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# Proximity in Modernity: Representation of Turkish Melodramas in the Middle East and the Balkans

Yesim Kaptan\*<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Izmir University of Economics (IEU) – Turquie

## Résumé

### Biography

**Yesim Kaptan** is an assistant professor at Izmir University of Economics in Izmir, Turkey. Her research interests are culture industries, consumer culture, and global media studies. She received a PhD in Communication and Culture and Folklore and Ethnomusicology (double major) at Indiana University, Bloomington (USA). Her articles have appeared in the International Journal of Communication, the Journal of Consumer Culture, Global Media Journal, The Journal of Arab & Muslim Media Research.

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### Abstract

After Turkish TV series aired on Arab and European satellite networks during the 2000s, the debates which appeared in the foreign press about Turkish television series attracted the attention of the Turkish media. Particularly the Turkish press showed a great interest in the broadcasts of these television series in the Middle East and Europe. Stories about the cultural and social impact of Turkish dramas on Arab viewers and Eastern European audiences appeared in the news one after another. This paper analyzes how Turkish newspapers and online news websites present and discuss the rise of Turkish cultural products in neighboring regions, such as the Balkans, the Middle East, and Eastern Europe. Why have Turkish television dramas prompted the Turkish press to talk about proximity, difference and modernity? How do Turkish language newspapers frame and represent the popularity of Turkish TV series circulating through international media? To answer these questions, this study focuses on discourses of *proximity*, *difference* and *modernity* in the news. The author argues that Turkish media discourses on the perception of Turkish television dramas by Arab and European audiences informs us about Turkey's own struggle between binary oppositions in ontological categories such as the East and the West, and modernity and tradition.

This research employs textual analysis of the coverage in Turkish print media and news websites of discourses about Turkish television series generated by the foreign press. Six Turkish-language newspapers (*Radikal*, *Hürriyet*, *Milliyet*, *Zaman*, *Yeni Şafak*, *Haber Türk*), an English-language daily in Turkey (*Hürriyet Daily News*) and a Turkish news website (*Doğan Haber Ajansı*) were analyzed in this study since the research focuses on disputes over representations in Turkish television series in neighboring countries and on discourses involving successful Turkish television series. These newspapers were chosen regarding the frequency of a stream of stories about the cultural and social impact of Turkish dramas on Arab viewers and Eastern European audiences appearing in the Turkish news between 2008 and 2012.

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\*Intervenant

Based on an analysis of a corpus of more than 100 articles taken from these newspapers and a news agency from January 2008 through December 2012, this research reveals that the newspaper discourses constellate around the construction of the Other by Turkish actors through cultural proximity in order to reposition Turkey within an epoch of emerging power dynamics in the Greater Middle East and the Balkans. By exploring disputes over representations in Turkish television series such as *Aşk-i Memnu* (Forbidden Love), *Deli Yürek* (Brave Heart), *Binbir Gece* (A thousand nights), *Kurtlar Vadisi* (Valley of the Wolves), *Gümüş* (Silver), or *Noor* dubbed in Arabic, and recently *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* (The Magnificent Century) and discourses around the successful Turkish television series in Turkish newspapers, I examine debates over the contested meanings of modernity in Turkey.