Turkey's image as a holder of soft power that serves as "a bridge between East and West, a Muslim nation, a secular state, a democratic political system, and a capitalistic economic force" (Taşpınar, 2008, p. 3). Having realized that television series feed into Turkey's soft power in the Arab world, the Turkish government announced that prizes and financial awards would be given to producers and directors who export media products that create a positive Turkish image in foreign countries (Kraidy and Al-Ghazzi, 2013b, p. 2348). Furthermore, the Turkish government launched TRT Al Arabiyya, a Turkish television channel in Arabic, in order to maintain Turkey's positive image. It goes without saying that TRT Al Arabiyya caters for the narrative position of the Turkish government that, as Brock (2014, p. 1-2) suggests, has been elaborating the narrative of Turkey's self- image as a regional leader and a democratic model in the Middle East.

On the other hand, some Arab circles frame the instruments of Turkish popular culture and mass entertainment within the context of the "Neo-Ottomans' invasion of the Arab world to restore their grandfathers' glorious days" (Mohamed, 2012, p. 144).

Arabic dubbed Turkish series are criticized, since they are considered to “represent a Muslim society that hardly represents Islam” (Delaimi, 2010, p. 4). Hence, it is necessary to underline that framing is a dialectical process (Gamson and Modigliani, p. 1989). That is, a frame may co-exist with a counterframe, as in the case of the neo-Ottoman cool versus neo-Ottoman invasion frames.

## An Analysis of the Framing of Narratives on Turkey’s Image

### Methodology

Two corpora are built for this study: one on the narratives circulated by the Saudi newspapers,<sup>3</sup> and the other on the narratives elaborated by the Turkish newspapers.<sup>4</sup> Following Alarfaj (2013, p. 14), who groups the most widely circulated Saudi newspapers into their geographical location of publication (i.e. *Al-Riyadh* and *Aljazeera* published in Riyadh, the capital city of Saudi Arabia; *Al-Medina and Okaz*, published in Jeddah, the Western Region of the Kingdom; *Al-Youm*, published in Dammam in the Eastern Region; *Al-Watan*, based in the the Southern Region; and *Al-Sharq al-Awsat* and *Al-Hayat*, published in London), the Saudi news corpus involves *Al-Riyadh* and *Aljazeera*, *Al-Medina*, *Okaz*, *Al-Youm*, and *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*. The study’s research on *Al-Hayat* and *Al-Watan* has not yielded any data on *Noor*’s representation of Turkish culture. The Turkish newspapers chosen for the Turkish corpus are *Yeni Şafak*, the symbol of the conservative Islamist press media in Turkey;<sup>5</sup> *Hurriyet* and *Sabah*, which are center-right newspapers;<sup>6</sup> and *Radikal* and *Cumhuriyet*, which have leftist tendencies.

This study does not intend to carry out a quantitative analysis which identifies the concordance of the linguistic features used to construct Turkey’s image in the selected newspapers. The aim, on the other hand, is to identify certain frames which contribute to the emergence of the broad frame of “[neo-Ottoman] colonialism” (Torelli, 2014, p. 44) in the Arab newspapers that construct Turkey’s image within their coverage of *Noor* and to the emergence of the broad frame of “neo-Ottoman cool” (Kraidy and Al-Ghazzi, 2013b, p. 2348), which is used to represent Turkey in the Turkish newspapers.

<sup>3</sup> With thanks to Diala Erikat of Hacettepe University for translating the Arabic news reports.

<sup>4</sup> All translations from Turkish into English are mine, unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>5</sup> *Zaman*, now a defunct newspaper that was another symbol of Islamist press media, is not involved in the study, since the relevant news content was not accessible.

<sup>6</sup> *Sabah* is also known as a pro-government newspaper.

In identifying the frames, the study will take into consideration that framing is not a matter of words, but a “mode of thought, a mode of action” (Castells, 2009, p. 158).

Given that the first episode of *Noor* was aired by MBC in February 27, 2008, and the final episode was in August 30, 2008, the time frame for both corpora is from February 27, 2008 to December 30, 2008.<sup>7</sup> Against the backdrop of these points, the news reports that focus on *Noor* are identified and selected for further analysis. The keywords used for the analysis are “*Noor*”, “Arabic dubbed Turkish television series”, “the representation of Turkish culture”, and “Turkey’s image”. The news reports which do not make any reference to the representation of Turkish culture in their coverage of *Noor* are excluded from the analysis.

To conclude, the study comprises a small corpus of twenty Arabic news reports and eighteen Turkish news reports, a total of 29, 178 words. Even though the study involves a limited selection of Saudi and Turkish newspapers and the analysis is based only on one Arabic dubbed Turkish series aired in Saudi Arabia, the data can still be considered to provide a picture of the construction of Turkey’s self- and hetero-images. After brief information on *Noor* in the following sub-section, the study will illustrate the frames by means of various examples which I take to be representative.

### **Brief information on *Noor***

*Noor* tells the story of the relationship between Muhannad (Mehmet, in the Turkish series), a wealthy and handsome man who lives in Istanbul, and Noor (Gümüş, in the Turkish series), a young woman raised in a conservative Anatolian village. Noor and Muhannad’s marriage, which was arranged by Muhannad’s business-tycoon grandfather, is based on a modern and equal partnership in which Muhannad encourages his wife to achieve her career as a fashion designer. The story takes place in a historical mansion on Bosphorus shores. Although the protagonists violate Islamic taboos by drinking alcohol, dancing in nightclubs, having sex before marriage, having children outside of marriage and so forth, they observe certain religious traditions by praying, fasting, and respecting their family’s patriarchal model. *Noor* not only displays the romantic and mutually supportive relationship between men and women, but also foregrounds women’s liberation by portraying Noor as a woman who empowers herself to stand against her patriarchal family. As Salamandra (2012, p. 45) argues,

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<sup>7</sup> Four news reports published after 2008 are also involved in the study, because they give fruitful insight into *Noor*’s representation of Turkish culture.

*Noor's* "ambiguity, like that of Turkey itself, invokes binaries of East and West, Islam and secularism, tradition and modernity enabling a range of commentary on the state of Arab society in general, and sexual relations in particular".

### ***The framing of narratives in the Saudi newspapers***

The Saudi narratives on Arabic dubbed Turkish series reflect the "official Saudi unease about the popularity and rise of a rival and more appealing Sunni power in the Middle East" (Kraidy and Al-Ghazzy, 2013b, p. 2350). The news outlets in Saudi Arabia "quot[e] heavily from Turkish sources evincing that Ankara's soft power went hand in hand with its geopolitical aspirations" (Leerssen, 2000, p. 284). Given that the debate revolves around "the role of television for new configurations of [Turkey's] soft power" (Kaynak, 2015, p. 138), the Saudi media depict "all exports of Turkey as part of the larger strategy of the [Turkish] government's policy goals in the region" (Kaynak, 2015, p. 245).

For instance, *Asharq al-Awsat* foregrounds the 'cultural invader' frame to build Turkey's hetero-image. In the face of the Turkish government's statements which frame Turkey's self-image as, in Salem's (2015, p. 3) words, "a principled champion of peoples' human and democratic rights in the [Middle East] region", the report entitled "Under the head of Muhammad" criticizes the way the Turkish media constructs Turkey's image as a transformer of Arabs' habitus:

The **popularity** which "*Noor*" and "*Sanawat Al-Diaa*" gained did not only surprise us, but also **surprised** the main actors of the series who found themselves during their visits to some Arab countries surrounded by so many crowds of admirers. This also **puffed up the Turkish media and newspapers with arrogance, conceit and ignorance**. They **implied that Turkish series taught us, Arabs, how to dress, love, and treat a woman** (August 31, p. 2008).<sup>8</sup>

The other news reports in *Asharq al-Awsat*, such as "The Turkish romantic invasion" (July 1, 2008),<sup>9</sup> "Turkish series: culture shock?" (August 21, 2008),<sup>10</sup> and "The dubbed

<sup>8</sup> Accessed June 04, 2015.

[http://archive.aawsat.com/leader.asp?section=3&report=485026&issueno=10869#.VuUpu\\_197IU](http://archive.aawsat.com/leader.asp?section=3&report=485026&issueno=10869#.VuUpu_197IU)

<sup>9</sup> Accessed June 04, 2015.

<http://archive.aawsat.com/leader.asp?section=3&report=477065&issueno=10808#.VuaX1v197IU>

<sup>10</sup> Accessed June 04, 2015. <http://archive.aawsat.com/details.asp?issueno=10626&report=483643#.VuUpvfl97IU>

series invades the TVs" (November 7, 2008),<sup>11</sup> also use the frame of cultural invasion. It is significant to note that the news reports that use the cultural invasion frame frequently use nominalized forms of threat (threat/threats) and verbal forms (threatening, threaten and threatened) to portray *Noor*.

In the face of the neo-Ottoman cool brand that is "largely dependent on popular culture and on being presented as a soft sell to Arab publics" (Kraidy and Al-Ghazzi, 2013b, p. 2343), it is argued by another Saudi Arabian newspaper *Al-Yaum* that *Noor* represents Turkey's image in a way which is disconnected from Muslims' lives:

Couple of years ago, the dubbed Mexican Drama **invaded** us, yet we used to find an answer to our kids' curious questions on the actions of the protagonists of those dramas which **contradicted** with our values, tradition and religion which we were raised upon and we are raising our children on. We used to explain it to them that these protagonists come from a **different culture and tradition** and a **different** religion and that's why we shouldn't mimic them, as our religion advised us to not imitate those who are different from us. [...] Turkish television series, such as *Noor* and *Sanwaat Al-Diaa*, came to us in a Syrian accent that is very familiar to the Gulf society, and most of the people watch these series which are filled with scenes and values that **contradict** [...] **Islam's values and principles** [...]. We tried really hard to explain the weird **immoral stuff** they watch which **contradicts** our **moral sentiments**; we tried so hard to convince them that **we do not share the same tradition and culture with them** [Turks] (April 12, 2009).<sup>12</sup>

This excerpt argues that Arab and Turkish societies are different in terms of cultural and moral values. Given that, as Hall (1997, p. 238) argues, the discursive construction of otherness is necessary for identity formation, it is plausible to argue that the framing of Turkey as the Other makes Turkey's othering constitutive to the Arabs' cultural identity in the Saudi news narratives. Along similar lines, the other news reports in *Al-Yaum*, such as "Turkish series reveal bad habits in the Gulf society" (August 26, 2008)<sup>13</sup> and "The Turkish series are silly and resemble Bollywood drama" (November 20,

<sup>11</sup> Accessed June 04, 2015.

<http://archive.aawsat.com/leader.asp?section=3&report=477065&issueno=10808#.VuaX1v197IU>

<sup>12</sup> Accessed June 15, 2015. <http://www.alyaum.com/report/2667658>

<sup>13</sup> Accessed June 15, 2015. <http://www.alyaum.com/report/2610996>

2008),<sup>14</sup> portray the Turkish series as debased, corrupt and harmful products of Turkish culture.

When it comes to *Al-Riyadh*, it is possible to see that the narratives frame Turkey's cultural otherness by highlighting the alienating effect of its television series. For instance, "*Al-Riyadh* asks the big question" places emphasis on the image of Turkey as a secular Western Other:

The series revealed some of the **faces of the daily life in the Turkish Muslim community**, [...]. And it might slip the viewer's mind that **Turkey is not only a Muslim country, it is also a secular country**, it is **militantly secular**, it is a **European country** to a great extent, and it is **close to joining the EU in all its values, customs and freedoms** (August 15, 2008).<sup>15</sup>

This excerpt shows that Turkey's otherness is portrayed within the context of 'secularism' and 'Europeanness'. Likewise, another *Al-Riyadh* report entitled "Beware of the tanned skin man" warns Arab viewers that the dubbing of Turkish series into Arabic makes Arabs regard those series as local programs and interiorize their culture-specific values. The report argues that the Arabic dubbing of television series should be replaced with subtitling, since the latter would foreground the foreign nature of Turkish series, which would make Arab viewers realize Turkey's cultural otherness:

[...] If **Turkish society is like this**, let it be, it is its business. But if we have to watch their series, at least, let us watch it in their language subtitled, not dubbed into our language. Because anyone who dubbed any series to our language intends to deliver a complete message and **bring it closer to us**. [...]. And this is exactly what the TV channels who are broadcasting these series are doing, **they are presenting many issues and immoral values** through these drama (April 25, 2009).<sup>16</sup>

"The Turkish stars infect the [Arab] audience with beautiful madness" (July 10, 2008)<sup>17</sup> and "How did we send Muhannad's generation to the road of loss?" (July 13, 2008)<sup>18</sup> in

<sup>14</sup> Accessed June 15, 2015. <http://www.alyaum.com/report/2631406>

<sup>15</sup> Accessed March 1, 2016. <http://www.alriyadh.com/367472>

<sup>16</sup> Accessed March 1, 2016. <http://www.alriyadh.com/424899>

<sup>17</sup> Accessed March 1, 2016. <http://www.alriyadh.com/357854>

<sup>18</sup> Accessed March 1, 2016. <http://www.alriyadh.com/358855>

*Al-Riyad* also portray Turkey's image in a negative way by using the frames of invasion and infection to describe how Turkey influences Arabs through its television series.

As for *Al-Jazirah*, the most prominent frames are cultural destruction and threat. "The desired: the wedding gown of the President's daughter" underlines that such series as *Noor*

became a hot topic in the Arab World. **They are the representatives of the Turkish culture [...]. They threatened** the foundations of our stable homes, especially the **fragile** ones, and are almost close to **destroying** our Fitra, as their protagonists are now viewed as idols, their fashion style has become our youth's. Moreover **their** immoral **depraved** actions are looked at as a role model. These series have become a major threat on the society and are almost going to **destroy** what is left from **our Islamic morals and values** (December 18, 2008).<sup>19</sup>

It is significant to note here that the us and them frame signifies that it is the Turks who "destroy [...] [Arabs'] Islamic morals and values". Likewise, another news report "Some fishing from the shores of *Al-Jazirah*" labels the series as the primary vehicle of transferring "dangerous foreign values" to the Arab audience. The news report under discussion emphasizes that Arabic dubbed Turkish series

**Pass dangerous foreign values** that somehow try to **turn the inside out of our social values system**. **They** encourage fornication by representing it as a normal human behavior through situations and social life stories; **we** naturally face in our life, where it is actually abnormal and unacceptable. These series are based on the **foreign secular ideas** which **Muslim Turkish society still suffers from** (August 20, 2008).<sup>20</sup>

Obviously, even though the excerpt depicts Turkey as a Muslim society, secularism is used as a frame to denote Turkey's cultural foreignness. Another *Al-Jazirah* news report entitled "The mined Turkish series" corroborates the other reports by positioning dubbed series in the larger narrative of the Turkish cultural invasion through sensitive key words (e.g. "mined", "desperate", and the like:

We are today in **desperate need to fight this foreign destructive cultural invasion**, [...]. We also need to dedicate our efforts towards

<sup>19</sup> Accessed March 3, 2016. <http://www.al-jazirah.com/2008/20081218/ar9.htm>

<sup>20</sup> Accessed March 3, 2016. <http://www.al-jazirah.com/2008/20080820/ar8.htm>

raising people's awareness in understanding the danger of such series (April 10, 2014).<sup>21</sup>

As for *Al-Madina*, "The dubbed politics in the Turkish series" claims that Arabic dubbed Turkish series give rise to a neo-Ottomanist political agenda that is presented by Turkey as an appealing alternative for modernity in the Middle East. Noting that Turkish series can revive the Ottoman past in the Middle East, the news report portrays Turkey's image by using the invasion frame:

[...] After **we all become Ottomans**, every Ottoman on this earth will be able to watch his life-story in a dubbed series; it is part of the politics of dubbing. [...] These series are part of the **Turkish invasion** in the Arab world [...] (May 25, 2012).<sup>22</sup>

In a similar vein, another *Al-Madinanews* report entitled "Turkish drama: invasion and accumulated impact" places emphasis on the destructive impact of the series which is argued to represent a decadent lifestyle:

The dubbed Turkish series **invaded the simple mind and heart** of the Arab viewer, especially the young ones and teenagers of both genders alike, and the series' characters and protagonists who are indulged in forbidden relationships were met with a complete approval from the viewer, which caused the producers and the funders to work hard to flood the media market with these series, up to the point where the most prominent exports of these series spread the culture of betrayals and moral degeneration. [...] And what added salt to injury is that the owners of these TV channels are insisting on **implanting this culture** and watering it with second and third seasons and even a tenth in order to continue with this immersion in forbidden sins (May 11, 2012).<sup>23</sup>

Taking a similar stand, the Saudi newspaper *Okaz* promotes the narrative of neocolonialism to highlight that Arab Muslims are vulnerable to attacks which take place mostly in the form of global capitalism. The report caters for the narrative position of cultural conservatives who accuse Western powers of launching cultural invasion in the Arab world (see al-Qaradawi, 2000, p. 196-198). The following excerpt from the

<sup>21</sup> Accessed March 3, 2016. <http://www.al-jazirah.com/2014/20140610/ar7.htm>

<sup>22</sup> Accessed March 5, 2016. <http://www.al-madina.com/node/380035>

<sup>23</sup> Accessed March 5, 2016. <http://www.al-madina.com/node/302335>

news report entitled “The Turkish series and the viewers” illustrates this point as follows:

[...] Thinking clearly of the **effect** of the Turkish series on the society leads to a **dangerous** conclusion that some of us are **amenable** and **frail** and can easily be affected by **neo-colonialism** [...] Beside that its heroines are usually dressed up in short revealing clothes, which comes as implicit invitations for our girls to **mimic** them, particularly the heros are admired by in this series (July 22, 2008).<sup>24</sup>

Depicting Arabs as “amenable and frail” people, the report re-sites the narrative on *Noor* in the context of several broader narratives relating to the neo-Ottoman invasion of the Arab world. Another *Okaz* report entitled “The dubbed series are a big danger on our society’s morals and values” also highlights this point as follows:

[...] they pose a significant **threat** to our conservative society’s morals and values, calling for a moral revolution against all these **destructive projects** (September 30, 2010).<sup>25</sup>

“The Turkish series invades the Arab TV Channels after the Mexicans”<sup>26</sup> (April 16, 2008) and “The dubbed drama invades the TV Channels and competes with Arabic Drama”<sup>27</sup> (September 15, 2010) in *Okaz* also foreground the invader frame to build Turkey’s image.

### ***The framing of narratives in the Turkish newspapers***

Owing to the popularity of television series in the Middle East and their capacity to create soft power, those countries which manage to export its own series “can, at least to a certain extent, spread its worldview, values, and ideas to Arab populations, and build cultural prestige in the region” (Jabbour, p. 2015). Therefore, Turkey’s narrative of Arabic dubbed Turkish series is based on the official statements that those series which embrace Muslim lifestyle and Western democracy create an image of stability and peace, introduce contemporary Turkey to the world and become one of the cornerstones of Turkey’s soft power (Rousselin, 2013, p. 20-21).

<sup>24</sup> Accessed March 8, 2016. <http://www.okaz.com.sa/okaz/osf/20080722/Con20080722211489.htm>

<sup>25</sup> Accessed , March 8, 2016. <http://www.okaz.com.sa/new/issues/20100930/Con20100930374880.htm>

<sup>26</sup> Accessed March 8, 2016. <http://www.okaz.com.sa/okaz/osf/20080416/Con20080416188412.htm>

<sup>27</sup> Accessed March 8, 2016. <http://www.okaz.com.sa/new/issues/20100915/Con20100915372289.htm>

In *Hurriyet*, the news report entitled “*Noor’s* romanticism for Arab women” argues that *Noor’s* representation of Turkish culture is a key factor that alters Arabs’ perception of Turkey:

Arabs once saw Turkey as a **secular and pro-Western country** and thought that Turkey shares very few common points with its **Muslim neighbours**. However, *Noor* has **changed** this. The number of Arab tourists who visit Turkey is gradually increasing. What is more, *Noor* has opened new horizons for those Arab women who long for romantic love and freer life in their **extremely conservative society** (August 31, 2008).<sup>28</sup>

As the excerpt reveals, Turkey’s image is portrayed not only as a secular and Western, but also a Muslim state. In this context, Çevik (2014, p. 97) underlines that *Noor’s* storyline places emphasis on women who “represent a synthesis of modernity and traditionalism, a very impeccable reflection of the in-between sentiment of Turkish society”. This enables Arab viewers to identify themselves with the Turkish characters that oscillate between the norms of a traditionalist society and the demands of the modern age. In another *Hurriyet* report entitled “Turkey’s **soft power**: television series”, Turkey’s image is framed as a synthesis that blends modern Western lifestyle with traditional Islamic values:

*Noor* has become such a phenomenon that 85 million people watched its last episode in 22 countries. Turkey owes, to some extent, its recent tourism success to television series [...]. The point which makes Turkish series popular abroad is that they reflect **Turkey’s modern face and traditional character** at the same time (February 7, 2011).<sup>29</sup>

The popular reach of *Noor* is also linked, in this report, to “[its] modelling [of] an alternative way of modernization”, to use Kaynak’s (2015, p. 243) words, which is a “third way” that efficiently embeds a modern lifestyle in Islam (Rohde 2013, p. 146). In its coverage of Arabic dubbed Turkish series, *Sabah* gives place to criticisms directed by the Arab mass media against *Noor*. Similar to the news narratives circulated by *Hürriyet*, *Sabah* frames Turkey’s image in the context of Arab women’s liberation. Furthermore, *Sabah* uses the role model frame to construct Turkey’s self-image. For instance, the news report entitled “*Noor* shakes Arab traditions” underlines that

<sup>28</sup> Accessed July 13, 2015. <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/arap-kadinlarinin-gumus-romantizmi-9785710>

<sup>29</sup> Accessed June 05, 2015. <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/turkiye-nin-yumusak-gucu-dizileri-19414165>

[...] the foreign press agencies publicize the claim of some clerics in the West Bank and Saudi Arabia that *Noor* is **not in harmony with** Islam and hence should not be watched; it is also underlined that the series might be **spreading the seeds of change** [in the Middle East]. **Turkey** provides **Arab** viewers with more opportunities to **identify** themselves with [the series' characters] than the Western productions do. [...] Female viewers see independent Turkish women as **a role model** (July 28, 2008).<sup>30</sup>

The role model frame is also used by *Cumhuriyet*. "Turkish series launched a revolution in the region's culture" exemplifies this point particularly effectively:

The series launched a **revolution** in the culture of the [Middle East] region. We can see some countries which do not broadcast and even do not imagine to broadcast such series in which women **dress up differently and behave differently**. *Noor* was the most popular series in 2008 (September 18, 2010).<sup>31</sup>

Along similar lines "Arabs loved Turkish series" (February 23, 2009)<sup>32</sup> and "Tourists who are flocking to see locations of television series are a source of income [for Turkey]" (August 8, 2010)<sup>33</sup> frame Arabized Turkish series in the context of Turkey's soft power in the Arab world. The positive image-setting approach of the Turkish newspapers above is also maintained by *Radikal*. The following excerpt from "Turkish series played a role in the Arab spring" claims that Turkey played a major role in Arab women's liberation owing to its television series that facilitated women's role in the Arab Spring:

[...] According to a research in Saudi Arabia, *Noor* has resulted in the realization of freedom for 63% of Arab women [...]. The **Arab Spring**

<sup>30</sup> Accessed June 07, 2015.

<http://arsiv.sabah.com.tr/2008/07/28/haber,84245B4862824DEC88A805F4990E8906.html>

<sup>31</sup> Accessed June 10, 2015.

[http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/diger/179418/Turk\\_dizileri\\_bolge\\_kulturunde\\_devrim\\_yaratiyor.html#](http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/diger/179418/Turk_dizileri_bolge_kulturunde_devrim_yaratiyor.html#)

<sup>32</sup> Accessed June 10, 2015. [http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/diger/43958/Araplar\\_Turk\\_dizilerini\\_sevdi.html](http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/diger/43958/Araplar_Turk_dizilerini_sevdi.html)

<sup>33</sup> Accessed June 10, 2015.

[http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/diger/169338/Dizi\\_setleri\\_Arap\\_turistlerden\\_de\\_kazaniyor.html](http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/diger/169338/Dizi_setleri_Arap_turistlerden_de_kazaniyor.html)

owes its existence to women, and it is **Turkey** that **mobilized** Arab women through its series (December 28, 2012).<sup>34</sup>

As the excerpt shows, Turkey is portrayed as an agent that initiates social transformation in the Middle East. *Radikal* also gives place to “A research refutes the claim that Turkish series launched cultural invasion” (September 19, 2013),<sup>35</sup> which refers to Eylem Yanardağoğlu and Imad Karam’s (2013) paper “The fever that hit Arab satellite television: audience perceptions of Turkish television series”. In order to disprove the Arab narrative that Turkish series are an instrument of cultural invasion, the report highlights Yanardağoğlu and Karam’s (2013, p. 561) point that Arab audiences do not see Turkish series as “culprits that corrupt cultural identity”. The last relevant report in *Radikal* “Turkey: the rising star in the Arab world” (March 12, 2009) frames Turkey’s self-image as a holder of soft-power in the Middle East.<sup>36</sup>

As for *Yeni Şafak*, the soft power frame is used to build Turkey’s image in the Middle East. For instance, “*Noor* challenges Arab traditions” (June 28, 2008) elaborates the narrative that the series’ representation of Turkish society can be a source of inspiration for other Middle Eastern societies.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, the news report “Arabs desire a country such as Turkey rather than Iran” argues that Turkish series play a significant role in portraying Turkey’s positive image:

[...] the most popular television programs in the Middle East are Turkish series. These series **present a life style to Arab viewers**. And they change Arabs’ **image** of Turkey to a great extent. [...] [Arab] viewers love our actors and actresses very much (February 7, 2011).<sup>38</sup>

At this point, it is necessary to consider the response of the conservative Islamist segments of Turkish society towards Turkish television series. Conservative Islamists in Turkey severely criticize domestic television series, arguing that they violate several religious taboos, such as extra-marital sexuality, consumption of alcohol, and manners of dress that contradict with Islam (Kaynak, 2015, p. 233-234). Therefore, it is necessary to note that *Yeni Şafak*’s coverage of Arabic dubbed Turkish series largely competes with

<sup>34</sup> Accessed June 17, 2015. <http://www.radikal.com.tr/hayat/turk-dizileri-arap-baharinda-rol-oyyadi-1114235/>

<sup>35</sup> Accessed June 17, 2015. <http://www.radikal.com.tr/hayat/turk-dizilerinin-kulturel-istila-yaptigi-iddiasini-curuten-arastirma-1151621/>

<sup>36</sup> Accessed June 17, 2015. <http://www.radikal.com.tr/radikal.aspx?atype=haberyazdir&reportid=925793>

<sup>37</sup> Accessed June 25, 2015. <http://www.yenisafak.com/aktuel/gumus-dizisi-arap-geleneklerini-sarsiyor-131482>

<sup>38</sup> Accessed June 17, 2015. <http://www.yenisafak.com/roportaj/araplarin-istegi-iran-degil-turkiye-olmak-301847>

the narratives of other conservative Islamist segments of Turkish society. One would argue that *Yeni Şafak*, which typifies the conservative Islamist press media in Turkey, promotes Turkey's positive image within the context of Arabic dubbed Turkish series, since those series are seen as Turkish cultural exports in the international arena.

## Conclusion

This study has set out to explore how the most widely circulated Saudi Arabian and Turkish newspapers frame narratives on Turkey's image in their coverage of *Noor*. The following conclusions are drawn in light of the study's corpora that illustrate how news framing contributes to the representation of Turkey's self- and hetero-images:

- While Turkey's self-image as a role model in the Middle East is identified as an exaggeration in the Saudi news corpus, the role model frame is systematically used by the selected Turkish newspapers to represent Turkey.
- While Turkey's image is framed within the context of cultural threat in the Saudi news narratives, the Turkish narratives portray Turkey as the holder of soft power in the Middle East.
- The cultural invasion frame is explicitly used in the selected Saudi newspapers, whereas the social transformation and revolution frames are used in the Turkish newspapers that depict Turkey's influence on the Middle East.
- The Saudi news corpus is dominated by the narrative that Turkish and Saudi societies are different in terms of culture and tradition. The selected Saudi newspapers elaborate the narrative that Turkey contradicts Muslim-Arab values; and they foreground the us and them frame. In this context, the construction of Turkey's image as the cultural Other seems to make Turkey's othering constitutive to the Muslim-Arab cultural identity in the Saudi news. The Turkish news reports, however, represent Turkey as a synthesis of modern Western lifestyle and traditional Islamic values.
- Whereas the Turkish newspapers frame Turkey's secularism in a positive context by labelling it as an inspiration for the Middle East, the Saudi newspapers foreground Turkey's secular character in order to represent Turkey as a secular Western Other.

Against this background, it is plausible to argue that Turkey's self-image is framed in a way that fits in the larger narratives of Turkey's perception of its role (e.g. regional leader and soft power) in the Middle East. On the other hand, the frames (e.g. cultural invader and neo-colonial threat) that construct Turkey's hetero-image in Saudi narratives dovetail with the larger narratives on Turkey circulating in the Arab world. It goes without saying that the frames highlighted above give rise to the emergence of the broader frames of 'neo-Ottoman cool' and 'neo-Ottoman colonialism' in the Turkish and Saudi media, respectively. This point reveals the Turkish newspapers' promotion of a positive self-image against a largely negative representation of the Turkish cultural Other in the Saudi newspapers that cover *Noor*.

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