



# Conditions and consequences of Türkiye's transnational TV production: A study of American women audiences

## *Türkiye'nin ulusötesi televizyon yapımlarının koşulları ve sonuçları: Amerikalı kadın izleyiciler üzerine bir araştırma*

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### Abstract

In today's globally connected landscape, transnational media establish pathways for cultural interchange, transforming how worldwide audiences interact with varied stories. Turkish TV dramas (dizi), which have gained widespread popularity in Latin America, Europe and the Middle East markets, exemplify this global shift and offer American viewers the opportunity to encounter Turkish culture. The research examines how Turkish TV series shape the cultural perceptions and intercultural interaction practices of American viewers. Although these series present idealized or commercialized versions of Turkish society, they function as important first points of contact that stimulate viewers' interest in authentic Turkish culture, history, and social practices. Through audience ethnography and in-depth interviews, it shows that Turkish dramas improve appreciation of Turkish culture, challenge stereotypes, and enhance comprehension of global intercultural relationships. It also emphasizes transnational media's role in encouraging intercultural dialogue, while noting the constraints imposed by profit-driven media partnerships. While *dizi* Turkish TV dramas--promote intercultural dialogue and support a more inclusive global media environment, the potential for cultural exchange is shaped by the commercial purposes underlying transnational media collaborations and joint ventures.

**Keywords:** Transnational media, Turkish *dizi*, audience ethnography, American viewers, intercultural communication

### Öz

Bugün, küresel etkileşimlerin yoğunlaştığı ve kültürlerarası iletişimin arttığı dünyada, ulusötesi medya kültürel alışveriş için yollar oluşturmakta ve dünya çapındaki izleyicilerin çeşitli hikayelerle etkileşim kurma biçimlerini sürekli dönüştürmektedir. Latin Amerika, Avrupa ve Orta Doğu pazarlarında geniş



izleyici kitlesi tarafından takip edilen ve yaygın bir popülerlik kazanan Türk dizileri, bu küresel değişimi belirgin bir şekilde örneklemede ve Amerikalı izleyicilere Türk kültürüyle karşılaşma fırsatı sunmaktadır. Araştırma, Türk dizilerinin Amerikalı izleyicilerin kültürel algılarını ve kültürlerarası etkileşim pratiklerini nasıl şekillendirdiğini incelemektedir. Her ne kadar bu diziler Türk toplumunun idealize edilmiş veya ticarileştirilmiş versiyonlarını sunsa da, izleyicilerin otantik Türk kültürü, tarihi ve sosyal pratiklerine olan ilgisini canlandıran önemli ilk temas noktaları olarak işlev görmektedir. İzleyici etnografisi ve derinlemesine mülakatlar yoluyla, Türk dizilerinin Türk kültürünün takdir edilmesini geliştirdiğini, yerleşik kalıp

yargılara meydan okuduğunu ve küresel kültürlerarası ilişkilerin anlaşılmasını güçlendirdiğini göstermektedir. Ayrıca, ulusötesi medyanın kültürlerarası diyalogu teşvik etmedeki önemli rolünü vurgularken, kâr odaklı medya ortaklıklarının getirdiği kısıtlamalara dikkat çekmektedir. Diziler kültürlerarası diyalogu teşvik edip daha kapsayıcı ve sürdürülebilir bir küresel medya ortamını desteklerken, kültürel alışveriş potansiyeli ulusötesi medya işbirliklerinin ve ortak girişimlerin altında yatan ticari amaçlar tarafından şekillendirilmektedir.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** Ulusötesi medya, Türk dizileri, izlerlikle etnografisi, Amerikan izleyicileri, kültürlerarası iletişim

## Introduction

New communication technologies have made geo-cultural media activities possible with increasing population mobility. Thus, Spanish, Korean, Turkish, and French become increasingly prominent in transnational societies and geo-cultural markets, while the media creates entertainment programs in these languages (Netflix, 2023; The Economist, 2024). While these geo-cultural and transnational networks contribute to media diversity by creating alternative flows to mainstream content, they enable content to circulate beyond national borders, challenging dominant, hegemonic media currents and offering a counter-narrative that sustains cultural plurality (Darling-Wolf, 2014).

Globalization discourses are one of the discursive effects of the construction of the epistemological field of the 'West.' The formation of multinational capital takes place in this discursive space, and new forms of capital domination are no longer legitimized by the direct colonial subjugation of the subject, but rather by the overexpansion of interpretive discourses and representations (Banerjee & Linstead, 2001, p.700). The dominant paradigm equates Westernization with globalization, arguing that hybrid identities emerge from the dominant culture's influence over minorities (Ackermann, 2012). However, even if this point of view could be accurate, it ignores the influence of non-Western cultures on the West. Because the interaction of cultural identities in a limited space makes it inevitable for them to be affected by each other in a certain temporal process. Thus, introducing cultural encounters to people through the media can enable them to get to know the 'other' who is foreign to them. Les Essif (2009) emphasizes that identities formed by different cultural backgrounds are relational. Particularly in the United States of America (USA), these encounters have created rhizomatic identities that evolve through lateral connections to other roots (p.101). Korean-Mexican fusion restaurants in Los Angeles, the widespread adoption of sushi in American dining habits, and the evolution of 'American Chinese food' demonstrate how cultural identities develop through multiple, non-hierarchical entry and exit points. Similarly, the integration of K-pop aesthetics into American popular culture, the influence of Japanese anime on American animation, and the incorporation of Bollywood-style dance sequences in American music videos exemplify how American cultural identity continuously evolves through its interaction with diverse cultural influences, creating new hybrid forms rather than maintaining rigid boundaries.

The fact that transnational media systems make everything that happens in the world instantly visible everywhere has a great role in the increase of cultural encounters (Young, 2020). The internationalization of television series enhances the recognition of actors, screenwriters, and directors while promoting national culture internationally. Thus, audiences in different countries become members of the imaginary transnational audience created by encountering new cultural values. Audiences in various countries become part of an imagined transnational audience, integrating new cultural experiences into their daily lives (Lopez, 1995, p.258). Reception studies on serials also show that serials are effective in promoting different lifestyles and creating a change in the audience (Pastina et al., 2003, p.9). From Jin and Yoon (2016) on the impact of Korean soap operas on transnational viewers' behaviors and cultural preferences, to La Pastina and Straubhaar's (2005) contribution of Latin American soap operas to viewers' social perspectives, and Yanardağoğlu and Karam's (2013) impact of Turkish soap operas on Arab viewers' cultural attitudes - enabling them to renegotiate the gender roles offered by Arab modernity - cross-border effects of different television cultures have been observed.

The increasing circulation of transnational media contents in the global market – especially with digital platforms- has allowed the audience to encounter different cultures. So much so that, until the beginning of the 2000s, the global circulation direction of television dramas was moving in a line from the West to the East, with the emergence of different transnational connection points, there has been a flow from East to West (Kim, 2013). The international recognition of the Turkish TV series industry has increased with the industrialization trend after the 2000s. In this respect, Turkish series, which first became increasingly popular in the Middle East, North Africa, and the Balkans, expanded their audience in the following years and started to be watched in South America, Europe, and North America. They now rank third in the export of scripted series, with global demand for Turkish series increasing by 184% between 2020 and 2023 (The Economist, 2024). The rising popularity of Turkish TV series in recent years and their consumption by audiences beyond national borders have increased interest in reception studies. There has been an increase in studies examining the reasons behind the growing popularity of Turkish series in Latin America, Asia, the Balkans, and the Arabian Peninsula from textual, political economy, and reception perspectives (Berg, 2017a; Yanardağoğlu & Karam, 2013; Çaylı Rahte, 2017; Aslan, 2019; Khan & Won, 2020; Kaptan, 2013; Arda et al., 2021).

The adaptation of Turkish TV series in the USA from 2015 onwards marks a significant turning point. In 2015, *Runner*, an adaptation of the Turkish series *Son*, was produced by ABC, one of the world's largest TV production companies. In 2016, the series *Suskunlar* was aired by the major media company NBC under the title *Game of Silence* (Patten, 2016). Following these two Turkish TV series, although Turkish TV series have not reached as many viewers in the USA as in Latin America, the Middle East, and Europe, they have started to attract an increasing number of American viewers. It can be said that the interest of American viewers in Turkish series has increased year by year. USA demand for Turkish series increased by 24% compared to the previous year, with a surge observed in late 2022. This rising demand for Turkish content is particularly visible in the performance of series like *Family Secrets (Yargi)* (Parrot Analytics, 2023).

This research examines the global spread of Turkish TV dramas and their cultural impact on international viewers, particularly in the USA. It analyzes how non-Western media affects Western audiences, contributing to discussions on globalization and cultural exchange. It also presents concrete findings on how media, as seen through Turkish TV dramas, play a part in building cross-cultural understanding and dialogue. Our study on the reception of Turkish TV series by USA audiences reveals that TV series viewers span a wide demographic spectrum, but there is a clear trend of older female viewers' interest in the series. Although there was initially no specific focus on this demographic group, due to the voluntary distribution of participants, the sample was dominated by older and mostly female viewers. This tendency led the study to focus on the experiences of this group in order to understand the cultural impact of the *dizi*.

### **International, multinational, and transnational media**

Transnational media production should be distinguished from international and multinational media production. International media sell commodities and services produced by workers in their own national factories to consumers in other nations (e.g., Comcast exports *Fast and Furious* films to China). Multinational media produce and sell commodities and services produced by workers in their own national factories and by factories owned by a subsidiary of the same corporation in another nation. (e.g., Disney produces television programs for its wholly owned *UTV India*, while production decisions and profits remain with *Disney US*). Transnational media are much different. Transnational media jointly own two or more companies from two or more nations. Transnational media companies (TNMCs) may exist through short-term joint ventures

or more permanent partnerships with majority and minority shares owned by two or more companies from two or more nations. For example, *Disney* is a TNMC as 26% co-owner of Canada's *Vice Media*, co-producer of *Dangal* (2016) with *Aamir Khan Productions*, and 1/3 owner of the Argentine film studio, *Patagonik* (Artz, 2022, pp.30-31).

Turkish transnational media companies (TNMCs) have both joint ventures and co-production partnerships with media on every continent. Turkish TNMCs produce Turkish dizi that are popular around the world. It is estimated that the export of Turkish dramas to more than 150 countries may reach about \$1 billion in sales (Medit, 2024), surpassing US exports to the Middle East and North Africa (Navani, 2021). In fact, Türkiye is now the fastest growing TV series exporter in the world and the second largest TV exporter after the US (Daily Sabah, 2024a).

*Medyapim*, *Bocek Yapim*, *Pana Film*, *Mind-Made*, *TIMS Production*, *Ay Yapim*, and other Turkish TNMCs have co-productions deals in the USA, Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and Latin America. For example, *Panamerica TV* in Peru imports more TV productions from Türkiye than Latin America. In Chile, *Mega TV* increased its audience share from 4 to 29 after airing more Turkish dramas. Although the Turkish government provided some support for TV exports, recently censorship and declining subsidies have interfered with TV drama production. (Artz, 2023).

In 2020, *Viacom* coproduced *El asesino del olvido* with *Medyapim* and *Ay Yapim* and Chile's *Mega TV* coproduced *20 Minutos* with the same Turkish companies (Cabrera, 2019). Likewise, Turkish dramas are also popular with Middle Eastern, Central Asian, and Greek audiences, and some actors have become celebrities in those countries (Tuncell, 2011). In Eastern Europe, *Calinos Entertainment* coproduced the Romanian hit *Fructul Oprit* with *Antena 1*.

In short, the political economy of current Turkish media production and distribution, including internet and streaming, identifies an emerging transnational model of coproduction, joint venture, and shared content. Have struck lucrative coproduction alliances with TNMCs in the USA, Europe, and Latin America (Iturri, 2021, p.117).

## Content themes in Turkish *dizi*

Importantly, similar thematic content appears in all Turkish TNMC productions, encompassing programming aired on *Netflix*, *Disney*, *Sony*, *Saudi Arabia's Middle East Broadcast Corporation (MBC)* (Vivarelli, 2022). Spain's *Mediapro* (Balaga & Hopewell, 2023). Italy's *Mediaset* (C21, n.d.), Pakistan's *Dot Media* (DRM, 2023), South Africa's *e.tv* (Ferreira, 2022). *MegaTV* in Chile (Hurriyet, 2022), *GrupoATV* in Peru (ttvnews, 2012), and on *O Globo* in Brazil (Balaga & Hopewell, 2023). Thus, consumerist messages promoting wealth and fashion are prominent in several Turkish transnational productions, with representations of affluent lifestyles appearing across various genres, including historical dramas.

In particular, *dizi* often relate stories of poor, beautiful girls rescued from bad relatives by handsome, rich men, all set amid the rich cultural tapestry of Istanbul and the Bosphorus. 'Family stories with big talents and directors, and great music' attract audiences globally, according to Izzet Pinto from Istanbul distributor Global Agency. Arab viewers also enjoy the Turkish modern life depicted in *dizi*, which still feature the poor in scenes highlighting traditional values and narratives. Such stories attract viewers across the Middle East and globally (Navani, 2021).

In the Arab world, Latin America, and the Balkans, Turkish TV series are quite popular. More than half of viewers in the Arab world have seen at least one Turkish TV series (Ottasilver, 2022). Moreover, as an emerging contributor to a transnational culture of consumption, Turkish *dizi* feature luxurious mansions, royal palaces, and other attractive settings—with most of the TV series produced in Istanbul, a city full of beautiful natural landscapes and well-known historical sites. Actors are attractive and wear the latest fashion. Additionally, following Erdogan's Justice and Development Party (JDP) regulations over content (Radio and Television Law of Türkiye No. 2954), Turkish *dizi* expresses the cultural values of family and Islamic traditions, which are prevalent across the Arab world.

Gabrielle Ferreira (2022) found that what interested viewers most in Turkish TNMC *Ay Yapım's Fatmagul* (2015) fit several categories: Fatmagul's overcoming adversity, her fight for justice, the romance between Fatmagul and Kerim, and the opportunity to get to know another culture (p.80). Besides the opportunity to learn about Turkish culture, *Fatmagul* offered many individualistic narratives—her personal resolve, her

individual romance, and her tragic self-interest. Ferreira concluded, "*Fatmagul's* audience seems to be mainly made up of women... reflecting conservative moral values through melodrama's classical structure." Viewers of *Fatmagul* were mostly interested in the protagonist overcoming obstacles, the fight for justice, and the romance—all elements of melodrama, a genre people relate to despite their culture (p.82).

While "themes of forbidden love, impossible love, and treason attract attention and create excitement for viewers... in Turkish TV dramas, tensions related to traditional social and cultural norms are used to complicate the scenario" (Ottasilver 2022). Ahu Yigit (2013) suggests, "The main appeal of Turkish television series seems to be the 'modern' lifestyle they present," which is nonetheless always packaged in traditional relationships. From the Arab perspective, modernity is especially inherent in certain types of gender relations and gender equality. Despite the strong patriarchal narrative, recently in Turkish series, "women enjoy a freer standing in society compared to most of their Middle Eastern counterparts, take part in professional life and have rather liberal relations with men" (Yigit, 2013, p.292). Arab women have also expressed strong appreciation for the romantic male characters featured. Further contributing to the series' appeal is the fact that all of this is presented in a setting of wealth and luxury enjoyed in mansions near the Bosphorus.

Many transnational Turkish-American media partnerships have recently increased the ratings of Turkish TV series both in the USA and globally. For example, the TV series *Suskunlar* was remade as *Game of Silence* on NBC and aired in many countries (Fitzpatrick, 2016). Transnational *Ay Yapim's* Turkish drama, *Son* (2018-2019) was sold to *20th Century Fox Television* and adapted into *Runner for ABC* (Goldberg, 2015). *Ay Yapim* also partnered with media in Russia (Franks, 2013), Spain (Roxborough, 2015), Netherlands (Anadolu, 2016), and France (Señal News, 2020). In 2017, *Kara Sevda (Endless Love)* won an Emmy for Best Telenovela of the Year (Daily Sabah, 2017). Turkish actor Haluk Bilginer was selected as 'Best Actor' for TNMC *Ay Yapim's* series, *Şahsiyet (Persona)*, 2018, 2020) at the 47th International Emmy Award (Daily Sabah, 2024b). In 2020, Türkiye's *BluTV* partnered with *FX* on *Alef*, winning the 'best crime drama' award at the New York Festival. As the first Turkish crime drama, *Alef*, was also selected for *Variety's* "Top 15 International TV Series" (Lang, et.al., 2020). *MF Yapim* coproduced *Sen Çal Kapımı (Love is in the Air)* (2020-21) with *Fox* in the USA. Meanwhile, *MF Yapim* also struck broadcasting partnerships in some 40 countries (MIP China, 2022).



Recently, the Turkish transnational *Birtaff* and *Netflix* coproduced *Make Me Believe* (2020), which reached #10 in *Netflix* USA audience ratings. One critic confirmed the romantic appeal of the film: “*Make Me Believe* created a world that the viewer can get lost in. The dreamily-paced romantic developments which build between the beautiful actors are supported by stunning visual backdrops of sparkling seas, sun-dappled quaint towns, and ancient rocky coastlines” (Edwards, 2023). Turkish *Tims & B Productions* partnered with *Netflix* on *Shahmaran* (2023), which included some nudity which challenged Turkish traditions, but ranked #9 in *Netflix* USA Top 10 (Jay, 2023). Another Turkish *Netflix* crime drama *Who Were We Running From?* (2023) ranked #4 on the USA Top 10—becoming the #1 non-English show on *Netflix* (Meek, 2023).

Overall, given the transnational partnerships sought after and forged by Turkish media, Western cultural imperialism (Schiller, 1976; Mirrlees, 2015) appears to have been replaced by an emerging transnational global culture of consumption (Artz, 2022) with the participation of media in almost every nation. In short, a materialist assessment of global media practices indicates we have entered a new era of transnational media co-production, dissemination, and viewer consumption featuring themes of wealth, romance, crime, and fashion while accepting existing traditional values of gender and class inequality. These themes remain attractive to both US viewers and Turkish immigrants to the US, with intercultural impacts on both audiences.

### **Narratives without boundaries: Transcultural dialogue through Turkish television in the United States of America**

Many studies have explored how series and dramas broadcast on transnational media platforms shape viewers’ perceptions of new cultures and lifestyles. These studies emphasize how audiences construct their cultural identities, understand otherness, and interact with global cultures through television narratives (Ang, 2013; Iwabuchi, 2002; Kraidy, 2010; Kumar, 2006; Straubhaar, 2007).

The acceleration of media globalization has transformed cultural interactions and created a more interconnected global media landscape. In this process of transformation, the rapid spread of digital distribution technologies and streaming platforms has affected the cross-border circulation of cultural content (Lobato, 2019). While satellite television facilitated cross-cultural media flows to a certain extent, the emergence of streaming services radically transformed content access (Wayne, 2020). Digital platforms

make it possible for content to reach different audiences quickly by removing traditional distribution barriers (Lotz, 2017). This new media landscape offers significant opportunities, especially for non-Western productions, while platforms like *Netflix's* investment in local stories and global distribution strategies have created new connection points for Turkish, Korean and other national productions to reach international audiences (Jenner, 2018). The popularity of Turkish dramas among American audiences exemplifies this shift, indicating a move towards a more inclusive global culture. This media-driven cultural exchange reflects mutual cultural influences, matching recent debates on how non-Western media shapes global narratives, challenging the traditional dominance of Western media (Jin & Yoon, 2016). Turkish dramas offer American viewers a particular mediated representation of Turkish society, one that combines contemporary storytelling with specific cultural elements and social dynamics, reflecting traditional family values or local social issues not typically covered in Western media. While these series, like any media product, present selective and sometimes idealized portrayals of their cultural origins, they provide American audiences with alternative narratives to predominant Western media representations. Although series can challenge certain preexisting stereotypes (Akser, 2014; Bayraktaroğlu, 2019) about Turkish culture, they may simultaneously construct new, potentially romanticized expectations/perceptions. Such encounters with foreign cultures via media can reduce stereotypical thinking and promote appreciation of cultural complexities (Kim & Song, 2019).

The storytelling's effectiveness comes from its depiction of universal human experiences and emotions, supporting theories of narrative transportation that show how storytelling can build empathy and change attitudes (Slater & Rouner, 2002). The shift in American viewers' perceptions of Türkiye demonstrates the media's power in shaping cross-cultural understanding through parasocial interactions (Tukachinsky et al., 2017). American audiences' embrace of Turkish dramas signifies a shift in global media consumption patterns, giving rise to an inclusive cultural dialogue that challenges Western narrative hegemony. This diversification of the media ecosystem enriches global cultural interactions, leading to a pluralistic exchange of ideas and perspectives (Appadurai, 1996).

## Aim and methodology

To explore the conditions and consequences of Türkiye's transnational television production, this study employs a mixed-methods approach, incorporating audience

ethnography and reception analysis. By examining the reception of Turkish television dramas among American viewers, the research aims to understand how these media products influence and reshape cultural perceptions and strengthen transcultural dialogue in a globalized world.

## Aim

In a globalizing diasporic world, the problems caused by the perception of different cultures as foreign, and/or the positive impact of creating a favorable view of the foreign/other/immigrant, highlight the importance of intercultural communication. The main goal here is to prevent conflicts arising from the encounters of different national cultures and/or to eliminate prejudices related to different ethnic elements or sub-cultures within the same culture. The increasing success of Turkish TV series in the market underscores the significance of understanding the flow of media products from East to West and how new cultural products are received within the framework of dominant and dependent cultures. In this regard, is there a chance for non-dominant cultures to influence the dominant culture in a globalizing cultural environment? Do people in the host culture experience these cultural products and accept the newcomers more easily? These questions demonstrate that cultural flow is bidirectional and mutually influential.

By examining the distribution and reception of Turkish TV series in the USA, the research explores the implications of transnational media flows on intercultural communication and global cultural encounters. It analyzes how Turkish dramas function for cultural exchange, improving cross-cultural understanding while challenging existing stereotypes and cultural hegemonies. Through audience ethnography and in-depth interviews, this research offers concrete evidence of how Turkish *dizi* contribute to a more interconnected and inclusive global media landscape.

**RQ1:** How do Turkish television dramas influence American viewers' perceptions of Turkish culture?

**RQ2:** In what ways do Turkish TV series challenge and reshape existing stereotypes about Türkiye and its people among American audiences?

**RQ3:** What are the key themes and narratives in Turkish dizi that appeal to American viewers?<sup>1</sup>

## Method

This study employs a mixed-methods approach incorporating ethnographic observation notes and in-depth interviews within the frameworks of critical theory and audience reception studies. The primary aim of audience ethnography is to analyze how viewers engage with media texts within their societal contexts, rather than merely focusing on media technologies or content. Media ethnography examines the reciprocal interaction between audiences and media representations, exploring how these interactions influence viewers' perspectives (Peterson, 2003). Therefore, it is crucial to conduct such ethnographic studies in the natural environments of the viewers, ensuring the authenticity of the data collected.

In conducting ethnographic research, the researcher should set aside personal values, attitudes, and judgments. The objective is not merely to obtain numerical data but to analyze how individuals' behaviors and thoughts are shaped by their interactions with their sociocultural environment (Taylan, 2012). Adopting an audience ethnography perspective is essential for such academic studies, as it encompasses the socioeconomic and sociocultural contexts of the region where the research is conducted, thereby providing a comprehensive understanding of the audience-media relationship (Algan, 2009).

Welsch (1999) argues that the multicultural structure of the USA, coupled with globalization, has transcended homogeneous cultural frameworks, resulting in highly interconnected and intertwined cultural interactions. Given the study's focus on the reception of Turkish television dramas by Turkish immigrants and local American citizens, and how these cultural encounters impact daily life, audience ethnography is deemed the most appropriate method. Audience ethnography emphasizes the changes in daily life resulting from individuals' interactions with media content, focusing on how cultural values confront dominant cultural norms.

This methodology follows the traditions of audience ethnography as defined in the cultural studies framework, influenced by the works of Morley and Brunson (1999) and Radway (1991). In addition to these traditions, the researcher spent time with

participants not only watching TV but also engaging in their everyday lives. Following Morley (1992), the audience sample is considered as unfinished subjects, where the meaning of TV drama content is realized through viewers' interpretations. The interaction between viewer and text is continuously rewritten with each reception, forming an ongoing chain of relationships. This research aims to understand and interpret the sociocultural perspectives of audiences engaging with Turkish television dramas in a transcultural context, providing insights into how new cultural values are perceived and integrated.

## Sampling

This study employed a comprehensive and multifaceted sampling strategy to explore the conditions and consequences of Türkiye's transnational TV production on American viewers. Initially, New York, Indiana, and California were selected due to their diverse socio-cultural landscapes and significant immigrant populations. These states provided a backdrop to examine cultural encounters and media reception from multiple perspectives.

**Table 1.** Profile of participants in ethnographic study

Interview	Age	Gender	Location
Interview 1	69	Female	Tennessee
Interview 2	75	Female	Washington DC
Interview 3	75	Female	Connecticut
Interview 4	69	Female	New Jersey
Interview 5	52	Female	Indiana
Interview 6	56	Female	New York
Interview 7	19	Female	Indiana
Interview 8	69	Female	Massachusetts
Interview 9	66	Female	Michigan
Interview 10	20	Female	Illinois
Interview 11	75	Female	Boston
Interview 12	81	Female	Georgia
Interview 13	80	Female	Virginia
Interview 14	65	Female	Oklahoma
Interview 15	79	Female	Washington
Interview 16	53	Female	Illinois
Interview 17	47	Female	Oklahoma
Interview 18	34	Female	Michigan
Interview 19	68	Female	New York
Interview 20	72	Female	Arizona
Interview 21	50	Female	Texas
Interview 22	44	Female	California
Interview 23	60	Female	Missouri
Interview 24	32	Female	Illinois
Interview 25	68	Female	California
Interview 26	70	Female	Texas
Interview 27	60	Female	California
Interview 28	75	Female	Texas
Interview 29	75	Female	New York

Recognizing the limitations of a confined geographic sample, the researcher expanded the research scope through an extensive road trip covering over 20 states and 100 cities across the USA. This journey aimed to capture a broad spectrum of American experiences and attitudes towards Turkish TV dramas. During this trip, the researcher engaged with individuals in their everyday environments. This approach allowed for ethnographic observations and authentic interactions, providing a richer understanding of viewers' perceptions and cultural engagements.

Participants were recruited through various online platforms such as *Facebook* and *WhatsApp* groups, *Reddit*, *LinkedIn* and *Quora*. The participant pool was then expanded using a snowball sampling technique, with existing participants referring to others who were already watching Turkish TV series. In this study, none of the participants were directed to watch Turkish TV series; instead, individuals who were already watching Turkish TV series were interviewed.

A total of 29 in-depth interviews were conducted, with the majority of respondents being over 60 years of age, followed by a moderate proportion in the middle age group, and a small minority of young people. Although the research did not specifically target the elderly, this group dominated the sample, as it is this age group that actively watches Turkish TV series and volunteered for ethnographic observation. Younger viewers are also interested in Turkish TV series; some of them like the romantic elements and the attractiveness of the male characters. However, despite efforts such as e-mail announcements to the university network, younger viewers were less willing to participate in the interviews. The study does not claim that older respondents are representative of the attitudes and experiences of the entire population, but recognizes that this demographic makes an important contribution to understanding the appeal of Turkish TV series. Interviews, lasting between 45 minutes to 2.5 hours, were conducted to examine topics such as cultural authenticity, emotional connection, and the influence of Turkish dramas on perceptions of Turkish culture. Interviews were recorded, transcribed and analyzed. The researcher read through all transcripts, took notes, and identified key themes considering the study's aims. Despite efforts to include male viewers, only one American male who watched *Resurrection: Ertuğrul* was identified, but he was unable to participate due to scheduling conflicts. To protect participant identities, codes such as P1, P2, etc., are used in this article. By spending time with participants in their environment and having conversations, the researcher was able to gather data that provided observations into their viewing habits and cultural reception pattern.

## Findings

The data collected in the analysis phase of the research reveals the impact of Turkish TV series on American viewers and different aspects of intercultural interaction. The findings obtained as a result of the interviews and audience evaluations are categorized according to the following themes.

### Cultural authenticity and appreciation

Turkish TV series have created a space of cultural dialogue in the transnational viewer's world that transcends a mere viewing experience (Yörük & Vatikiotis, 2013). The depth of this cultural interaction is especially evident in American viewer evaluations. Series such as *Şahmaran* and *We Were Running Away From Who, Mom?* have been included in the *Netflix US Top 10* list, a remarkable achievement among non-English content (Netflix Tudum, 2023). Rotten Tomatoes (2023) reviews of *Şahmaran* reveal the sensitive attention paid to the series' cultural texture and narrative language. Viewers particularly emphasize that the series maintains its cultural authenticity by avoiding unnecessary dramatic elements (Rotten Tomatoes, 2023; BGR, 2023). While American viewers are accustomed to individual decision-making, they encounter extended family structures where three generations share living spaces and non-individual decisions shape daily life. Similarly, traditional practices, such as tea ceremonies and religious festivities, offer American audiences a window into formal social customs that differ from their casual social interactions (BGR, 2023). This may also be related to the interest and satisfaction that discovering different cultural richness creates in viewers. The fact that Korean and Spanish dramas have also attracted large audiences around the world in recent years demonstrates their ability to reach global audiences by blending local cultural elements with universal themes (Jin & Yoon, 2016; Ibarra & Navarro, 2022).

Turkish dramas provide American audiences insight into the complexities of Turkish culture. As P29 noted, "The cultural aspect of that movie really grabbed me... We learned about the Roman Empire... but we never learned about the Ottoman Empire ever. So that's very new to Americans. That's why I was so mesmerized by this." Through Turkish dramas, audiences are introduced to often-overlooked elements of Turkish heritage, sparking an interest in its rich culture, history, and language, bringing new perspectives to light. P1 expressed this growing interest, saying, "When the Ottoman Empire... And I started learning the real meaning of Islam. And I was so moved and attracted to it. I

think Islam is a beautiful, beautiful religion. I have a Koran on my Kindle." By moving beyond stereotypes, this curiosity inspires a greater respect for cultural differences and transforms storytelling into an educational experience that promotes awareness and understanding through authentic and engaging depictions. As P14 stated, "I like and appreciate so much of it. We have differences but by far we have more similarities and I respect their culture very much." Participant feedback reveals how global media consumption enhances cross-cultural understanding, reminding us of Iwabuchi's (2002) concept of "cultural odor." The unique cultural elements of media content act as an attraction rather than a deterrent, suggesting that Turkish dramas serve as conduits through which American viewers can explore the rich cultural landscape of Türkiye—its values, traditions, and historical context—thereby cultivating an appreciation for its culture.

### **Narrative and emotional engagement**

American audiences are interested in the stories of romance, historical narratives and moral conflicts presented in Turkish TV series. Turkish TV series frequently feature themes that are important in Turkish culture, such as family loyalty, social values and moral dilemmas (Kocamaner, 2017). While many American productions are more individualistic and action-oriented, Turkish series offer stories centered around character development and relationships, allowing viewers to form an emotional connection (Ökmen, 2023). By interweaving cultural and historical elements, Turkish TV series offer viewers a different perspective, thus contributing to a meaningful connection between different cultures (Larochelle, 2021). This kind of narrative transforms TV series from being just entertainment products and creates an opportunity for viewers to get to know different cultures. P19 emphasized, "Turkish TV has the best trained actors, production, and plots like no other countries I know of... I prefer Turkish TV because nothing else beats it for total substance and intelligence."

The emotional context of Turkish dramas, exploring vulnerability, familial ties, love, and loss, creates a deep connection with audiences. This deliberate projection of multifaceted human experiences invites viewers into a shared space of engagement and reflection, enriching the viewing experience with emotional depth. Supporting this idea, P24 comments, "I love the emotion that they show in the Turkish series. They're not afraid for the men to cry. They're not afraid for the men to show their temper. They're not afraid to show strong women... It's just a very emotional base." These layered



narratives and rich characterizations prompt viewers to reflect on their own lives and relationships. The compelling visual storytelling in *dizi*, marked by landscapes, historical authenticity, and cultural aesthetics, enhances narrative engagement. These visual elements serve not merely as backdrops but as integral components that enrich the emotional narrative, inviting viewers into a more immersive and appreciative viewing experience. Additionally, the attractiveness and talent of Turkish actors and actresses play a major role in captivating audiences: “Turkish actors are amazingly talented! The characters they play are done so well that you’re drawn into their storylines. The number of emotions I feel while watching these shows only proves how brilliant these actors are!” (P21). Most viewers are more likely to engage with and feel empathy for characters acted by attractive and talented performers, these qualities enhance the overall viewing experience and emotional connection. As P16 expressed,

and then I was hooked in this picture shows and I now I only watched Turkish shows. A lot of the Turkish actors are very handsome. But no, I just like, they’re so dramatic. And the storyline was so good. It just felt like a true love story. It felt like a real, honest, old fashioned love story. So that’s why I fell in love. Yeah, that guy is. He’s very handsome.

The contrast in storytelling pace, emotional depth, and portrayal of relationships and gender roles between Turkish dramas and their American counterparts offers viewers a refreshing alternative. Turkish series’ slower pacing and emotional richness provide a contemplative space, diverging from the fast-paced, action-focused narratives common in American media.

### **Building empathy & perceptions of Türkiye, Turkish people, and Turkish culture**

The consumption of Turkish dramas by American audiences results in some shifts in their perceptions of Türkiye and its people. *Dizi* challenge existing stereotypes, promoting an understanding of Türkiye’s social diversity and complexity. Universal themes such as love, family, struggle, and resilience, along with complex character portrayals, lead viewers to see beyond surface-level judgments. This storytelling approach promotes understanding, as viewers connect with characters’ experiences despite cultural differences. For example, P14 remarked,

Before my image of Türkiye was of a 3rd world country with violent fundamentalist citizenry. I thought it was a poor unsophisticated and clannish people. My current perception is very different. From what I have seen it is a beautiful country with welcoming warm people and many cultural treasures.

This evolution in outlook illustrates how the media can reshape perceptions and foster an appreciation for the complexity and richness of Turkish culture.

Turkish dramas also serve an educational purpose by exposing viewers to historical and cultural contexts they might not be familiar with. Through storylines that address historical events, cultural practices, and social issues, these shows provide insights into Turkish heritage and contemporary life, thereby inducing cultural exchange. Initially, some viewers harbored stereotypical perceptions of Türkiye, but the depiction of Türkiye's landscapes, architectural marvels, and historical treasures significantly alters these perceptions. P4 shared,

I think it's beautiful. I think it's lovely... I love the way you get married. Love that with the TV, I love it... I just think the culture I love... I love hearing the call to prayer. Very, very comforted. I don't know why.

Dramas screen Türkiye's beauty, cultural richness, and historical depth, transforming the nation from an abstract location to a desired destination enriched with stories.

Stereotypes often result from a lack of knowledge and exposure to different cultures. By presenting complex characters, Turkish dramas challenge these stereotypes. They screen strong, independent women and caring, emotional men, which can contradict the often simplistic and negative representations of gender roles in the Middle East. By showcasing Turkish society's diversity and cultural richness, these narratives prompt viewers to question their biases, as P.14 shared:

My only previous impression of Türkiye was one that is stereotypical and, in my experience, in no way accurate. I did not envision them as gentle, pleasant, and warm people prior to being exposed to Turkish entertainment and sources of information. They seemed 'other' to me, but I feel closer to them now.

The dramas introduce audiences to a comprehensive view of Turkish culture, from family bonds and social customs to culinary arts and historical milestones. One participant remarked,

It's beautiful. Beautiful. I love when I see the young people within the old people's home. It's just like for a week, as we always say, this film which is, you know, and on a very good day, God bless you, is asking for the blessing. And I think it's beautiful. The music is very good. I like, you know, different music. I love the bands. I loved the guys dancing.

The participant's comments on family dynamics, music and traditions show that Turkish TV series reduce cultural distances through shared human experiences and values. Instead of seeing Turkish culture as foreign or 'other,' viewers begin to recognize elements that intersect with their own cultural experiences and values.

### **Cultural promotion, consumption, and self interest**

The complex narratives and authentic representations spark heightened curiosity for cultural landscapes beyond their familiar confines, illustrating the universal appeal of storytelling in bridging emotional and cultural divides. P16 noted that American audiences' inherent self-centeredness limits their exposure to diverse cultures, and they expressed a desire for greater integration of Turkish cultural aspects in American society: "Americans are very arrogant and self-centered. We pretend like no one else exists in the world... I wish we had more aspects of Turkish culture in our society."

Turkish dramas serve as powerful paths for transcultural dialogue, effectively narrowing the chasm between Eastern and Western cultural spheres. The engagement with Turkish series demonstrates the capacity of international media to create connections across cultural rifts, advocating for a more inclusive global perspective. This sentiment is echoed by P19, who observed, "My view from *Facebook* is that more people from different ethnic groups are watching Turkish television shows instead of the American shows... I feel in time Turkish shows will definitely impact the cultural flow of Americans." Since American viewers mostly watch Turkish TV series with subtitles, they have a different viewing experience by interacting with visual and textual elements simultaneously. As Participant 6 noted below, while subtitles encourage the viewer to make a more active effort to understand the story, sometimes may require 'rewinding

and trying to understand' scenes. This experience feels more like watching a book than opening and reading it, as subtitles involve the viewer in interpreting cultural details on their own. By allowing viewers to actively participate in the process of translation and contextualization, subtitles create a space of escape that is both novel and intellectually stimulating.

...Because there are subtitles. They forced me to sit and watch, one episode a week of each week of the show. So, I mean, obviously. I don't sit there for the whole time, but. I like the fact that I can sit and I'm reading and, and I still have to figure it out... And now rewind it to try to figure out because it doesn't match what I think is happening. Because they're not there. Some of them aren't that good. The the, subtitle. So, it's it's escapism into a world. It's like almost like it's almost like opening up a book, but instead of reading it, you're watching it. Okay. So it's very exciting. So there you go. (P6)

By transcending geographic and cultural boundaries, these dramas not only entertain but also educate, leading to a more interconnected and empathetic world. They reinforce the importance of diverse narratives in the global cultural ecosystem, promoting global cultural exchange and counter-cultural flows. As P14 reflected, "I believe that the more exposure Turkish TV series receive in the USA, the more their culture will be received favorably."

The reception analysis of this research, derived from participant interviews, underscores four key themes: cultural authenticity and appreciation, narrative and emotional engagement, building empathy and perceptions of Türkiye, and cultural promotion. These themes highlight how American audiences perceive Turkish TV dramas, reflecting a fascination with and appreciation for the representation of Turkish culture, traditions, and social values. However, it is important to note that these perceptions are shaped by representations rather than real encounters with Türkiye and its people. The portrayals in Turkish dramas provide a mediated understanding of Turkish culture that may not fully align with the complexities of the actual Turkish experience. Unlike the past, where Turkish representation in the USA was largely mediated by American media, the current portrayal is directly crafted by Turkish media. After examining the implications of the research findings, the following section presents a critical analysis of audience reception based on ethnographic observations.

## Discussion and conclusion

The rise of non-Western content, especially Turkish TV series, in Western markets may seem like a break from Western cultural hegemony, but it reflects a more complex cultural interaction. The melodramatic narrative tradition that characterizes today's Turkish TV series - with its intense emotions, moral conflicts and sometimes seemingly unrealistic plots - is actually present in the history of Turkish cinema itself. Frequent "rich man-poor woman" narratives, over-dramatized character expressions of emotion, or unrealistic plots are meant to reinforce the impact of a universally appealing melodramatic narrative rather than reflect the social structure that exists in Turkish culture (Berg, 2017b). Long before Western media gained widespread access in Türkiye, the Yeşilçam era (1950s-1970s) had already adopted similar themes - impossible loves, class conflicts and family dramas - that we see in TV series today (Yüksel, 2011, pp.93-99). In short, rather than simply adopting Western narrative traditions, Turkish TV series combine modern production values with this rich melodramatic heritage. While productions such as *Muhteşem Yüzyıl (The Magnificent Century, 2011)* or *Kara Para Aşk (Black Money Love, 2014)* employ sophisticated cinematography and production techniques associated with Western television, the core of their narratives - with their emphasis on complex family dynamics, fateful coincidences and emotional intensity - is distinctly rooted in the Turkish melodramatic tradition. In this context, even if Turkish TV series offer cultural authenticity, the fact that they are shaped by Western narrative patterns does not completely distance them from the content forms of Western media and makes them dependent on these narrative forms to a certain extent. This hybrid form indicates that the global media landscape continues to be shaped by transnational capitalist norms, even while superficially embracing diversity which manifests as the inclusion of non-Western stories and characters while maintaining Western storytelling conventions and production values. The cultural exposure through media often leads to a superficial appreciation rather than a deep, transformative understanding of the "other" (Cruz et al., 2024). The appeal of these narratives to Western audiences should not be mistaken for a genuine cross-cultural exchange or a challenge to transnational entertainment influence. The difference between what is shown and what actually happens is a reminder that watching these stories does not imply a genuine cultural mix. Instead, non-Western narratives presented in Western formats suggest that cultural products are shaped in a consumption-oriented way to adapt to transnational market demands, and that this adaptation creates a consumption-oriented effect rather than an authentic cultural exchange. The critical view lies in examining not only the content

but also the structural dynamics of transnational media production, which is evident in several aspects of Turkish TV series. While *The Magnificent Century* presents Ottoman history, it does so through heightened drama and visual spectacle designed to appeal to international audiences rather than historical accuracy. Besides, contemporary Turkish series like *Black Money Love* maintain their melodramatic elements but package them with glossy production values and universal themes that align with global market expectations. Cultural elements are often modified or amplified to meet commercial demands as traditional family values are dramatized for effect and cultural conflicts are simplified for broader appeal. Transnational media production often prioritizes marketability over authentic cultural representation, transforming cultural elements into consumable entertainment products.

Regarding the relation between the conservative culture appreciation of Türkiye and the tendency of a conservative society in the US nowadays, the interviews suggest that the conservative elements in Turkish TV series appeal to some American viewers who are either part of or sympathetic to conservative values in the USA. These viewers appreciate the representation of a society where individualist, family, and ironically, communal values are prioritized, which they find refreshing and lacking in American entertainment media. This does not necessarily mean a direct influence of Turkish culture on American viewers but rather an appreciation for narratives that echo existing values or a nostalgia for such values. The concept of “cultural odor” (Iwabuchi, 2002) can help to explain why American audiences are drawn to Turkish dramas. It highlights the distinctive cultural characteristics embedded in media content. The prominence of traditional norms and conservative social values in Turkish dramas corresponds with the preferences of American audiences who value such, making these productions more engaging for them. While traditional norms and conservative social values in Turkish TV series are portrayed in modern stories through moral conflicts centered around love, loyalty and family ties, in historical TV series social values are portrayed through conservative perspectives of the Ottoman or Seljuk period, where elements such as social hierarchy, gender roles and male authority remain unchanged. Thus, Turkish TV series, whether dealing with historical or contemporary themes, present a distinctive identity that attracts Western viewers through the consistency of cultural norms and values. Among the participants, the majority of individuals from different age groups show a strong commitment to religious and family values in their daily lives. These range from regular visits to church to volunteer work in religious organizations. P24, 32 years-old, said, “Yesterday I went to church, then I visited a lady who will be 90

years old... She prepared me a delicious meal of pork loin, green beans, carrots and potatoes," illustrating how religious and friendship values are intertwined in everyday life. Quality time spent with family is also of particular importance for these viewers; family meals, attending children's school events or watching sporting events together are essential elements of everyday life. Family-oriented practices are also reflected in television viewing experiences. As a matter of fact, university student P17 stated, "When *Sultan* [TV series] was on, my family would get together every night to watch it. It was a big event where everyone gathered and watched it together," revealing that family ties are strengthened through media consumption. It is precisely at this point that the interest in conservative values portrayed in Turkish TV series among American viewers gains meaning.

Ethnographic observations and interviews reveal that most participants, regardless of age, have a nostalgic longing for traditional American values and lifestyle (American Dream). While older participants draw from lived experiences, younger and middle-aged viewers express this nostalgia through their critique of contemporary American media content. P24 stated that "American TV shows are all about sex, there is no real connection between people. They also belittle women. This disturbs me," captures the underlying tension between traditional values and contemporary media content. Similarly, a young viewer (P10) who turned to Turkish TV series with nostalgic feelings said, "Sweet love stories like in *Heartbeats*, slow-building romance... I really like these," expressing her longing for traditional narratives.

Nostalgia, which emerges as a reaction to social change and instability, provides a kind of comfort to viewers by reminding them of a simpler and idealized past (Pickering & Keightley, 2006). For American viewers of different age groups, the conservative values, strong family ties and traditional lifestyles portrayed in Turkish TV series evoke a sense of familiarity and longing for values that they perceive to be weakened in today's society. Interviews reveal the prevalence of this feeling across generations: A 47-year-old viewer (P17) said: "The dramas are wonderfully written. Reminds me of romance novels I read as a teenager minus the sexual content," while a 52-year-old participant (P5) said, "I think the older stuff is more romantic... of course, and, remind you of things you might have forgotten and let you see different perspectives." These views, together with P26's observations that community and family-centered narratives recall her own home and neighborhood experiences, illustrate how audiences of different ages connect with these narratives through their own memories and ideals.

This multigenerational nostalgia, rather than age-related nostalgia, points to a broader cultural response to the perceived shift towards individualism and the weakening of community and family ties.

When participants talk about their youth and how it differs from today, they often recall a time when outdoor play was the norm, neighborhood relationships were strong, and entertainment was found in community gatherings and family activities. The link between this nostalgic longing and Turkish TV series can be seen in the viewers' appreciation of the series that transports them to a world where these values are still alive. In a rapidly changing world, media offers audiences the opportunity to connect with an idealized past (Boym, 2008; Niemeyer, 2014). By emphasizing traditional values, respect for elders and the importance of family and community life, Turkish TV series offer an escape from the materialistic and fast-paced lifestyle that viewers associate with modern American society.

American interest in Turkish TV series has developed through a cultural perspective where Western audiences meet unfamiliar traditions, histories, and beliefs, creating new ways of seeing the Muslim world and Middle Eastern culture. The appeal stems from how these series present Islamic faith, Ottoman history, and Turkish customs—elements often oversimplified or misrepresented in American media through stereotyping of Muslim identity in USA media (Pennington, 2003). As P19 remarked, "I used to think they're uneducated low class middle eastern looking people."

Through these encounters, viewers discover and appreciate cultural elements that challenge their prior assumptions about Muslim societies. P29's comment about learning Ottoman history and peaceful aspects of Islam points to how these series help transform long-held misconceptions:

We learned about the Roman Empire. We learned about the Greek Empire... we never learned the Ottoman Empire ever. So that's very new to Americans. That's why I was so mesmerized by this. And again, the introduction to Islam, was also very, very interesting because I didn't know the piece of peaceable religion.

In the context of post-9/11 American media (Alsultany, 2012), where Muslims often appear through negative stereotypes (Bleich & van der Veen, 2022), Turkish series create alternative ways of understanding Islamic culture and Middle Eastern traditions through daily life stories and relatable characters.



The appeal of the “exotic” is not just a fascination with cultural differences but often involves a process of othering, where the foreign culture is romanticized and consumed as an entertainment commodity rather than fully understood in its own context (Said, 1978). The interest of Turkish cultural elements, while genuine in its attraction, often stops short of meaningful engagement with Türkiye’s social complexities. What emerges instead is a kind of cultural window-shopping, where distinctive aspects of Turkish life become consumable entertainment rather than windows into authentic cultural understanding.

American viewers’ attraction to Turkish TV series is part of a broader trend in global media consumption, where audiences are increasingly drawn to narratives that showcase cultural, ethnic, or racial elements perceived as exotic or distinct from their own norms. Such attraction to unfamiliar cultures reflects global media’s tendency to present differences through familiar storytelling frameworks, balancing exotic appeal with comfortable accessibility (Iwabuchi, 2002; Appadurai, 1996). In the context of transnational media production, the fascination of the foreign is both constructed and consumed within specific cultural and media ecosystems. For American viewers, Turkish TV series serve as a portal to a culture that is simultaneously familiar in its universal themes of love, family, and struggle, and exotic in its distinct cultural practices, values, and historical narratives. This dual nature of Turkish dramas—both exotic and relatable—enhances their appeal but also frames the viewers’ engagement through the lens of their own cultural backgrounds and media expectations (Appadurai, 1996).

As American audiences watch Turkish TV series, they make sense of new cultural elements by relating them to their own experiences and knowledge. Based on viewers’ responses to perceived similarities and differences, these cultural negotiations manifest through various levels of understanding. For instance, some viewers express immediate recognition based on appearance, as P23 notes “That Turkish people look just like us. That they aren’t all dark-skinned and hair.” Others engage with cultural parallels while acknowledging distinctions, as shown in P27’s observation “They are very kind people. They’re just like us. They just have different, they, you know, traditions.” However, as evidenced in these viewer responses, statements like “You are like us” can subtly position the speaker’s own culture as the standard or norm against which others are measured. Such comparisons reflect viewers’ attempts to bridge cultural gaps through recognition of shared human experiences, while consciously or unconsciously reinforcing a cultural hierarchy where the American way of life becomes the benchmark for accepting and validating different cultural experiences.

Turkish dramas have adapted to the digital medium by embracing a format that mirrors the episodic-narrative familiar to audiences of traditional American soap operas. Based on the established narrative structure of American soap operas—with their extended episodes, complex character developments, and emotional storytelling—these series attract viewers through recognizable formats while offering fresh cultural perspectives. A viewer articulates this connection, observing “It’s kind of like to me, they’re like telenovelas... like 60 episodes, 80 episodes, really long. But I can watch them because they’re good soap.” As these dramas find their place on digital platforms, they transform traditional narrative patterns into binge-worthy experiences, where familiar storytelling meets contemporary viewing habits. “*Netflix* was becoming a big thing. And they have like a whole bunch of different shows from different countries... And I saw this one show... *Love Bird* in English,” explains one viewer, illustrating how streaming platforms facilitate this cultural convergence. Streaming platforms turn these cultural encounters into daily routines, as viewers slip easily between familiar stories and fresh perspectives.

The blend of digital access and viewer experience creates new connections to American television’s past. A viewer’s reflection on past viewing experiences—“At least in the 70s and 80s, there was a little bit more of a story... I love the music in Turkish series. Older American shows and movies used to have more music”—reveals how Turkish dramas evoke nostalgic elements of American media culture. In the context of digital streaming, where content increasingly transcends national boundaries, these cultural resonances suggest how traditional storytelling techniques maintain their appeal while adapting to new media environments, creating what Banet-Weiser and colleagues (2007) describe as an expansion of viewers’ horizons through established viewing preferences.

### **Closing observations**

This ethnographic study aims to understand the dynamics and limits of the intercultural dialog realized through Turkish soap operas. First, the family values, traditional lifestyles and community relations popularized by the series fulfill a nostalgic longing in viewers for values that American society has lost. Second, while the series transform prejudices about Turkish culture, Islam and Ottoman history, this transformation is limited within the commercial dynamics of transnational media partnerships. Third, while Turkish TV series create opportunities for genuine cultural dialogue, this interaction is shaped by the consumption-oriented structure of global capitalism.

Current TNMC production and distribution has consequences for the perceptions of global viewers in every nation and culture. Given the shared profit motives of transnational media partners, content available for global viewers conforms to the entertainment narratives appealing to consuming audiences and advertisers. While Turkish TV series have achieved international success primarily through productions produced in Türkiye, emerging transnational co-productions in Europe, the US and Latin America provide additional distribution channels for these series. With almost immediate access to digital streaming on computers, laptops, and cell phones, viewers almost everywhere are drawn to entertainment promoting individualism, consumerism, and other ideological themes such as militarism, austerity, and patriarchy necessary for global capitalism.

In conclusion, this study contributes to the broader discourse on transnational media flows, offering a replacement for cultural imperialism theory with more concrete and valuable insights into the actual dynamics of cultural cooperation resulting from transnational joint ventures and partnerships. Ironically, in the process of seeking global audiences and advertisers, transnational media contain some potential for narratives fostering mutual understanding and appreciation between disparate cultures. However, conditions for transcultural exchange remain limited by the political economic structures of transnational media partnerships and joint ventures primarily intended for profiting TNMCs and promoting a global culture of consumption—rather than real cultural exchange. The reception of Turkish TV series by American viewers exemplifies the complex interplay between transnational media and consumerist culture in a globalized world, highlighting media's capacity to integrate geographical and cultural boundaries for the narrow purpose of media profit.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>While these research questions are framed for 'American viewers' in general, it should be noted that the study participants were all women. This was not by design but a result of the participant recruitment process. The findings should be viewed with this context in mind.

<sup>2</sup>This study was reviewed and received approval from the Purdue University Human Research Protection Program (HRPP). It was deemed exempt from IRB review on March 2, 2023 (IRB-2023-311). The study was classified under exemption categories 2(i) and

2(ii), which cover research involving surveys and interviews where participant identities are protected and responses do not pose risks to participants.

**Ethics Committee Approval:** This study was reviewed and received approval from the Purdue University Human Research Protection Program (HRPP). It was deemed exempt from IRB review on March 2, 2023 (IRB-2023-311).

**Informed Consent:** Informed consent was obtained from the participants.

**Hakem Değerlendirmesi:** Dış bağımsız.

**Peer-review:** Externally peer-reviewed.

**Author Contributions:** Conception/Design of study: U.B., L.A.; Data Acquisition: U.B.; Data Analysis/ Interpretation: U.B., L.A.; Drafting Manuscript: U.B., L.A.; Critical Revision of Manuscript: U.B., L.A.; Final Approval and Accountability: U.B., L.A.

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**Yazar Katkısı:** Çalışma Konsepti/Tasarımı: U.B., L.A.; Veri Toplama: U.B.; Veri Analizi /Yorumlama U.B., L.A.; Yazı Taslağı: U.B., L.A.; İçeriğin Eleştirel İncelemesi: U.B., L.A.; Son Onay ve Sorumluluk: U.B., L.A.

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