

The Soft Power of Turkish Historical Drama Marketed at the Arab World Payitaht: Abdülhamid Series as a Model

القوة الناعمة للدراما التاريخية التركية الموجهة للعالم العربي
مسلسل عبد الحميد الثاني – أنموذجا -

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Abstract:

Since the Justice and Development party (AKP) came to power in 2002, Turkey's foreign policy has went through profound developments, specifically in terms of the Arab world given its historical, strategic, and economic importance. In order for its foreign policy ambitions to be met, Turkey had to culturally and historically reintegrate itself with the Arab world. This also meant cleansing Turkey's image from misconceptions, especially in regards to its relations with the Zionist entity and to its alienation from its culture as well as its secular extremism. It was then necessary to make use of Soft Power tools such as media, cinema, and culture in order to appeal to peoples of the Arab region and to reconcile with them on the grounds of historical and religious ties and similarities in cultures and customs. Thus, Ottoman history was invoked to target religious feelings and drama became one of the soft infiltration strategies on which the AKP relied to market an ideal image of Turkey; to reintegrate the Arab world by rebuilding relations with it; to foster the sympathy of the region's peoples; and to make Turkey's political, economic, and social models admirable.

Keywords: Soft Power, historical drama, the Arab world, foreign policy, Turkey.

ملخص:

شهدت السياسة الخارجية لتركيا منذ وصول حزب العدالة والتنمية إلى سدة الحكم سنة 2002، تطورات عميقة في خطوطها العامة، خصوصا اتجاه العالم العربي، وهذا بالنظر إلى الأهمية التاريخية والإستراتيجية والاقتصادية للعالم العربي، باعتباره حديقة خلفية أو عمق إستراتيجي، ولتحقيق هذه المطامح كان من الضروري إعادة التطيع الثقافي والحضاري مع محيطها العربي، وتغيير ذلك الانطباع السائد عن تركيا، ذلك البلد المرتبط بعلاقات حميمة مع الكيان الصهيوني، والموغل في الاغتراب عن إطاره الحضاري والموسوم بالتشدد في علمانية الدولة والمجتمع.

فكان من الضروري توظيف موارد القوة الناعمة، كالإعلام والسينما والثقافة، من أجل خطب ود شعوب المنطقة العربية، والتصالح معها على أساس وجود روابط تاريخية ودينية، وتشابه العادات والتقاليد، مع استحضار التاريخ العثماني لإثارة العواطف والمشاعر الدينية، فشكّلت الدراما إحدى آليات التغلغل الناعم، التي اعتمد عليها لتسويق صورة خارجية نموذجية عن تركيا، واختراق العالم العربي من خلال إعادة ربط العلاقات معه، ودفع شعوب المنطقة للتطبيع مع ذلك والتعاطف مع قضاياها، وخلق حالة من الانبهار والإعجاب بنموذجها السياسي والاقتصادي والاجتماعي.

كلمات مفتاحية: القوة الناعمة، الدراما التاريخية، العالم العربي، السياسة الخارجية، تركيا.

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Introduction:

In an age of globalization, cinematic and dramatic artistic works have become some of the most important Soft Power tools countries can utilize to strengthen their presence and increase their influence beyond their geographical confines. During the past years, given the growth of the up-to-date drama and film industry, the utilization of said industry has taken shape both regionally and globally, specifically in the Arab region. In this regard, the goals behind cinematic and dramatic productions are varied between boosting the tourism sector and improving country image or serving foreign policy goals.

An example of Turkey's Soft Power tools directed at the Arab region would be drama and filmmaking due to the indirect political objectives that they are purposed with and that they can transmit to reinforce the spread and influence of Turkey regionally and globally in a soft manner. This tactic proved to be successful as Turkish drama, especially the historical genre, has managed in the last decade to attract Arab people socially, culturally, and economically to interact and sympathize with Turkey's domestic issues.

This brings us to the following research question: to what extent does Turkish drama marketed at the Arab region, specifically in its historical side, contribute to the betterment of the country's image and to the fulfilment of its foreign policy goals?

To answer the question asked, this research is divided into an introduction, a conclusion, and five parts:

1. Defining the Concepts:
 - 1.1 Soft Power
 - 1.2 Historical Drama
2. The Historical Dimension of the Turkish-Arab Relations
3. The Factors behind the Spread of Turkish Drama among Arabs
4. Payitaht Abdülhamid Series as a Model of Soft Turkish Drama
5. The Strategic Softness of Turkish Drama towards Arab Public Opinion

1. Defining the Concepts

1.1 Soft Power

Throughout history, power has always been the primary driving force behind international events and relationships. For many decades, in political terms, power meant hard power which includes military force and economic power. This is the definition that was adopted by the realist school to understand international relations and it relies on a country's material capacities and its capability to use said capacities to pressure its enemies into doing what it wants in order to achieve its goals and serve its personal interests.

In 1990, the concept of Soft Power was put forth by Harvard University professor Joseph Nye in his book, *Bound To Lead: The Changing Nature Of American Power*, where he states that Soft Power is the ability to attract and include without resorting to coercion or using power as a means of convincing. What this signifies is a country having a spiritual and moral authority through the embodiment of a set of ideas, principles, and morals by providing support in the areas of human rights, environment, infrastructure, culture, art, and aid which ultimately leads others to respect this style, take a liking to it, and eventually be persuaded by its initiators. Power, then, can be exercised in three ways according to Nye: the first one being coercive threats (sticks), the second one being inducements (carrots), and the third one being attraction. The combination of the first and second ones represents hard power and the third one is Soft Power. (Nye, 1990, p 36)

With Nye's new conceptualization of Soft Power in his book *The Paradox of American Power*, he maintains that the Soft Power of the United States of America (USA) is one of the most prominent civilizational models which attracts millions with its cultural and political values along with freedom of speech, democracy, and diplomacy. When it comes to the sources of Soft Power, Joseph Nye enumerates three elements in his book *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*; they are as follows (Nye J. S., 2007, p 22):

- Culture (in instances where it is attractive to others)
- Political values (when they are adopted both domestically and abroad)
- Foreign policy (when it is seen by others as legitimate and morally authoritative)

Accordingly, the new sources of power presented by Nye include science and knowledge, tourism, arts, cinema and drama, sports, media, and international image –all of which makes 'Soft Power' one of the most employed terms in world politics as a way to speak on the influence of literature, science, arts, and sports.

1.2 Smart Power

The radical changes in the international system alongside the abundance of information which is rapidly circulated has made it impossible to categorically separate Soft Power from hard power as the former cannot exist and prosper without the latter for what the latter offers of capacities that ensure the Soft Power's prosperity and ability to influence. Consequently, it became necessary for a new term to emerge which would combine the two concepts of Soft Power and hard power and which would be beneficial in creating a legitimate power that would actually make an impact on an international scale. Said term would come to be noun as 'smart power' and it is a concept introduced by Joseph Nye in *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*. The term was introduced as a response against the misconception surrounding the idea of Soft Power needing to be employed individually in order to achieve foreign policy goals, and also due to the necessity of shifting towards a wider and more encompassing definition that is developed to include both soft and hard powers considering the two to be in pace with various international developments, with the

impossibility for neither to be relinquished. Smart Power is defined by Ernest Wilson as the ability of an actor to blend the elements of the soft and the hard powers in a manner that secures its goals efficiently and effectively. (Nye J. S., 2007, p 23)

Soft Power does not imply the disappearance of hard power tools; it is used in appropriate instances and it usually operates in a framework of exchange and compatibility with the economic, political, and military tools of hard power. If softness came to be synonymous with weakness and incapability, it would be so not by choice, but out of necessity; oftentimes, that is what deprives it of its power –even from a symbolic aspect. Hence, it can fall under the umbrella of public relations rather than political relations and be distanced from international relations in the precise scientific sense.

Soft Power is, therefore, not a fixed concept. It changes according to the contexts and tools of cultural influence and their qualitative changes in light of the conceptual changes of place and geography. Soft Power can also fluctuate depending on the moral capital stock of the country that wishes to be a role model, as well as the actual capital stock that the country invests in that domain in terms of allocations and budgets so that it manages to pursue the exercise of power and influence. (Nye J. S., 2007, p 24)

1.3 Historical Drama

The definition of drama can be applied to the definition of media as it is the art of conveying information to people. What characterizes drama is its ability to manipulate the audience's feelings and emotions in order to convince them of a specific idea or to bring their attention to a certain product. It is also very popular and is interacted with by youngsters and adults as well as men and women alike. Nowadays, television drama scores the highest viewing rates in comparison with other types of drama. (Abdullah, 2010, p 17)

Being initially a product of imagination that has nothing to do with reality considering the fact that its events and characters are usually drawn out of the dramatist's imagination, drama has a large room to represent cultures and behaviours that are unfamiliar to the audience and that qualifies it to deal with taboos under the guise of imagination. (Mustapha, 2010, p 11)

In addition to that, drama maintains a pivotal role in bringing up historical events and readjusting them for better or for worse to the audience tuning in. Many are the historical events which were tucked away in books far from the general public and that drama has managed to revitalize and immortalize in people's minds. Not only that, but it also provides a better understanding of the present since history is an essential source to learn lessons from historical events that continuously repeat themselves. Thus, drama plays an important role in quenching the knowledge needs of the targeted audience. (Muhammad, 2019, p 28)

Drama also has a magical effect in commemorating historical events as well as historical and religious figures, especially in the minds of the general public since a big portion of society do not dedicate their time to read history books and what they contain of important events connected to their political, social, economic, and ideological reality. Drama, therefore, has the attractive capacity to pull out events from books and devise creative ways that concern and are meant for people to be more aware of relevant details concerned with their history and their historical figures. (Muhammad, 2019, p 29)

It is in such a manner that television drama has managed during its relatively short lifespan to secure a esteemed position amongst the majority of other artistic means of expression as well as

benefiting from different means of media and communication and other technological advancements. The last quarter of the last twentieth century has seen, as Syrian director Najdat Anzour puts it, strong indicators for the birth of an eighth art form which is the art of television drama that makes use of words and images, dramatic actions, music, and lighting within a certain specificity. (Masri, 2010, p 42)

2. The Historical Dimension of the Turkish-Arab Relations

The abolishment of the Caliphate and Turkish foreign policy cutting ties with the Arab and Muslim world since 1924 were significant landmarks in Turkey's foreign inclination becoming European oriented. What such orientation required was building tight and strategic relationships with Europe and the USA while simultaneously distancing one's self from the Middle East which Turkey regarded as an obstacle for its reinvention project. The dominant approach in this reorientation was an inward focus on providing protection against being affected by the pervasive turmoil within the Middle East.

With the coming to end of the Islamic World's Ottoman era, which lasted four centuries and ended at the beginning of the twentieth century, perceptions of Turkish and Arab national identities changed and became individualistic. The lack of trust and the exchanged accusations between Arabs and Turks resulted in the former siding with the British against the Ottomans during World War I and in Turkish leader Kemal Atatürk administrating an epistemological break with Islamic heritage. Atatürk's political philosophy was in a large part concerned with refusing the state of weakness and expansion that characterized the country's past years. There was also a conviction towards the presence of Ottomans in Arab and Middle Eastern countries being the reason for the state's weakness and going against the establishment of a modern, united Turkey. (Nouredine, 1997, p 235)

Turkey's new leadership pivoted towards westernization and a disregard of the East that it deemed as the main source for its backwardness and tardiness, and for the fall of the Ottoman Empire. Growing hostile feelings towards Ottoman Turks ensued from the strategic choices made by Atatürk in becoming a part of the "developed" West and being separate from the "underdeveloped" East, and a new generation of educated Arabs emerged with the conviction that it was necessary to reappraise Arab peoples and be separated from the state of decadence associated with the Ottoman rule. (Nouredine, 1997, p 236)

The historical background of Turkish-Arab relations has made it so that they would be characterized by crises and tepidity in different sectors as a result of a clash of interests and plans of moving from a latent backdrop to one of knowledge and science that was witnessed by Europe during the eighteenth century and that allowed it to take on a dominant position in history (Mechaane, *The Turkish Strategy toward the Middle East: A Study in Light of The Factors of Regional Change*, 2017, p 245)

Turkish-Arab relations would afterwards take on a transformative route in the different areas of economic, political, and diplomatic cooperation, especially after the coming to power of the Justice and Development Party (AKP - Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi) on October 3rd, 2002 despite its efforts in joining the European Union. The refusal of the USA's requests by Turkey's Parliament in 2003 to employ Turkish military bases against the North of Iraq and the increase of criticism regarding Israeli policies against Palestinians played a major role in restoring the amicable relations

between the Arab and Turkish sides. This also rid both sides from some levels of suspicion and scepticism. The AKP's focus then shifted to the use of Soft Power with the aim of promoting policies that equilibrate between Islamic heritage and the secular, civil decisions of the modern republic of Turkey. This is where Turkish media programs came to play a crucial role. (Mechaane, The Turkish Strategy toward the Middle East: A Study in Light of The Factors of Regional Change, 2017, p 246)

3. The Factors behind the Spread of Turkish Drama among Arabs

The media market of the Arab region in recent years has been the subject of a fierce competition between drama and film makers regionally and globally with the intent of acquiring the largest broadcast share possible. Additionally, satellite channels in the region have been competing over the broadcast rights of the most famous regional and international drama productions which made the market for Turkish dramas to expand alongside other dramatic works of other competing countries.

The spread of Turkish dramas in the Arab region is due to a number of factors, the most notable of which being:

1. The Increasing Demand on Non-Arab Dramas from Satellite Channels: with the continuous broadcasting hours throughout the day, broadcasting channels –specifically those specializing in drama content– have made sure to vary the types of dramas that they show as a way of attracting viewers and eventually getting sponsors and a share of the commercial advertisement market; this being one of the most important revenue generating devices through which channels can fulfil their obligations towards their employees and to improve their performances.

2. Dubbing non-Arab Dramas: dubbing non-Arab dramas to Arabic has helped the spread of said dramas to a great extent. When doing so, broadcasting channels went with colloquial language rather than standard Arabic and they also changed foreign names into Arabic ones for consumer accessibility. This has led dubbed dramas to be circulated mostly in the Syrian dialect, followed by the Egyptian, the Tunisian, and the Moroccan dialects respectively.

3. Dealing with a Plethora of Subjects: most dramas trending in Arab media are of a high level of artistry as they have beautiful cinematography and high level directing, and they feature stunning nature sceneries. This captivates consumers and keeps them tuning in so that they get to be presented with more aesthetically pleasing elements in light of the dullness of local content and its low technical quality –all of which benefits the aforementioned trending dramas.

4. The Politicization of Art: drama and film makers use these mediums for many reasons; they go beyond enjoyment and entertainment and can instead serve the foreign policy goals of the drama producing countries. Some countries have relied on dramas as a foreign policy tool that would reinforce their soft spread and influence regionally and globally. Turkey, for instance, has recently played the most prominent role in this context –even when preceded by Egyptian drama and filmmaking– as many reasons led to the eminence of Turkish drama that managed to reach Latin America and the Caucasus as well as its wild spread in the Arab region by relying on the Syrian dialect for dubbing in the Gulf countries, the Arab Levant, and Egypt, and on the Tunisian and Moroccan dialects in North Africa.

Turkish drama begun to spread in Arab countries since 2007 where Turkey managed to market its series to more than 100 countries around the world in such a way that generated,

according to some estimates, profits reaching 300 million dollars a year as the revenue obtained from selling the series. Dramas have also benefited real estate and tourism as both have been booming for years thanks to the series promoting touristic sites and showcasing Turkish buildings from villas, to palaces, to apartments in a manner that pushes investors into buying and inventing). (Nour Alouane, 2020)

In the end, it can be said that the success of drama in spreading beyond geographical boundaries and language barriers, despite differences between peoples in their cultures and customs, puts it in a position where it can continue to reach the goals it sets to achieve, especially since there is a growing tendency for countries to use their dramatic productions to serve their foreign policies.

4. *Payitaht: Abdülhamid Series as a Model of Soft Turkish Drama*

Many drama productions document important historical events that took place in the past, the benefit of which being educating audiences about the history of nations and the human experiences that their ancestors underwent. Television dramas that are purposed with such a goal are important in the sense that they are the fastest and most efficient way to be informed about the life and legacy of historical figures and to commemorate them.

The Sultan Abdülhamid series is one of the popular television drama that had a great impact on people. The events of the drama were narrated in a series of clusters that extend over a long period of time which is why a group of main conflicts and sub-conflicts are found in the scenario; this creates an emotional connection between the series characters and the audience.

The historical series of Sultan Abdülhamid provides viewers with a number of technical dramatic indicators about the most important historical events witnessed by the Ottoman Empire during the rule of the last legitimate Sultans and Caliphates of the empire. The series was first broadcasted on February 24th, 2017 and would go on to be produced in four parts that documented the most notable events from the last thirteen years (1896-1909) of the rule of Sultan Abdülhamid, the second. (Edrissi, 2019, p 21)

The most important dramatic historical indicators of the series are as follows:

a) Rectifying History: being the official media company of the republic of Turkey, TRT channel took on the production of Sultan Abdülhamid series in order to present a more accurate and fitting image of the great Sultan given all of the criticism and misrepresentation towards this historical figure in Turkey's contemporary history. Many political analysts of the current Turkish leadership think of that behaviour as being a manifestation of a longing to revive the glories of the Ottoman past and to clear up the misconstrued historical image of the Sultan. Research confirms that the revival of the history of Sultan Abdülhamid comes under the keenness of conservative decision-makers in Turkey (the AKP) to praise the Sultan who has stood against ethnic intolerance, antagonism between different political components, and estrangement from Islamic heritage. (Policy Brief, 2017, p 2)

What can be inferred from the Sultan Abdülhamid series is that it deals with the final period before the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the establishment of a modern Turkish republic which is a political ideological utilization of this historical legacy because it represents the acknowledgement of a kind of structural interrelatedness between the Turkish and Arab recipients from the challenges experienced by the Sultan and the hostilities of Zionist enemies along with other imperial powers, to

the ongoing hostilities and conspiracies surrounding the current president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and the coup attempt in the summer of 2006. (Policy Brief, 2017, p 3)

b) The Continuance of Zionist Ambitions: the series showcases some figures of the Zionist movement and their spies in an attempt to deceive Ottoman leaders in a planned and systematic framework to establish an Israeli state. It made sure to uncover the infiltration tactics and strategies used to distort Islamic history and combat the Ottoman Sultan for Zionist ambitions to establish their state on Palestinian soil after he refused to sell lands from Jerusalem to the leader of the Zionist movement, Theodor Herzl, in exchange for Turkey's debts to be paid (Eddrissi, 2019, p 22).

The series also emphasizes the Zionist movement's disposition to fabricate and its role in conspiratorial coups and separatist rebellions during the thirteen years of the rule of Sultan Abdülhamid of whom the loyalty and commitment towards the protection of Jerusalem from Zionist ambitions and agendas have been documented in the series as well.

c) The Unity of the Islamic Nation: the series deals with the strategies put forth by the West and the Jews for psychological manipulation and the implementation of doubt regarding the effectiveness of remaining under the rule of the Ottoman Empire that sustains a conservative Islamic model. Another thing the series focuses on is the political awareness of the Sultan's character that was always alert to plans threatening the spirit of Islamic unity and continuously confronted colonial ambitions and orientalist thoughts. Sultan Abdülhamid sought to found an Islamic university with the goal of overcoming conflicts and strengthening the state in the face of threatening conspiracies of divisions. (Essalabi, 2017)

Additionally, the series displayed issues of identity and the questioning of religious importance in political practice, and it showed that the fall of the Ottoman Empire was caused from within at the hands of its people despite the Sultan's attempts to defy its disintegration and protect the unity of the Islamic nation, and that the adoption of a Western secular model has not solved the issue of identity crisis.

d) Conspiring against Strong Leaderships and Internal Betrayals: the Turkish scene has witnessed large discussions regarding the considerable similarities between the July 2016 coup attempt against the current Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and the 1909 rebellion of the Young Turks against Sultan Abdülhamid. Said discussions were packaged differently and contradictorily as some were concerned with the tragic fate of a tyrannical Sultan, whilst others were concerned with the dangers of treason and conspiracy and following foreign parties' instructions against every Turkish leadership carrying out national projects.

Sultan Abdülhamid series promoted the idea that conspiracies having the power and capability to fracture the Turkish people's unity was not due to the weakness of the state and its mindlessness about the danger of the situation, but that it was rather due to the dispersion of social and political ties and the desire to conquer in order to seize power. Furthermore, the Sultan's acumen and his great ability to run general affairs and defy conspiracies despite the social and political changes that Turkey went through at that time (nationalism, Turkification, secularism, and radicalism...) from one part, and the 2016 coup attempt and its reminiscence of what happened nearly a century ago from another part, can almost explain the importance of the popular regard to the strong and capable leadership combining power and participatory approach approaches, even in the face of accusations of tyranny faced by Erdoğan. (Eddrissi, 2019, p 24)

5. The Strategic Softness of Turkish Drama towards Arab Public Opinion

The series of Sultan Abdülhamid was a true gamble for the current politics of the AKP who attributes a huge importance to Turkish-Arab relations on the grounds that Turks and Arabs share the history and culture. The series was an essential factor in the revival of the Islamic Ottoman history as its resurrection of the common and decisive triumphant and unsuccessful events had an impact that is still embedded in the collective consciousness.

The dramatic historical narrative of Sultan Abdülhamid series was employed to serve the interests and ambitions of Turkey in reinstating its influential presence in the Arab region in a manner that was soft and which was embodied by the harmonious way through which the series promoted a positive image of Turkey to Arab public opinion. The latter admires the successful and prosperous experience of the “new Turkey” realized by the policies the AKP implemented to execute their strategies such as popular culture, dramas, trade, and tourism to secure Turkey’s geopolitical position in the Arab region. (DjarAllah, 2018, p 58)

The attentiveness Turkish drama gives to evoking Ottoman figures in order to reconcile the Turkish people with its Ottoman past, as well as magnifying values such as courage, wisdom, and the concern for state sovereignty and interest, all put an end to any attempts at distorting and criticising such policy. President Erdoğan is one of its leading faces as he started to reframe history in a manner that serves Turkish interest ever since the 2016 coup attempt; he did so by continuing to make use of Soft Power (art/drama) for the unity of the Turkish people under a national project he oversees. (Policy Brief, 2017)

Turkish historical dramas are the foundation of the novel and positive perception of, not only Ottoman history, but also of Islam since historical drama concerned itself with proving that there is no clash between simultaneously maintaining a Muslim identity and having a strong secular state as proved historically by the Ottoman’s Empire Islamic policy ability to provide protection and ensuring unity and cultural prosperity.

The accusations Turkey pointed at the West for being involved in the failed coup attempt of 2016 made Turkey’s foreign relations further distanced and increased Western criticism regarding president Erdoğan’s strict way of dealing with those disagreeing with his policies. The approach taken by dramas, then, relies from one part on honouring Sultans and Ottoman leaders, and from another part on highlighting the dangers of internal and external conspiracies and strengthening the loyalties of Turkey’s current leadership.

What the historical dramas of the AKP’s diplomacy do is reinforce within global public opinion the idea of a “new Turkey” being a regional and international power in all political, military, economic, artistic, and religious fields in the face of conspiracies to weaken and topple it down.

The impressive worldwide spread of Turkish drama has made it a living example of the “Soft Power” concept as it has managed to successfully infiltrate different countries and societies from Latin America, Central Asian, and the Balkans, to the Middle East and Europe. This has prompted the American magazine, Foreign Affairs, to state that Turkish drama has proved that winning the hearts of those living in Muslim world is not an impossible task, but the problem with the USA is that it has yet to discover the effective way to carry it out. (Edrissi, 2019, p 24)

The aforementioned statement is indeed accurate. The impact of Turkish dramas is not limited to the cultural and social sides, but it is extended to the economic and political ones. This has raised the interest of Arabs and Muslims in general towards anything Turkey-related and has

pushed them to be informed about it. Turkey's president has the support of the majority of Arab peoples who consider him to be a Muslim hero thanks to his stance on the Palestinian cause and the Palestinian people, as well as his strong ability to balance between said stance and his country's relations with the Zionist entity.

When it comes to the economic side, Turkish economy has benefited not only from the huge revenue generated by the dramas themselves, but also from the flourishing touristic sector. In its showcase of natural scenarios, touristic spots, and different foods, drama has become an ambassador for Turkish tourism which made Turkey a touristic destination for people from all over the world, especially from the Arab world and Asian countries. Thanks to touristic destinations being promoted in dramas, and to the mastery of Turkish architecture in building castles, villas, and apartments being highlighted in them, real estate is also flourishing as the wealthy are pushed to make purchases and investments. (Taher, 2017)

Turkish drama has led the market for ready-to-wear clothes, accessories, and Turkish jewellery to bloom as stated by Furkan Ortakaya, the regional director of Kayra Company in the Middle East, as he clarifies that Turkish dramas have led to the increase in Turkey's exports of clothing and accessories to Middle Eastern countries, especially the Emirates, Palestine, Lebanon and Jordan. Furthermore, many Turkish brands have branched out to most Arab countries after the increase in public demand in regards to what is seen on Turkish series and movies. Turkey has actually transformed to an important agent in "Muslim fashion" which has recently overwhelmed Arab markets coinciding with the invasion of dramas and which is represented in colourful loose-fitting clothing, patterned head covers, and different kinds of big-sized accessories.

The manifestation of Turkish dramas' influence on Arabs is not only concerned with fashion; it also includes furniture and home decor that is seen in the series. Saudi Arabia is the most prominent example in this regard as the success of Turkish drama has led Saudi citizens to purchase non-traditional furniture which led to the increase of Turkish furniture imports to Saudi Arabia from 81.2 million dollars in 2013 to 159.7 million dollars 2015. (Taher, 2017)

Turkish influence is not limited to the financial aspect, but it rather extends to introducing the stunning natural sceneries that show forests and snow –which is a rare sight for most Arab countries– as well as combining between historical Mosques and bars, and between modernity and rural origins. All of this peaks one's curiosity to explore such sights, especially in light of geographical and cultural relatedness which allows the continuity of the success of dramas in promoting tourism. In the same manner that the popular television series, Miami, broadcasted between 1985 and 1998 had an effect on the increase of European tourists in the USA, and that the Lord of the Rings Harry Potter franchises succeeded in promoting tourism to New Zealand and England, respectively, Turkish drama managed to increase tourist numbers that are from the countries in which it is broadcasted. Turkish drama has contributed in raising the number of Arab tourists coming to Turkey from 65 thousand tourists annually to six or seven times that amount at the moment. It is expected that these numbers will reach the 10 million mark in the upcoming years, especially in Istanbul and Antalya. In 2010, Syrian tourism in Turkey increased by 91.4%, with Lebanese tourism increasing by 81%, Emirati tourism by 45%, and Iranian tourism by 43%. In addition, The Culture and Information Office of the Turkish Consulate in Dubai stated that Turkey welcomed 822.85 thousand Khaliji tourists during 2016, being an increase of 27% compared to 2015. (Policy Brief, 2017)

Conclusion

Many critics attribute the success of Turkish drama to a number of factors –the most prominent of which perhaps being the production quality, the attention to cinematography, and the accuracy in choosing filming locations, as well as the diversity in storytelling that revolves around the trinity of romantic, historical, and action series genres. That and the dramatic plots, dealing with issues regarding personal freedoms in a bold way, and discussing taboos, have all made it so that audiences become avid viewers.

In the end, one can say that by succeeding to spread despite geographical and language barriers, and differences in customs and cultures, drama has nominated itself to continue pursuing its goals, especially since many countries are increasingly exploiting dramas for foreign policy purposes. With Turkey playing an important regional role after 2011, the effectiveness of historical dramas has increased in promoting the “new Turkey” image that is strong due, not only to its achievements, but also due to its roots in Ottoman history. Said dramas have also solidified the foundations of Turkish identity by creating a sort of reconciliation of the people with its Ottoman past in light of the high regard for secularism.

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