

The Rise of Turkey as a Regional Center within the Global TV Markets

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The circulation of the cultural products has been transformed by the increasing use of the digital technologies in the last years. While online sharing and piracy contributed to the unauthorized distribution of the content, the alternative digital platforms helped forming global groups of fans. In the case of television programs, this demand not only encouraged the authorized distribution of the programs but also increased the number of adaptations. The resulting global context of circulation is an eclectic mix of multiple flows, which has generated its own regional centers. As a regional center born out of this transformation, Turkey provides an interesting case for the study of this set of format and program circulation. While adapting imported formats from abroad, the Turkish market also exports finished programs to the region. With more than seventy shows exported to fifty-four countries, the exports of the Turkish TV industry exceeded 150 million dollars according to the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism, which makes Turkey a newcomer to keep an eye on in contemporary transnational TV trades.

As a newcomer, Turkey started to attract more attention during the mid-2000s due to the increasing number exported TV series. Following the popularity of *Gümüş*, which was released as *Noor* in Middle East, many Turkish melodramas were exported to the region. The popularity of the Turkish melodramas quickly fueled debates about Turkey's influence and soft power in the region. It is important to mention these discussions coincided with the Western media discourse depicting Turkey as a democratic model for the Middle East following the conservative Justice and Development Party's (JDP) rise to power. The debates around this discourse and the success of the Turkish melodramas were further complicated by the colonial history of the Ottoman rule in the region.

While the initial success of dubbed Turkish melodramas in the Balkans and in the Middle East helped Turkey to become recognized as a new regional center of production due to the increasing number of exported TV series, Turkey had already been an interesting player in transnational format markets. As the call for this roundtable indicates, format adaptations have been increasingly popular in the global context challenging the pre-existing dominance of the dissemination of original program over format adaptations. Within the larger European context of privatization and deregulation, the late 1990s and early 2000s witnessed an increased demand for TV content with the increasing number of channels in Turkey. This coincided with the global wave of format adaptations for reality shows and contests and the Turkish adaptation of *Big Brother* was soon followed by *Pop Idol*. These game and reality show adaptations are still going strong with the adaptations of *X Factor*, *The Voice* and *Survivor*. Sit-com adaptations also became popular during the early 2000s. While there were a few unauthorized loose adaptations of American shows prior to this new wave, the most significant adaptation in terms of this new global wave was *Dadı*, the adaptation of *The Nanny*. Starring two very well known theater actors and a Turkish singer, the show became a big hit and instigated a series of sit-com adaptations

including *Dharma and Greg*, *The Jeffersons* and *Married with Children* adaptations.

Once the sit-com adaptations reached saturation, the expanding industry turned its attention to the melodramas. As mentioned above, these melodramas were soon exported to the region. Around the same time, older Turkish classics, both novels and films, became sources for adaptations, which were also successfully exported. Therefore, it is possible to say that there is an increasing expertise in “adapting” both foreign and older content. Currently, Turkish producers not only export the Turkish melodramas, but also adapt international formats and export the finished products, such as the Turkish adaptation of *Desperate Housewives*, to the region.

This growth of the export market had an influence on the domestic conditions. The flourishing of the industry transformed the conditions of production by diminishing the chances of shows with smaller groups of viewers. Having experienced the mainstream success of stronger shows, the network executives were less willing to wait for shows to strengthen their fan bases. The importance of ratings made it harder for new shows to survive.

In conclusion, there are a few interesting points, which can be useful for connecting this short survey of the Turkish case with the theoretical questions posed in the call for this roundtable. Firstly, while talking about the rise of Turkey as a regional center of production, it is also necessary to mention the role of the digital technologies. The visibility of fans thanks to the social media had an important role in increasing the demand for the Turkish TV series as the online piracy of the content contributes to the popularity of the Turkish shows. Similarly, the increasing popularity of Korean dramas instigated by the Turkish fans' access to pirated content online led to the Turkish adaptation of Korean shows. Surveying these synergistic interactions further might help surveying the intrinsic properties of what now appears to be a multi-platform context. Secondly, the expansion of the export market for the Turkish TV series and the financial strengthening of the industry have been accompanied with the JDP government's attempts to control press and media in general. Questions of censorship and monopolization as well as the conservative bias in the domestic context further complicate Turkey's rise as a regional center of production and raise new questions about economic, political and cultural aspects of the ongoing transformation. Therefore, it might be useful to address the distinctions between these aspects and how different theories have previously prioritized one aspect over the other while surveying the role of digitalization in curtailing the differences between platforms and perspectives at the same time.