The analysis of social and cultural impact of Turkish soap operas on Arab women

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ABSTRACT

Starting in 2007, Turkish soap operas are being watched and admired with a growing interest by millions of Arab viewers especially women. Turkish and Arab newspapers and TV stations are full of reports about the effects of these series (Newsweek Turkey, 2009). They report that Arab women are becoming devoted fans of Turkish actors, are demanding more freedom and that tourism and business between Turkey and Arab countries is growing because of these series. The purpose of this thesis is to examine this phenomenon more closely and analyze the relationship between media, culture and societies. Three main questions to be answered within this context. They are:

- Why are Arab women really watching Turkish soap operas? In other words, what are the real cultural and social reasons?
- What kind of influence do these soap operas have on Arab women? Are they simply mirroring or truly influencing their way of thinking and acting?
- Are these series becoming an important communication tool of cultural diplomacy? In other words, are they helping to bring Turkey and the Arab World closer?

In the conclusion, the gaps and limitations of the research are highlighted and the areas where further research is needed are specified.
STATEMENT OF AUTHENTICITY

I certify that this thesis is my original work and it is the sole creation of my own efforts and ideas. I understand that plagiarism is a crime defined as the use of others' words, ideas and expressions without acknowledging the source. I further understand that plagiarism is grounds for immediate disqualification. I warrant that all the information and statements in this thesis are true and accurate to the best of my knowledge and belief.

Sibel Akin

Signature:

Date:
I would like to take the opportunity here to thank all those who played an important role in writing this thesis by giving their support.

First of all, I would like to show my gratitude to my supervisor, Professor Surabhi Aggarwal whose deep knowledge and guidance helped me tremendously to learn the process, focus my thoughts and finish the thesis on time.

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CHAPTER I – INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

In summer 2009, the Saudi owned pan-Arab network MBC, based in Dubai, broadcast the finale of the hit Turkish soap opera “Noor”. Eighty-five million Arab viewers tuned in¹.

The reach of mass communication tools are recently on the rise in the Middle East due to the developments in satellite and digital technologies. There has been a considerable increase in the number of satellite TV channels in the region such as Al-Jazeera, commonly known as the “Arab CNN” (Atlıoğlu 2008). Besides Western media like BBC in Arabic and CNN International, other regional channels such as Al-Arabiya, owned by pan-Arab satellite pioneer MBC, and Al-Hurra, an American station, are all competing in this increasingly profitable media industry. Since 2007, the one sector that has seen phenomenal growth in the Arab World is the genre of Turkish TV soap opera. The term “soap opera” is been used in the study as a reference to popular usage of the term. However, there are some major differences which will be explained later in Chapter IV. According to some recent studies, (TESEV 2010 Middle East Research) an average of 70% of the Arab World is watching these series. It all started when MBC (Middle East Broadcasting Corporation), after seeing some encouraging test results, decided in 2006 to translate two Turkish soap operas--Gümüş (translated as Noor in Arabic) and Under the Linden Trees (translated as Lost Years)--into colloquial Arabic and broadcast them in 22 Arab countries (Newsweek Turkey 2009). The surprising, immense success of these two series led to others to follow the same path, and the trend is still continuing.
Every day in newspapers and magazines, on internet sites and TV channels, there is news about the most popular TV series or Turkish actors/actresses; there are contests and entire programs dedicated to these dramas. The lead actors are invited to Arab countries to attend TV shows, events, even some private ones organized by royal families. They have Hollywood star treatment everywhere they go in the region (USAK 2010).

The purpose of this thesis is to analyze the increasing popularity of the Turkish soap operas among Arab women. The focus of this research will be on Arab Muslim women who tend to be more liberal. The reason for this is simple logistics; these women are more accessible for research purposes due to cultural reasons. Since The Arab World is vast, spreading from North Africa to the Middle East, the researcher has looked at the secondary research data, from the region and conducted primary research on respondents from different countries, in order to get a sense of the “Arab World”. The first two so-called “iconic” soap operas Gümüş (Noor) and Under the Linden Trees (Lost Years) will be used in the narrative and semiological analysis. Semiotics studies the role of signs as part of social life (Chandler 1994).

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this study are:

- To understand the **socio-cultural reasons** for the popularity of soap operas among Arab women
- To see if these series are **mirroring or influencing** Arab women’s state-of-mind, their way of thinking and acting
- To study if these series are becoming an important **communication tool of cultural diplomacy** between Turkey and Arab nations

1 *Turkey’s soap opera diplomacy* by Michael Kimmelman, NY Times 19/06/2010.
In this introductory chapter, the reasons for the researcher’s interest in this subject will be explained. A brief historical background regarding Turkish and Arab relations will be given in order to provide a backdrop for understanding the similarities and differences between the two cultures. In the methodology chapter (Chapter II), the various methods used for the research will be discussed. This is a mainly qualitative analysis, but within it there are distinct ways of collecting data using primary and secondary research – both are employed for this thesis with different approaches and techniques. Chapter III is Literature Review which will cover four main areas – Arab Culture and Arab Women; Communication / Media and Culture; TV / Soap Opera and Women; and Analysis of Two Series. Chapter IV is the Presentation of Data. This thesis is based on four important pillars – Media / Communication / Culture and Society. Therefore, all these pillars will be defined and discussed at length in this chapter. Arab and Turkish cultures have some similarities in terms of values, traditions and religion. They also contain some differences, especially in lifestyle and the role of women in the society. The research looked at the role of Arab women in Arab countries. Although there are differences between the countries, the major problems and trends are the same. Since soap operas are an important genre of television, in this chapter, we will discuss the history of soap operas in general and the development of Turkish soap operas in particular. Mass media theories will be used to build a solid foundation for the research. The main theories will be reviewed, the gaps will be identified, and a more appropriate new theory will be introduced. Chapter V is the Analysis of Data – two popular soap operas which engendered this whole phenomenon in the Middle East--Gümüş and Under the Linden Trees--will be analyzed in terms of storyline and main characters. Narrative and semiological analysis will be used to answer the question of “Why?” The two other major questions--are these series mirroring or influencing the Arab women state of mind? And are they an effective communication tool for cultural diplomacy? - will also be answered using primary and secondary data. Finally, the last chapter will be a discussion of gaps, limitations, and the need for further research, as well as a summative conclusion.
INTEREST IN THE SUBJECT

The personal interest of the researcher for this subject began in 2009 when a flood of articles started in Turkish newspapers and magazines about Arab women’s growing obsession with these TV series. Stories even reported some interesting anecdotes about how some Arab husbands are divorcing their wives because they were too much “in love” with Mu hannad (the lead actor in “Noor”)². As a person from the region who was raised in Turkey, the researcher was aware that Turkish – Arab relations were not considered warm for many years. Although Turkey borders some Arab countries such as Syria and Iraq, it always preferred to improve its diplomatic relations with the Western world and quietly ignore its Eastern neighbors. Turkish children grew up with unfortunate stories and stereotypes about Arabs, at least up until recently, and the schoolbooks were full of historical references against Arabs. The researcher became intrigued after seeing news stories about Arab people and especially Arab women watching Turkish TV series with a growing interest. She was curious to understand the real reasons behind this phenomenon. There are, of course, political, economic and social dimensions of this cultural rapprochement between Turkey and the Arab World. The recent uprisings and revolutions in Arab countries makes this thesis a very relevant one in that sense. It shows that there has been a shift in the mindset of Arab people (especially women) that was building for some time. Their choice of TV programs reflects these changes, and it is just one sign of this transformation. This is why it is important to understand that this is not just a temporary media trend of watching some popular TV series or soap operas like the famous American phenomenon of Dallas around the world in 1980s or Brazilian or Mexican soap operas among women in 1990s. It is reflective of a more serious yearning among women for expression of their selfhood and identity.

² When Mehmet becomes Mu hammad by Nurçin Yıldız for USAK Strategic Research Center 14/04/2010
The Ottoman Empire was dominant for 400 years in the Middle East. They had strong economic and political ties with most of the Arab nations; however, these relations started deteriorating by the end of the 19th century for various reasons and continued throughout the Cold War Era (Prof. Altunışık). Turkey’s Independence War was observed carefully in the region but the reforms, which have been put forward by the founding father Kemal Atatürk in order to establish a modern and secular state, were criticized in Arab nations. After the Cold War, Turkey’s foreign policy in the Middle East was quite passive and favored relations with Israel and the West (Atlioglu 2008). This atmosphere began changing in 2003 when the Turkish Parliament rejected Turkey’s involvement in the invasion of Iraq by the US. At the Davos World Economic Forum 2009, Prime Minister Tayyip Erdoğan’s famous “one minute” angry reaction to Israeli President Simon Peres, due to the Gaza assault, was a spontaneous move which made Erdoğan a “hero” among Arab people. The Wall Street Journal describes Erdoğan in a recent article as a rock star: “Mr. Erdoğan himself has turned into something of a political rock star in the region after adopting a tough stance against former ally Israel.” (Parkinson, 2011)

Turkey’s foreign policy became more inclusive and active under the leadership of Foreign Minister Mr. Davutoğlu, whose famous standard of “zero problem with the neighbors,” is a subject of many international articles. This quote from Elif Şafak’s recent article in The New York Times sums it thus: “How could we blend Islamic and Eastern elements with a modern, democratic, secular regime?”

In this thesis, one intention is to show that Turkish TV series do mirror exactly the blend of Eastern values and Western modernity which is demanded by Arab women.

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3 Internationally known, Turkish writer, most recently the author of «The Forty Rules of Love»
CHAPTER II – METHODOLOGY

This chapter will discuss the different methods of research that have been used to answer the three main questions of this thesis. In order to simplify the process, one particular approach to group the various methods of research has been adopted. Blaxter, Hughes and Tight (1996) provide a simple but focused table to define the different research methods. According to this table there are three levels – research families, approaches and techniques:

| Research families | Quantitative or qualitative  
|                  | Desktop or fieldwork        |
| Research approaches | Action research  
|                   | Case studies  
|                   | Experiments  
|                   | Surveys        |
| Research Techniques | Documents  
|                    | Interviews  
|                    | Observation  
|                    | Questionnaires |

Table 1 Research Families, approaches and techniques

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RESEARCH FAMILIES AND APPROACH

In this study, a qualitative research family is used. Quantitative analysis answers the question “what is happening?” while the qualitative method answers the question “why it is happening?” (Watson & Noble 2007). One of the main queries in this thesis is “Why are Arab women watching these series, and what are the effects?” Therefore, it is only natural to adopt the qualitative approach. However, the secondary data found on the subject did have some quantitative research.

Both desktop and fieldwork were used. The starting point for the research was desktop. An extensive review of the documents, articles, surveys and reports already done on the subject were reviewed in order to grasp the dimensions of the phenomenon. During the desktop research, the aim was to gather as many points of view as possible from Turkey, the Middle East and the Western world in order to avoid biased conclusions. Although language (Arabic) was a barrier, there were enough Arab media portals in English or in French to collect secondary data.

The topic is currently more easily researched for two reasons. First, the remarkable interest of Arab women (and men, too) in the Turkish series attracts much media attention, both national and international. Therefore, there are many articles, reports, interviews, and TV programs on the subject, although there is no detailed analysis in terms of media and culture. The facts and figures, as well as direct quotes from Arab women about why they watch these series and the effects they see around them, were gathered through the secondary data. Secondly, the recent uprisings in the Arab World have made this a timely topic. These eruptions have led to an influx of interviews, articles, reports, and TV programs about Arab Culture, Arab women, their role in the society and what to expect, etc. The secondary data which would have been quite difficult to obtain prior to the “uprisings” were abundantly available during the desktop research phase.
The review of this secondary data was helpful to examine the situation, revealing the audience and the cultural and sociological environment. However, primary data (fieldwork) was needed to confirm some of the findings and also to get more insights to answer the “why.”

RESEARCH TECHNIQUES AND SAMPLING

PRIMARY RESEARCH

An on-line questionnaire was developed with 10 questions (4 of them open ended) for Arab women. The aim was to get confirmation about the interest in these series and learn why women were watching them.

Purposeful Sampling was applied to obtain detailed information about the subject. The logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research, thus the term purposeful sampling (Patton, 1990). The respondents were chosen by using snowball sampling which is one of the 16 types of purposeful sampling. This type of sampling uses references to find other people who can be useful for the research purposes (Patton, 1990). In this study, there were some barriers for the interviews, one was the geographical barrier and the other was the cultural barrier – Arab women are more reserved than Western women and they are reluctant to talk to others face-to-face or on the phone about their private lives. Therefore, the researcher decided to create an on-line survey to make it more discrete and got some references in the Middle East from her

5 Please refer to Annex E for the questionnaire
personal contacts and asked these Arab women to fill-up the on-line questionnaire at their convenience and refer it to others who would do the same. **11 women from different countries** including Syria, Egypt, Bahrain, and Lebanon accepted to answer the questions. The age range was between 23 and 37, eight of them were married, they all spoke English and six of them have a university degree.

One **face-to-face interview** in Geneva was conducted by a Lebanon / Palestine origin woman –married, mother of three, university educated, and 36 years old. She follows the series through satellite dish and she has other Arab friends in Geneva, in London and in Lebanon watching them as well. She speaks English, French and Arabic.

One **e-mail interview** with another Arab woman from Syria has been done in the second phase of the primary research in order to fill in the gap about the influence of the series. She is 32 years old, married, with two kids, living and working in Geneva, university educated, speaks English, French and Arabic.

**Narrative analysis:** In order to do the media analysis of the two series, **30 episodes** each have been reviewed. The episodes were selected so as to understand the full story and the patterns throughout. According to Tzvetan Todorov (1978) storytelling often follows a structure where a state of equilibrium is established at the beginning before it is disrupted by some events and subsequently reinstated at the end (Hodkinson 2011). The story in Turkish series usually spans two years, but they do follow this arc. The first 10 episodes were important to understand the characters and the roles they play within the story. Next, the researcher randomly selected another 15 episodes to follow the events. The remaining five of the thirty episodes occurred towards the end of each series and included the final episode to conclude the story. To analyze the series, qualitative over quantitative approach is again selected; therefore **narrative**

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6 Please see Annex F for the interview guide
**analysis and semiotics** have been used instead of content analysis which is quantitative in nature (Chandler 1994).

The following paragraph, taken from the book, *Media, Culture and Society* supports this choice:

Narrative analysis treats media text as …composed of different forms of storytelling and seeks to identify the conventions and devices with which such narratives are constructed (Fulton et al 2005; Gillespie 2006). Semiology is of great importance here because many of the devices used by storytellers are reliant on the successful meaning through signs – the use of music to interfere emotion or hint at what may happen next or the use of clothing or an accent to signify particular character traits, for example. Narrative analysis is particularly concerned with understanding the narrative conventions on which stories draw and in doing so, deconstructing the ways in which audiences are being asked to make sense of content. (Hodkinson 2011)

**SECONDARY RESEARCH**

Two quantitative surveys have been reviewed. One was done by KA Research. It was an opinion poll surveying a random sample of 207 Saudi women aged 15 years and above to study the phenomenon of Noor. The other one was indirectly related to the subject. It was done again by KA Research for Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation (TESEV). It was conducted in 8 Arab countries--Egypt, Jordan, Palestine, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia and Syria--as a telephone interview and as a face-to-face interview in Iraq. Altogether, KA Research interviewed 2006 people.

In addition to the Turkish soap opera series, some TV programs by Arabic, Turkish and international news channels such as CNN on the subject were watched. Arab women were interviewed in these programs and asked why they were watching the series, what kind of changes they were seeing around, and these responses were also used as secondary data for the analysis.
“It is impossible to understand the operation and significance of any one of the elements of media without placing it within the socio-cultural context.”
(Hodkinson 2011)

The researcher’s aim through the literature review was to achieve the goal mentioned above, to understand the impact of mass media, as represented by Turkish TV series, on Arab women by putting it into the right socio-cultural context. In order to achieve this, Arab culture and its similarities and differences from Turkish culture as well as Arab women’s role in this specific society has to be analyzed first. Then the relationship between the mass communication, culture and society had to be understood. In addition, the role of television and soap operas and their impact on women in general has to be reviewed. Finally, a recent review of articles from different angles on the subject of the thesis had to be done to grasp the phenomenon properly.

ARAB CULTURE AND ARAB WOMEN

Culture is the accumulation of learned and shared behaviors, norms and values. *Culture is those deep, common, unstated experiences which members of a given culture share, which they communicate without knowing, and which forms the backdrop against which all other events are judged* (E.T. Hall)

Arab Culture and Turkish culture are both high context cultures. This term was developed by researcher Edward Hall to describe the relationship of culture and communication. There are high context and low context cultures in the world; we may see this as a continuum reaching from the extremely low-context cultures of German Switzerland and the US to the extremely high context cultures of Japan.
Every nation has its place on this continuum depending on its level. High context cultures rely heavily on the context to convey the meaning of the message (Beamer & Varner 2008). High context cultures are defined by shared characteristics such as being indirect, relationship-oriented, emotional, and hierarchical, but there are also differences between these societies. To understand these similarities and differences, Geert Hofstede developed some cultural dimensions. The website of Hofstede Cultural Dimensions reveals the similarities and differences of Arab and Turkish cultures. Valuable insights used in the analysis included variables such as family values, collective culture and loyalty.

Understanding Arab women required, on one hand, gathering statistics about education level, unemployment figures etc., while also going deeper to understand the state of mind of these women. One report was crucial to obtain the facts and figures – UNIFEM7 Progress of Arab Women 2004 Report. It provides valuable insights into the world of Arab women and shows the social and economic progress made recently. The report also identifies the challenges Arab women face today as they attempt to strengthen their positions within their families, communities and societies. The report reveals that the participation of Arab women in the labor force is the lowest in the world, at 26%. One reason for this is the education level of Arab women; the region is characterized by gender inequality in literacy and education. Relatively low educational level puts women at a disadvantage to men when it comes to finding employment.

The second task was to go deeper and try to understand how Arab women think and feel. One book was quite valuable to glance inside the world of Arab women. It is called “Arab Women’s Lives Retold” – Exploring Identity through Writing edited by Nawar Al-Hassan Golley. It is a collection of studies done on the autobiographies of some Arab women writers, including Ahdaf Soueif, an Egyptian female novelist. She is best known worldwide as the author of the

bestselling *The Map of Love* which was shortlisted for the Booker Prize for Fiction in 1999. Her other fiction in English, *In the Eye of the Sun*, was analyzed in depth by Mrinalini Chakravorty. The female character, Asya, is torn between family pressure, Eastern values and Western attitudes. According to Chakravorty, the book provides a realistic portrait of a liberal Middle Eastern woman and her challenges.

Another analysis done by Pauline Homsi Vinson for “*Return to Childhood: The Memoir of a Modern Moroccon Woman*” by Leila Abouzeid, reveals Western misconceptions about Arab women’s lives and how Arab female writers react to these by writing their memoirs. In this analysis, another interesting and relevant fact about the Arab women is the role of storytelling; how it is important in the daily lives of Arab women and how it is part of each young girl’s education. Abouzeid, according to Vinson, insists that the storytelling tradition is an important value in constructing individual and social identity.

Finally, an extensive review of the recent articles in the wake of the Arab Uprising has been done to understand the role of Arab women in this new era. Some main articles are: *The Middle East Feminist Revolution* by Naomi Wolf (March 2011, AL Jazeera); *Silent No More: The Women of the Arab Revolutions by Carla Power* (March 2011, TIME); *It’s Cool to be Arab* by Rana Moussaoui (March 2011, ME Online) *In Egypt, Women Have Burdens but No Privileges* by Mona El-Naggar (July 2010, NYTImes); *What the Head Scarf Means, When Everyone Wears One* by Mona EL-Naggar (August 2010, NYTImes); *For Women, Diploma Doesn’t Mean a Career* by Sara Hamdan (November 2010, NYTImes). All these recent articles show the dilemma that Arab women today experience in one way or another. On one hand, they would like to advance in their career, in their societies and become more powerful, but on the other hand, they are dragged down by their patriarchal societies, their own traditions and cultural norms.
COMMUNICATION / MEDIA / CULTURE

In this section, a communication model which would form a solid ground for the research had to be provided. McQuail’s book *Mass Communication Theory* (2010) was reviewed. McQuail’s four models of communication – Transmission / Ritual / Publicity / Reception - were analyzed in terms of relevancy to this thesis. All of them except the Publicity Model were found relevant to some extent. However, the element of social and cultural environment was missing in all three; therefore, a search for a more complete new model continued. The book *Media, Culture and Society*” by Paul Hodkinson was crucial at this stage because the author was talking about the same dilemma of finding a better communication model that includes all the elements of mass communication by taking into consideration a broader social and cultural environment. According to Hodkinson (2011):

“Our understanding of media processes has to incorporate the extensive and constant flows of influence both to and from a complex broader social and cultural environment, which consists of an established but developing overall world of social relations, ways of life and modes of expression.”

Hodkinson’s mass communication model was adopted for this thesis as it helped to put all the pieces together in a meaningful way.

Another book that was supportive to understand the relationship between communication, media and culture was *Media and Culture Theory* (edited by James Curran and David Morley). It is a collection of essays by international scholars that analyze key issues in media and cultural studies. Some of these were especially interesting for this thesis especially *the nature of cultural globalization and media representations of the new women in contemporary society* (Curran and Morley 2006).
TELEVISION / SOAP OPERAS AND WOMEN

The next step was to understand more deeply the influence of television on women vis-a-vis one specific genre: Soap Operas.

Understanding the role of television in people’s lives and how the female audience reacts to certain TV programs were crucial for the researcher. Sonia Livingstone, a social psychologist, looks at TV as an everyday phenomenon in her book called *Making Sense of Television* (1998) and explains her studies especially on the soap opera audience. She argues that the soap opera serves as the case study for the broader exploration of the role of media in producing and reproducing social knowledge (Livingstone 1998). She claims that, despite the general view of TV audiences as receptive and mindless and the process of watching TV as routine and passive, mass media communication is becoming more and more complex; and the role of receiver in this process is anything but passive. **The audience is actually knowledgeable, skilled and motivated** (Livingstone 1998). The concept does form an important support for the claims of this thesis that Arab women are not passively watching the Turkish series but they do choose to watch them because they find meaningful with stories related to their daily lives. This is something that they cannot find in other series. This is also a humble contribution to the Moderate Effects Model, especially Uses and Gratification which is function in this model (Balvares, Donald and Shoesmith 2001). This approach focuses on understanding how an active audience selects and uses the media content for their needs.

Even the most potent of the mass media content cannot ordinarily influence an individual who has “no use” for it in the social and psychological context in which he lives. The “uses” approach assumes that people’s values, their interests, their associations, their
social roles, are pre-potent, and that people selectively “fashion” what they see and hear to these interests (Katz, 1959)

Soap Opera is one of the most important genres of television, and it is a female genre. There are different types of soap operas, such as the **daytime soap or prime time soap**, and various definitions among scholars when it comes to explicating exactly what a soap opera is. Dorothy Hobson is one of the scholars who did extensive research about the subject, and she provides valuable insights in her book *Soap Opera* (2003) about the history of the genre, major studies done around soap opera, the effects on the audience, and how these series cross international boundaries through the common storylines and appealing characters. The book is recognized as *a definitive guide to the genre* by Mal Young, a BBC Drama Series Controller. There have been many studies to understand the relation between soap operas and their female audience. Ien Ang (1985) did an important study when *Dallas* became a globally renowned soap opera. The study was conducted in the Netherlands, using a female audience. There were other works by Robert Allens (1985, 1992 and 1995); Mary Ellen Brown (1990 and 94); Ellen Seiter et al (1989); Sonia Livingstone (1990); Christine Geraghty (1991) and Marie Gillespie (1995). All these works and many others are trying to reveal some peculiar relation between these shows and the female audience and to understand their influence on women. However, all are focusing on American, British and Australian soap operas that are all from low context cultures. In this thesis, the aim is to look at how one high context culture--Turkey--can export a soap opera to another high context culture - Arabic - successfully.

Christine Geragthy’s name is well known in the Media and Cultural Studies field. She has done a major study about the role of women in prime time soap operas. In her book called *Women and Soap Opera* (1991), she looks at the relation between the female audience and the story lines by comparing the British and
American prime time soaps like *Dallas, Dynasty, Coronation Street, and EastEnders*. Geragthy, just as Livingstone, talks about the active audience:

“If we are to understand the relationship between soaps and their audience, we need to look more closely at the viewer’s quite conscious participation in the processes of soap fiction.”

The book was very useful for helping make sense of the Western soap operas and pinpointing the similarities with and differences from Turkish soap operas in terms of story lines and characters.

**ANALYSIS OF THE TWO SOAP OPERAS**

The qualitative approach has been adopted to analyze the storyline and the characters of the two series that made a surprising impact on Arab women starting in 2007 and continuing into the present. In order to understand the reasons behind the phenomenon, it was vital to make an in-depth analysis of the content. For this, narrative and semiotic analysis has been used. To review the basic elements of semiotics, the guide *Semiotics for Beginners* by Daniel Chandler was instrumental. It takes the reader step by step through what semiotics is—simply put it is *the science of signs* (Morris 1938)—how we define a “sign”, and the encoding and decoding process.

The book - *Media, Culture and Society* (Hodkinson 2011) - mentioned before in the Communication theories section, was also useful to understand the different methods to analyze the content. The author introduces all the approaches from semiotics to narrative analysis to discourse and content analysis. He compares them in terms of qualitative and quantitative forms of media analysis (Hodkinson 2011). He points out that one limitation of semiotics is that it rejects *the engagement of media content and its users*. Hodkinson also argues that other researchers claim that different audience interpretations and reaction to media
texts cannot be underestimated. In light of this argument, in this thesis the analysis of media has been done with the combination of both semiotics and narrative analysis.

Here is one quote to support this decision:

“Texts not only need to be understood in relation to the ways in which audiences engage with them but also in the context of their relationship with other texts and broader culture and society” (Hodkinson 2011, Fiske 1991)

Apart from the books, some recent reports and articles on the subject have been also reviewed in order to get differing viewpoints. The researcher was careful not to use only articles written by Turkish scholars or journalists but also to take into account the articles written by Arab scholars and Western journalists. The major ones which are used as references in the analysis are: “When Mehmet becomes Muhammed” by Nurçin Yıldız (2010) an in depth analysis for USAK (strategic research center in Turkey); “A Silver (Gümüş means silver in Turkish) Revolution in Middle East” by Newsweek Turkey (2009); The Noor Phenomenon by John Dagge (El Bawaba 2007); The Invasion of Turkish Soap Operas by Daily News Egypt (2008); Soap threat to Bahraini values by Basma Mohammed (Gulf Daily News 2008); Turkish Passion – a women’s thing by Yves Gonzales Quijano\(^8\) and Turkey’s soap opera diplomacy by Michael Kimmelman (NYTimes 2010). These articles were useful to gather local facts, reactions and viewpoints. It was interesting to see how the issue was interpreted differently in different countries. For instance, Noor was a phenomenon in Egypt whereas it was viewed as a threat in Bahrain.

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\(^8\) Original article is in French: Passions turques: un truc de femmes
In this literature review, the researcher realized that what was missing was the study about the impact of soap operas especially from a high context culture on Arab women. The studies done about the soap operas usually refer to TV series from US such as *Dallas* or British soap operas such as *EastEnders and their impact* on women from the Western world. Turkish TV series or soap operas, although they are on the popular media almost every day, are not yet analyzed in details academically from a communication point of view and in terms of the impact they are making on Arab women. Therefore, this study is a modest contribution to the body of knowledge about this aspect of soap operas by taking into accounts the similarities and differences of two high context cultures.
ARAB CULTURE

Arab culture is a widely used term to describe people who share the same language, religion, certain values, art, similar concerns, way of life and some symbols. The term Arab World refers to the geographical region of the Middle East and North Africa, there are 18 Arab countries which are Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, UAE and Yemen. There are, of course, different sub-cultures within each country and diverse communities. However, there are enough similarities to combine these people under one culture called the “Arab culture”. And one common denominator that binds them all is the language.

CULTURAL DIMENSIONS

Arab culture, as well as Turkish culture, is a high-context culture, a term developed by Edward Hall to describe the relationship of culture and communication. Within the high context cultures there are as many differences as similarities. In both Turkish and Arab cultures, some fundamental values such as collectiveness, family values are shown to be the same by the analysis of Geert Hofstede who developed four dimensions to describe high context versus low context cultures. These are:

- Individualism vs. Collectivism
- Power Distances
- Uncertainty avoidance vs. uncertainty tolerance
- Masculinity vs. Femininity
Geert Hofstede™ Cultural Dimensions website does provide the index for each nation in the Arab World. The analysis includes the countries of Egypt, Iraq, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. Please refer to the detailed analysis at the Appendix A. It demonstrates that the Muslim faith plays a significant role in people’s lives. Some other important highlights are that Arab culture is an extremely collective culture and loyalty plays a crucial role and overrides most other societal rules. According to Hofstede, these societies are highly rule-oriented with laws, regulations, and controls in order to reduce the amount of uncertainty, while inequalities of power and wealth have been allowed to grow within the society. (Hofstede 2011)

The interesting part of this analysis is that when we compare cultural highlights of Arab culture and the index done for Turkey, we see an exact mirroring of Arab culture in Turkey’s index\(^9\). This is a proof that the two cultures share similar values and beliefs.

**FAMILY VALUES**

The low Individualism ranking demonstrates that Arab culture is a collective culture based on interdependency. There is no “me” concept but always “we.” People value highly what others think of them and act accordingly. For an Arab, the ultimate goal is to be a respectable member of the society he/she lives in and of the family to which he/she belongs. Family is the most important institution in Arab society and loyalty to the family the most important value. Arab children grow up learning that the needs of a group are more important than the needs of one person. In her book, *Understanding Arabs: A Guide for Modern Times*, Margaret Nydell writes “intense feelings of loyalty and dependence are fostered and preserved by the family, and family loyalty and obligations take precedence over loyalty to friends or demands of a job, members of a family are expected to support each other in disputes with outsiders. Regardless of personal antipathy

\(^9\) Please refer to the Annex A for the table
among relatives, they must defend each other’s honor, counter criticism, and display group cohesion…Of all members of the family, however, the most revered member is the mother.” (Margaret Nydell 2006)

**Family values, loyalty and pressure from parents** are all important concepts for this particular thesis. When we search for the most compelling reasons to explain the phenomenal pace at which Turkish TV series have inculcated Arab pop culture, family loyalty surfaces as one of the main elements. Analysis of two much-admired series, *Gümüş* and *Under the Linden Trees*, reveals that in the center of both shows there is a big and powerful family.

**ROLE OF WOMEN IN ARAB SOCIETY**

One fundamental difference between Turkey and Arabic countries is the role of women in the society. After its War of Independence at the beginning of the 20th century and its transformation to a secular and democratic regime, Turkey managed to secure the rights for women by law. This helped the society to accept the need to respect the women’s rights. Although there are still some flaws and gaps today, especially in rural areas, overall, women have equal rights with men when it comes to education, participating in the labor force, voting rights and heritage law. In Arab societies however, the role of women is different. It would be difficult to make a generalization because it does differ from one Arab nation to another, but it would not be inaccurate to say that the status of women in Arab societies is inferior to men.

An Egyptian freelance female journalist wrote in her recent blog post about the status of women in Egypt.

Rowan El Shimi states (2011):

Politically:

- We were left out in the constitutional revision committee
The clause on the Egyptian president’s origin assumes that the Egyptian president needs to be a man

Women’s quota is not helping women find seats but rather limiting them

Women always have minimal representation in the cabinet

Socially/Culturally:

- A large percentage of women suffer domestic violence and never report it
- Female Genital Mutilation is practices heavily in Egypt even though it is no longer legal
- 85% of Egyptian women suffer sexual harassment in big cities
- A woman’s role in society is often confined to being a wife and mother

The World Economic Forum’s Global Gender Gap Report (2007) shows the Middle East and North Africa region as the worst performing in terms of gender equality. Arab societies have powerful institutions and old traditions that limit women’s access to education, resources, financial services, and career opportunities, especially in the private sector. In addition to this, there are also widely accepted social norms – society sees women’s core responsibility as mother and housewife. Traditionally, women in most of Arab countries, especially in the Gulf States, seem to accept this role instead of challenging it. They either choose to stay at home and raise a family or work for the government which has flexible hours but no real opportunities to make a career. This is an important handicap for women, because the ability to work and advance in a career is crucial to feel empowered. Some recent research supports this. Women are exceeding men in university education in the Gulf States For example, 75% of university graduates in The Emirates are women (one of the highest figures in the world), yet only 4% are employed in the private sector while 60% of public sector jobs are occupied by women (Sara Hamdan, 2010). Oxford Consulting gives cultural traditions as the main reason behind this limited participation and cites the other factors as being inappropriate work conditions, poor training, and a male-dominated work culture: “The Arab
community is a very family-oriented, if your father says ‘Don’t work’, you can’t. My friends are all willing to be housewives. I want to get into management. I didn’t study for four years not to prove myself” Fatmaa Fikree, a student at Zayed University.

This research about Arab women reveals the struggle in their daily lives. In every program, article, or interview analyzed, there is a sense that strong family ties, religious duties and powerful traditions are holding women back even though the more modern (not necessarily Western) life is giving them aspiration. The symbolic importance of the Turkish series lies here, because they do deliver a fine balance between traditional values and modern life. There is perhaps one person whose public persona typifies this same struggle - Queen Rania of Jordan. Recent articles about her in the media reveal that she is experiencing some challenges within her own society, because she is a modern-looking, independent and very attractive young woman. She is involved in projects to improve women’s rights in her country and shows the courage to be visible instead of hidden behind the shadow of her husband. This attitude provokes some critiques and even enough anger in her country that at a recent football game, one part of the stadium was chanting slogans of divorce! One political analyst in Amman said: “The society here is quite conservative and for many the role of a woman is to stay under the shadow of her husband and not to be an independent figure”10

COMMUNICATION AND MEDIA

There are four core elements in this thesis which are culture, society, communication and media. Culture and society in their relevant forms were examined in the previous sections. In this section, an analysis of communication and media using several widely known theories and their

10 Rania de Jordanie Une Reine Dans La Tourmente, by Camille Olivier, Gala Magazine 16/02/2011
relationship will be discussed. There will also be an explanation of the relationship between media and communication in the context of culture and society. This will construct a more solid basis to understand the analysis in the next chapter and the in-depth reasoning of why Arab women are watching these Turkish series.

At the most basic level, there are two types of communication. First is the interpersonal communication which is a two way process providing immediate feedback. The second type is mass communication which aims to give a message to a mass audience; it has historically been one way and not flexible. However, with the development of technology, and the improvement of new media and globalization, the clear-cut separation between these two types is getting blurrier every day. Although the Internet has the potential of being a mass media tool, it also creates platforms for two-way communication which can be more individual and private. This brings us to the question of “what is Mass Media?”

The media, which are the plural of medium, are means of delivering a message to persuade, educate or entertain an audience. And the mass media is doing the same to a large audience—a mass audience. Until recently, mass media was clearly defined according to Beth Lane. In her article, she says it was comprised of eight mass media industries – books, newspapers, magazines, recordings, radio, movies, television and the internet. But defining mass media is not that simple anymore. How would you categorize when an on-line newspaper, intended for a large audience, receives feedback from an individual who expects an action in return? Is it a one-way or two-way process when the dedicated audience of a TV series forms an on-line fan club on Facebook and start communicating with each other about a story and characters which was intended for a large audience, especially when sometimes their comments do influence the scriptwriters?
The idea of mass being mass media, mass audience or mass cultural have been theoretical, and it is becoming even more so and less relevant today with cultural shifts and the convergence of communication technologies McQuail (2010).

COMMUNICATION MODELS

McQuail posits four major communication models - Transmission Model / Ritual Model / Publicity Model / Reception Model (McQuail, 2010). All of them except the Publicity Model are worth exploring since they all have some elements relevant to this thesis.

Transmission Model

One of the earliest models developed to define communication as a process was the Shannon and Weaver Model (1949). The model was developed for a telephone company to improve the efficiency of the communication technically, but it became a widely used and influential social model. This one directional model was taken a step further by Harold Lasswell (19480, whose studies reflect a broader understanding of media in a society.

![Figure 1 Lasswell's model](https://via.placeholder.com/150)

These early linear models of communication provide a good basis for understanding communication processes. However, they are oversimplified

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11 Taken from the book Media, Culture and Society by Paul Hodkinson 2011, Sage Publications, London page:8
and do not take into account the broader sense of media in the society. These models assume that the receivers are passive (Hodkinson 2011)

**Ritual or expressive model**

The trend has been to move from the linear one-way definition to a circular explanation of the communication process, one that includes mutuality / shared perceptions. Rogers (1986) argues that it has become increasingly difficult to think in terms of “source and receiver”; instead, each person is a “participant”. This model focuses on shared understandings and emotions; it brings out the celebratory aspect of communication. Performance plays an important role in this type of communication as it is realized. Examples can be found in religion, art, festivals, and some old traditions and ceremonies.

**Reception model – encoding and decoding of media**

This model, which is the opposite of transmission model, looks at the communication process from the receiver’s point of view and claims that different receivers may decode the same messages differently according to their cultural backgrounds, expectations and needs. Therefore, this model gives “power to the audience.” (McQuail 2010)

**INTRODUCTION OF A NEW MODEL**

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, not one but three communication models are relevant to the subject of this thesis. The **transmission model** is the typical and widely-used model for the television programs; the **ritual model** involves performance and cultural transmission: soaps are the popular sources of transmission of cultural values and traditions. Lastly, the **perception model** is relevant because it is about encoding and decoding messages, about constructing a new meaning other
than the one intended by the sender. Turkish series, especially the early ones discussed in this thesis, were not intentionally targeting Arab women at their production stage. They were produced in 2005 and 2006, and there were no discussions of broadcasting them in Arab countries at the time. The aim was to capture the Turkish audience. But in 2008, the Arabic broadcasting company MBC decided to do a pilot run with Gümüş. When they realized that interest was high, they started the full broadcasting.

**Hodkinson’s new model** was quite suitable for this thesis because he aims to incorporate a broader social and cultural environment into classical mass media communication by keeping in mind that users are not passive. As this thesis claims, they in fact actively participate in the process.

He introduces us to a new model below:

![New Model: The elements of media in socio-cultural contexts](image)

**Figure 2 New Model- The elements of media in socio-cultural contexts**

Below are some relevant highlights from the explanation of each component:

**Media industry** Media and related organizations are not only the creators of content but they also dominate its production and distribution and control the development and availability of technologies.

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12 Taken from the book *Media, Culture and Society* by Paul Hodkinson 2011, Sage Publications, London page:11
**Media technologies** Rather than simply shaping us, technologies are developed and used in ways that relate closely to the social and cultural context of industry and users.

**Media content**: The content may have the capacity to influence the thoughts and lives of users and the broader ways of life and social relations of which they are a part.

**Media users**: Rather than restricting their role to that of receivers who are affected by media messages, it recognizes that, although they still may be open to influence, those who engage with media play an active role in the communication processes.

**The broader social and cultural environment** It is impossible to understand the operation and significance of any one of the elements of media without placing it within this socio-cultural context. (Hodkinson 20111)

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**TELEVISION /SOAP OPERAS AND WOMEN**

The world we live in is full of mass media tools which we use for information and entertainment. Television is still one of the main mass media tools, despite the rapid development of the Internet (Fulcher and Scott 2007). Terrestrial, satellite and cable delivery systems provide hundreds of channels around the globe. People learn what is happening in the world or in their countries from television screens. TV also plays an important role in cultural activities; we import / export cultures through television programs, series, reality shows and soap operas. These programs’ contribution to popular cultures cannot be ignored. There is even the term “**culture industry**” (Adorno and Horkheimer 1986) to describe this concept. The United States of America dominates this industry; by 1996, Hollywood had cornered 70% of the European film market and 83% of the Latin American market. The iconic prime time soap opera *Dallas* was viewed in more than 90 countries at the height of its popularity in Eighties. There are different studies and opinions about how this affects the audience, whether American values are truly being imported by these programs. In their book *Sociology* Fulcher and Scott argue
that it is too simple to generalize and conclude that American values are widely accepted in every country where *Dallas* is shown. Research done by Ang (1985) shows that Dutch viewers were enjoying the story but were rejecting the values. The communication theories previously discussed reveal that the role of the viewer—as active or passive— Influences the effects of a show on an audience.

The following example **shows how culture plays a crucial role** in defining whether an imported program will be successful. A high context culture may very well reject a program from a low context culture even if it was localized.

Coronation Street is a popular British soap opera and in 2000 Granada (production company) signed a £15 million contract with a Beijing company to produce 500 episodes of a Chinese version – Joy Luck Street. Granada believed that Coronation Street had a universal appeal because people have affairs, they have heartbreaks, they lose their jobs, they have aspirations and all these are definitely universal. Local Chinese characters modeled the original ones, a local bar represented the Rovers Return and the original corner shop would be a store selling noodles. Some storylines and characters were dropped or censured by Chinese authorities. Even with all these changes Joy Luck Street was not successful, it attracted only half the audience that is expected. The Chinese found the program too depressive and focusing on the miseries of the characters.\(^\text{13}\)

That is why there are so many articles in the national and international media about the phenomenon of Turkish Soap Operas and Arab women. The fact that New York Times ran almost a full page article about this in November 2009 proves the need and importance of an in-depth research in this area.

\(^{13}\text{Taken from the book: Sociology. by Fulcher and Scott, 2007 3rd edition, Oxford University Press page :361}\)
WHAT IS A SOAP OPERA?

Soap Opera is a universally accepted definition for a specific genre of television, one that is considered mostly as a female genre (Hobson 2003). The genre was born in the US in 1930 as daytime radio serials sponsored by Proctor & Gamble (soap manufacturer) to attract housewives nationwide through mass media. The definition itself varies from one source to another, but there are some important characteristics. The stories are built around family relations, jealousy, infidelity, child-rearing, childlessness, and romantic love (Hobson 2003). There are different sub-genres within soap operas, such as daytime soap opera or prime time soap opera. This separation is interesting for this thesis because originally the Turkish soap operas were produced as prime time ones and were shown once a week. However, on Arab channels they are shown every day, and women are watching them as daytime soap operas. They usually have a story (if the ratings are good) which goes for two years (80-100 episodes) before it ends. This format contrasts with the usual format of soap operas which are usually endless and may run for twenty years or more. The term soap opera is adopted in the thesis nevertheless because, apart from some format differences, the main characteristics of the Turkish genre are similar enough to the American ones. The most important similarities are the story lines, how they appeal particularly to women, and the intense relation between the show’s characters and the audience.

TURKISH SOAP OPERAS

In 1975, the first TV series produced in Turkey was Ask-I Memnu (Forbidden Love) on TRT, which was the only public channel available at the time. Then came others, all of which were watched with great interest. However, the turning point occurred in the 1990s when the industry was privatized and private channels started opening up one after another. These high budget, high quality
productions became part of the TV routine in Turkey after the 2000s and the audience has seen an explosion in every channel. By 2007, the Middle Eastern countries discovered these soap operas with Gümüş\textsuperscript{14} and Under the Linden\textsuperscript{15} Trees. At the beginning the price per episode was $5000, today, this has tripled (Habertürk, 2011). There is a vast interest from Latin America to the Middle East; even the US is interested in getting a new series called Magnificent Century which tells the life of a famous Ottoman Sultan Kanuni. As mentioned above, this new trend of exporting Turkish Soap Operas to other countries, started with two particular soaps Gümüş and Under the Linden Trees (Ihlamurlar Altinda) to the Middle East. In 2006, MBC dubbed two Turkish TV series in colloquial Syrian Arabic and changed the titles to make it sound more meaningful in the Arab World. Gümüş became Noor and Ihlamurlar Altinda became Sanawat El Dayaa. The names of the characters were also changed to some popular modern Arabic names.

In the next chapter, we will see the narrative and semiological analysis of these two series in terms of story line and main characters.

\textsuperscript{14} Translated as Noor in Arabic \\
\textsuperscript{15} Direct translation from Turkish title is Under the Linden Trees but translated as Lost Years in Arabic
CHAPTER V - ANALYSIS OF DATA

STORYLINES AND CHARACTER ANALYSIS OF TWO SERIES

GÜMÜŞ (NOOR)

**Storyline (100 episodes in total):**
It is a story about a rich and powerful family, Şadoğlu, and a couple within this family--Mehmet (Muhannad in Arabic) and Gümüş (Noor in Arabic). The family lives in Istanbul, in a seaside mansion by the Bosphorus. The head of the family is the grandfather Mehmet Fikri who has 3 children - two sons (one has passed away with his wife in a car accident, leaving two children behind) and one daughter (she is married but has no children)--and four grown-up grand children. Ahmet (oldest son) and Şeref (daughter in law) are the parents of Mehmet and his sister Pinar. Bahar and Berk are the children of the son who passed away, and they also live in the same house. Mehmet, as the oldest grandson, is expected to take responsibility for the family business and the family itself. Mehmet and Bahar are both involved in the family’s business. Pinar is an artist who lives in New York despite her grandfather's objections; she has a 4 year old daughter of whom nobody in the family is aware. Berk is a university student. The story starts with a dramatic event: Mehmet’s fiancé, who is pregnant, is killed in a car accident in front of him. He is devastated and falls into a long depression.
After patiently waiting for a year, Mehmet's grandfather takes matters into his own hands and decides that he should get his act together and start taking responsibility for the business and family. Therefore, he should get married. The grandfather chooses the bride himself – Gümüş. He knows her well, because she is the daughter of a distant relative from the small village Afyon that the Şadoğlu family originally moved from to Istanbul. Gümüş lives with her grandmother because she lost her parents while she was very young. Her grandfather was helping the family to live, helping her to follow her education. He is a very respected and appreciated figure by Gümüş and her grandmother. Mehmet is her childhood love, so when his grandfather comes to Afyon out of the blue and says that he would like her to get married to Mehmet, she obeys. Mehmet, on the other hand, has no intention to through with this arranged marriage, so he resists at first, but then some events force him to accept his fate and please his family. The story centers on Gümüş' attempts to adapt into her new life in a completely new world. She manages to transform herself into a modern city girl with the help of some family members and despite the obstacles of her mother–in-law, whose ambitions and jealousy are quite obvious. Gümüş, supported by the grandfather, gets stronger every day, becomes a successful stylist. She transforms her look, her clothing and her confidence so completely, Mehmet, after a period of resistance, falls in love with her. However, it does take a while for him to grow up and become a mature husband. There are several miscommunications, heartbreaks, a miscarriage, a divorce, a reconstruction of their relationship, a reappearance of the so called “dead” fiancé and a son unknown to them, kidnapping, illnesses, a baby and finally, a big wedding. There are, of course, other characters and their stories. The audience examines known issues through other family members' lives - like illegitimate children, broken marriages, infidelity, the empowerment of women, serious illnesses, the rebellious attitude of young generations, and a dose of family hypocrisy, to name the few. The finale is a happy ending with Mehmet and Gümüş getting married a second time with a big wedding while the ever growing family always lives in the same seaside mansion, adding and subtracting members as they go.
Main character analysis: 

Gümüş: She is a small village girl in her early 20s, a high school graduate but quite talented in handcraft. She is giving lessons in the village school. When she comes to Istanbul, it takes her a very short time to get into the big city atmosphere. We see both worlds--rural and urban--through her. Her success is an inspiration to women, because she transforms her look into an elegant modern looking woman, she advances in her career and becomes a known stylist and most importantly, she manages to transform an arranged marriage into true love. Her character traits that are Middle Eastern women appreciate and identify with are her gentle but determined attitude, her honesty, and her preservation of some conservative values such as respect to elderly, not raising her voice in front of others, and being very patient. She is a nearly perfect blend of East and West, both physically and mentally. That is why she became an icon among Arab women. The paragraph below is taken from Daily News Egypt (2007)

Although critics have attributed the show’s success to Mu hannad’s striking looks and his ideal devotion as a husband, it is Noor’s independent and willful personality that captivated female viewers across the Arab world. Being able to balance a successful marriage and a flourishing career is everything a woman wishes for; and after all, there is a reason why the show is named Noor, not Muhannad.

Mehmet: He is a rich, well-educated and handsome young man. He went to schools in Europe and in the US, started working in the family business and was very successful until he lost his fiancé. On the surface, Mehmet is the ideal “prince” for all the young girls. His western looks (blue eyes, pale skin, structured face and perfectly built body) made all Arab women audience dream. His gentle attitude, his devotion to his wife, his respect to his family and especially to his mother are all the important characteristics that helped capture the hearts of millions of Arab women viewers. Sometimes this fan admiration went even too
far. According to many local newspapers from the region, there were divorces based on the platonic love women viewers held for Mehmet.

The below paragraph is taken from an article written by John Dagge 2008

“In Bahrain, a wife moved for divorce after her husband failed to hit a one-week deadline to become "more like Muhanad", local media reported. In Saudi Arabia, a husband divorced his wife and threw her out of the marital home after becoming fed up with constant complaints he should be as romantic as the blue-eyed, blond haired heartthrob, played by 24-year-old Turkish actor and model Kivanc Tatlitu. Syrian women are particularly vulnerable to the Turkish TV hunk's charms, with a local website reporting there have been four Muhanad related divorces in Aleppo alone. In one case, a husband divorced his wife after a heated argument in which she reportedly told him: "I want to be with Muhanad for only one night and die afterwards." (Dagge 2008)

**Mehmet Fikri**: The dominant grandfather, he represents the old guard who observes everything in the house and in the lives of each family member and does not hesitate to intervene when he sees necessary. He is quite authoritative and would like to manage the family as he manages his business. For him that is the most natural thing to do. On the other hand, his unconditional love for each family member is unquestionable, and he is not portrayed as an evil character at all. He represents the male dominant, collective high context culture; he is an exaggerated version of the Middle Eastern reality. This quote from Mehmet about his grandfather sums up the general thinking about this dominance:

“My grandfather always considers our own benefits, he may be right or wrong in his doing but he is always right in his thinking”

**Şeref**: She is the mother of Mehmet and Pinar, wife of Ahmet (the oldest son). She, like Gümüş, is from the small town Afyon. Although not much educated, she managed to educate herself and became a respectful member of the Istanbul elites and a glorious housewife. She is responsible for the management of the “family house” and likes to control people’s lives, especially her son’s. She is
portrayed as somewhat evil, but towards the end, she does transform as well to a gentler mother who is finally at peace with herself and with others. She represents another reality of the Middle Eastern culture – a dominant mother in the family and a typical mother-son relation. She is very protective of her son, jealous of her daughter-in-law, and she does everything she can to suppress her, to prevent her from being successful. All these are quite familiar stories for Turkish and Arab audience from their own lives.

IHLAMURLAR ALTINDA (THE LOST YEARS)

![Image](image_url)

**Storyline (80 episodes in total):**

This is a rather complex story of two completely opposite worlds which are not only apart in terms of economics (rich versus poor), but also in terms of mentality as well (conservative versus modern). It is also a story of how these two different worlds can become one through love, friendship, solidarity and destiny. Usually in Turkish soap operas, the main couple starts building their relation from the first episode and the story gathers momentum. However, at the beginning we see another couple, Yılmaz and Elif. They are both from a well-known ghetto of Istanbul – Gazi. He works in a transportation company and she works in a textile factory. They are engaged and trying to get married but struggle to find enough money to rent a house and buy all the necessities. Yılmaz is quite happy where he is and anxious to get married to Elif. However, she wants more in life; she dreams of nice houses, trendy clothes, looks up to female executives in the workplace as role models and she pushes to advance. From the start, we see a
fight going on between these two young people. He doesn’t understand why she wants more in life, and she doesn’t understand why he always gets angry when she wants more. The following dialogue illustrates their conflict:

_They are in a shopping mall because Elif insisted on coming_

_Yılmaz: “What kind of place is this, very annoying, why don’t we sit by the sea and enjoy the view instead?”_

_Elif: “Don’t you see there is life here, we are young!”_

_Yılmaz: “All I see bunch of people crazy for shopping, most probably they don’t even earn the money they are spending here”_

They both live with their widowed mothers. Yılmaz’s mother is a more traditional housewife, but Elif’s mother is a strong character who also wants a better life for her daughters (Elif has a younger sister, a high school student). The father left them years ago, the mother works as a tailor at home, and Elif had to give up her education to support the family. We see some supporting characters again in this world, friends and other family members. It is shot in real locations, so the audience observes the poor neighborhood, the little houses, kids playing on the streets, etc. Parallel to this world we see another one – rich houses, nice offices, trendy clothes, and fancy cars. In the middle of all this is another family called the Tekinel Family. They own the textile factory at which Elif works. The father is a dominant figure who is about to transfer the business to his son Ömer and his daughter Filiz. They both are well educated and run the family business quite successfully already. Elif comes to Filiz’s office from time to time to iron or sew the clothes. One day Ömer sees her and likes her very much, so he decides to get to know her better and makes all the rights moves to impress her. Elif then gets promoted to work in the shop where she becomes the face of a new perfume campaign. Yılmaz is a very jealous man and quite conservative when it comes to women. He becomes angry and violent. He gets into a fight with Ömer first then with Elif. Finally, he destroys the shop that she is working at by diving into the window with his motorcycle! He ends up in jail and they break up. After some hesitation, Elif accepts the marriage proposal of Ömer, although she knows
that she doesn’t love him as much as she loves Yılmaz. On the side of Tekinel family, parents are outraged; they oppose this marriage, and view Elif as an opportunist. Only Filiz, his sister and her boss, support this marriage. In the meantime, Yılmaz is in jail for 2 years where he meets an important man. This man, Kemal, will become almost a father to him as well as a mentor. Yılmaz saves his life and Kemal takes him under his wings. Kemal is an ex-mafioso who denounced any dirty business after losing his son to drugs. Now he runs a big holding company. When both are out of prison, Yılmaz becomes his partner and makes a plan to get his revenge. He is determined to get very rich and destroy the Tekinel family. He somehow manages to get closer to Filiz, and succeeds in making her fall in love with him. But something unexpected happens, and eventually he falls in love with Filiz as well. The second part of the story (around episode 20) becomes the story of Yılmaz (Yehia in Arabic) and Filiz (Lamis in Arabic). We witness their love, their struggle to be together, obstacles, evil characters, family pressure, friendship, support etc. During the story, Elif dies giving birth, and Filiz’s father dies learning that she is about to marry Yılmaz (first season finale). The second season is about the couple’s struggle, about Filiz becoming pregnant but not telling Yılmaz that it is his child. The Tekinel holdings go bankrupt so the family loses everything and moves to Gazi (ghetto neighborhood) where they are surrounded with friends (Elif’s mother, sister, friends etc.). Two worlds slowly come together at the end. Yılmaz and Filiz get finally married with all the family members' blessings. Ömer and Yılmaz become friends, and he finds someone who truly loves him, and they also get married. The last scene, 5 years later, shows an ever growing crowd with many children having a picnic under the Linden Trees (just like the title). The two mothers from two different worlds – the mother of Filiz and the mother of Elif -- conclude the series by saying “you see we managed to have a successful partnership- me knowing the profession on the job and you being very elegant, tasty, trendy, our shop in the chic neighborhood of Istanbul is doing very well!”
Main character analysis\textsuperscript{17}: 

\textbf{Yılmaz (Yehia)}: He is the typical Turkish / Middle Eastern guy both in terms of look and attitude. He has dark skin, dark eyes, and a mustache. He is from the poor neighborhood. His father died when he was young so he had to work to support his mother and his sister, but he managed to finish high school and enroll in a distance-learning college. He is a very hardworking, honest, goodhearted and trustworthy guy. On the other hand, especially at the beginning of the story, he has an oriental side – very jealous, conservative (he gets mad when he sees his fiancé wearing sleeveless or low-neck shirts, for instance) and may even become violent if he feels that his woman has betrayed him. He thinks that women should either stay at home with the kids or do some jobs as a hobby, like running a flower shop. But with time and Filiz’s influence, he does change and becomes more modern in his thinking without losing his honesty and decency. 

\textbf{Filiz (Lamis)}: She is a well-educated, well brought-up girl from a wealthy family. She looks tough but inside she is very emotional, not revealing her feelings easily. She is prideful to a point of arrogance. Her Western style clothing and behavior contradict the way she thinks and feels. She wears designers’ clothes that can be highly revealing and sexy but she still lives with her parents. Although she is a working woman, she is attached to his father very deeply, and she doesn’t go out with men very often. She is almost waiting for someone unique, honest, and unspoiled. We discover later in the series that she has not been with someone until she met Yılmaz as if she was waiting for the right person. This represents one of the most respected attitudes in Turkey. Although it is changing rapidly, young women are still expected to be a virgin until marriage or at least until they meet their future husbands. In the series, that is one of the reasons that Yılmaz becomes so impressed with her and tells her “you are not at all as you look!” 

\textsuperscript{17} Please refer to Annex C for a key image
Elif (Rafif): She is rather a complicated character; on the one hand, she is a typical girl from a poor neighborhood with understandable ambitions to have a better life, but on the other hand she comes across, especially at the beginning, as greedy and careless. She dismisses presents that Yılmaz buys for her because they look old-fashioned, and she is not satisfied with the house search because she wants a house like the ones she sees in the rich neighborhoods. She accepts the marriage proposal of Ömer because he can give her a good life and he loves her very much even though she does not really love him. She is a more realistic character than Filiz in a way, since most women, especially in countries like Egypt, Syria, Yemen, can associate with her struggling life, with her tough choices, her dreams and aspirations. At the end, she realizes that she made a mistake by choosing money over true love and asks forgiveness from Yılmaz right before her death. This is a well-known Islamic tradition; it is called “receiving blessings from the ones you hurt in the past before you die”

Ömer: He is the only son of the Tekinel family, well educated, and devoted to his family, especially to his mother. He works in the family business, but he is not as dedicated as Filiz. He has a weaker character. It is almost like he is the spoiled daughter, and Filiz is the tough son of the family. He is like a small helpless child; when something bad happens he likes to escape rather than finding a solution. That is why he starts gambling and loses almost all family fortune on the table when he realizes that his wife is still in love with Yılmaz. When Elif dies, he goes to Italy for 4 years, leaving his new born baby with his mother-in-law. He, too, changes over time, matures, finds peace in himself, finally becomes a good father to his daughter and marries a woman who loves him back. Ömer and his sister Filiz represent an important reality in Middle Eastern culture – pressure from the family. It is almost a taboo to complain about this, but almost all young men and woman, regardless of their socio-economic status, feel it one way or another. They have to live up to the expectations of their parents. In most cases, they have to accept the path which is chosen for them--either an arranged marriage or running the family business because this is part of the high context
culture. That is one of the main reasons that there are problems in the couple’s relations. As we will see in later quotes, arranged marriages and family pressures do lead to unhappy lives, and women look for an escape such as these soap operas. The quote below is taken from an article written by John Dagge (2008): "Our men are rugged and unyielding, I wake up and see a cold and detached man lying next to me; I look out the window and see dust. It is all so dull. On Noor, I see beautiful faces, the beautiful feelings they share and beautiful scenery." (26-year old Saudi housewife)

NARRATIVE AND SEMIOLOGIC ANALYSIS

A detailed analysis of the soap operas to fulfill the objectives of the study will be done in the following section.

OBJECTIVE 1: WHY DO THE ARAB WOMEN WATCH TURKISH SOAP OPERAS?

The first objective of this thesis is to understand the real reasons for the phenomenal interest among Arab women.

"Viewers first fell in love with what is familiar in the show: Muhannad's arranged marriage, the respect shown to elders, the family all living together in one house. But what led to their utter fascination is what differentiates it from their lives - the romance within the marriage, the open, honest communication between husband and wife."

(Middle Eastern radio journalist Alanoud Bashir)¹⁸

The quote above summarizes very effectively why these series became so popular among Arab people. Nurcin Yildiz’s in-depth analysis mentions the same
thing as the main point, that this two sided identity of Turkey is most attractive and rather curious for many Arab women (Yildiz 2010).

There are realistic stories and similar cultures but a more modern life style, which represents the ideal blend for which they are looking. Primary research supports this, some responses from the on-line survey to the following question are:

Why do you think these series became so successful among Arab women?
Some answers:
“Nice stories, nice sceneries. Similar culture but more open”
“I think we have some few things in common with the Turkish customs”
“The stories are nice, the culture of Turkey and more and more (scenery, actors, decoration)”
“It has a modern twist to it”

In the face-to-face interview, the participant agrees with this finding as well:
“The stories are more like facts of life; it makes it less boring, easy to follow. We see similar values in these series, there is also Islam but not a lot, women can openly kiss men and Arab women enjoy watching that but nothing is exaggerated like in the Western series, there are no sex scenes, or naked people. There is a certain level, not too open and that is good”.

Secondary data backs the same findings. The following quotes are taken from a TV program called The World Focus by Muhammad El Kasim in 2009:
“The shows deal with the issues that we are dealing with” (Rana from Ramallah)

“They present familiar topics like arranged marriages, respect to elderly, family members all living in the same house. The reason these shows attract many viewers is because Turkey is a Muslim country also its culture and traditions are

18 Taken from the article of “The Noor Phenomenon” by J. Dagge, 2008
The series became such a surprising hit among Arabs that a research company called Ka Research did a survey in Saudi Arabia among women. They conducted an opinion poll surveying a random sample of 207 Saudi women aged 15 years and above to study the phenomenon of Noor. One finding was:

“56% stated that Turkey’s geographical, cultural and religious proximity to Arab society had increased their interest in the series.” (KA Research 2008)

One observation from a Sociology Professor in Cairo, Abdel-Hamid Abdel Latif is particularly interesting:

“40% of Arab population is under 25 years old and up till now in Arabic TV, the series were all about the daily lives of typical Arab people but Gümüş is about modern, more western style life which is more relevant to young generations especially women” (Newsweek, 2010)

We see this **Western / Eastern blend** in both series. In Gümüş, we see a beautiful house, breath taking scenery, and nice clothes, but some characters like the grandfather or even Gümüş herself are quite traditional. She gets embarrassed when her husband kisses her in front of others for instance. When the grandfather learns that his grand-daughter had an illegitimate child, he grabs his gun and says “20 years ago I should be killing you!” and later says “We should find a solution which would not hurt our family honor!” What he really means is that he wants to find the father and force him to marry his grand-daughter. The second series under examination, Under the Linden Trees, is based in this “traditional versus modern” or “poor versus rich” or “East versus West” blends as a whole story. In terms of images, the director shows us the two worlds side by side. For instance, we see Elif’s poor house in the Gazi Neighborhood and then the action cuts to the Tekinel’s house, a big mansion in
the middle of breathtaking green scenery with modern, very trendy furniture. In one scene, Yilmaz is looking at drawings which are part of a proposal that Filiz made for his hotel chain employees’ clothing line. He finds them too Western and says:

“It shows that you don’t know our culture much, we want authenticity not Western imitation! We want a blend of East and West just like Istanbul. Here you can eat kebab or sushi, you can either go to a mosque or to a church; it is a magical place!”

It is not just the ideal blend of East and West that attracts these Arab women but also the discussion of subjects that are either considered taboo in their societies or don’t exist, such as considering men and women as equals, more balanced and romantic relations between men and women, family hypocrisy in the name of honour. Men are being portrayed as weak characters, while women are being depicted as very strong willed and independent minded.

Secondary data also supports this conclusion – KA Research’s one highlight was:

“63 % agreed that Arab women’s interest in the Noor series is a sign that they are dissatisfied and would like greater freedom and rights.”

(KA Research 2008)

One program, done by Claudia Laszczak for Deutche Welle TV in 2009 on Noor Phenomenon, shows some interviews with Arab women. Here are some quotes:

“Noor became a role model for many women especially the ones who wish more freedom in their lives.”

“Some says Noor even got some women thinking leaving unhappy marriages.”

“The show gave women the courage to not simply accept everything, it made them stronger.”

In both series, we see very strong female characters. The main heroines (Gümüş...
and Filiz) are successful, independent, working women, but at the same time they are devoted to their families, very attached to their traditions and loyal to their lovers. However, there are also some supporting female characters who are also very influential such as Meral in *Under the Linden Trees*; she plays a Mafia leader, an evil person who is still very strong. In addition, Bahar in *Gümüş*, the other grand-daughter, is very active in family business, and it is she who pushes Gümüş to become a business woman. In one scene, Yilmaz kisses Filiz by force for the first time, and she pushes him back and says “nobody can touch me without my approval!” before she kisses him back. In the Western world this scene would be seen as banal, but in societies where women struggle every day to have some equal rights, it would only create astonishment and admiration. In Saudi Arabia, women cannot go out without a male companion and they cannot work without their male guardian’s permission, so it would not be surprising to find out that 71,5% of women are watching these series (KA Research 2008) because they found in these a world of which they can only dream.

**Format and Signs - Semiotics**

Semiotics does play an important role in the decoding of these series by Arab women. The founder of semiotics was a Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857 -1953). Although it started as a study of language, many scholars from different fields such as anthropology (Claude Lévi-Strauss) and psychoanalysis (Jacques Lacan) developed the concept even further, and in 1960 Semiotics began to become a major approach to cultural studies as a result of the work of Roland Barthes (Daniel Chandler 1994). According to Chandler, semiotics studies the role of signs as part of social life. By **signs**, he means not only **language or words** but also **images, sounds, and objects**. However, all these signs do not have a meaning until we give them a meaning. “**We interpret things as signs largely unconsciously by relating them to familiar systems of conventions.**” (Chandler 1994).
There are so many familiar signs in these TV series which indicate a “high context Middle Eastern culture”. But probably the most important is the language. The decision to dub these series in Syrian colloquial Arabic instead of the more formal Modern Standard Arabic\(^{19}\) was a crucial one. Research also shows that one of the main reasons for this popularity comes from the fact that people feel more comfortable watching them.

Primary data supports this finding. Figure 4.0 below is from the on-line survey conducted by the researcher:

![Bar chart showing main reasons to watch these series]

**Figure 3 Main reasons**

As shown in the bar chart 6 people out of 11 participants to on-line survey and in addition to this the face-to-face interviewee, agree that language plays an important role.

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\(^{19}\) MSA is widely used by media and educated people and often referred to as the language of “elites”
Secondary data also backs this up. Here is a quote from the article of John Dagge in 2008:

“I feel like I am in an Arabic literature class when I watch Mexican dubbed shows, but when I watch Noor, I definitely feel that it is entertainment”

(Dania Nugali from Saudi Arabia)

It is not only the dubbing but also some localization done with these series that has proven to be very successful. As mentioned before, the names of the characters are changed to some modern Arabic names. Mehmet became Muhamnad, Gümüş became Noor, Yılmaz became Yehia and Filiz became Lamis. In her analyses, Nurcin Yıldız raises an interesting point by saying it is not possible to change a Western character’s name. For instance Michael cannot become Muhamnad since it would look ridiculous. However, because these shows are Turkish, and two cultures are similar, it was accepted by an Arab audience. Furthermore, the title of “Under the Linden Trees” was changed to “Lost Years” because in Arab countries such trees don’t exist, and using them in the title might therefore alienate the audience.

These series are shown every day in Arab TV, unlike Turkish TV which runs one episode per week. In the primary research, 6 out of 11 participants said that they do watch them every day and one said she watches them couple of times a week:
**Music** is another important sign; Turkish music has some similarities in terms of melody and rhythm with Arab music. The high production values in those TV series’ means that music plays an important role; most of the songs are produced originally for a particular soap opera. There are familiar words in it, so Arabs feel like they understand the meaning of the songs (Yildiz 2010).

Other important signs can be listed as:

**Houses**: In both series, there are some iconic houses. In Gümüş, the seaside mansion by the Bosphorus became so famous that there were special tours organized by Arab Tour Companies to visit the house. More than 10’000 Arab fans came to visit the house. Here is a quote from a Tour Operator:

“100 people on average come visit the house per day, sometimes it may be even 300 people, they pay $50/visit. Some comes exclusively to Turkey to see the house” (Serdar Ali Abet)

20 Please refer to Annex D for some photos
**Women’s clothing:** Clothes do not represent only the socio-economic class of the women in these series as in real life; they also represent a mindset. Modern and western women tend to be freer in their choice of clothing. For instance, Filiz and Gümuş are seen to wear short skirts, short-sleeved shirts or strapless evening dresses. However, when Elif was first living in the poor / conservative neighborhood, she was wearing long sleeves and long skirts because that is also part of the culture. In Turkish series, we rarely see women with a headscarf; and if we do, they are usually old women playing the role of a grandmother or village women who work on the field where it is part of the tradition to wear a headscarf. This lack of headscarves is a symbol of secularism, but it may also be decoded by Arab women as a declaration of freedom.

**Decoration / Scenery:** One aspect which comes out in every interview is the interior decoration of the houses and breathtaking scenery. Primary data reveals this very clearly. Here are some quotes taken from answers of the open-ended questions:

What are other reasons to watch these series?

“Good deep actors (sensitive), view, nice villas, clothes, simple make up, love stories, views, music, songs, amazing acting, but too long, good looking actors, food, restaurants, hotels, high production not cheap (high quality of production)”

“The Hero’s match each other & well chosen, nature view, good production & filming, deep acting so real, music is amazing, love, nice villas, nice cars, romance, respect the elderly”

” Interior design ideas, home decorating, photos, pictures & accessories”

And face-to-face interviewee makes a point about the scenery and says:

“I went to Turkey because of the series; we didn’t know Turkey being this beautiful until I watched the series. I heard about the amazing food, scenery, sea etc. but when I saw it on the TV I decided to visit Istanbul”
Some secondary data reveals also interesting finding:

“According to Tourism Ministry statistics, in 2006 and 2007 summer period, Arab tourists coming to Turkey were around 350'000 and in 2007 and 2008 after these two series, the number raised to 530'000” (Newsweek Turkey 2009)

**Cultural signs:** Although Turkey is more westernized and secular, in terms of traditions and cultural values, it is still a part of the Middle Eastern culture. There are some small signs in these series that can easily be decoded by a Middle Eastern person. That is the reason why these series make Arabs feel very comfortable; they feel warmth towards the actors because they share common values. Small signs that signal a shared culture include:

- removing shoes when you enter a house (not in the big mansions)
- offering Turkish coffee or tea using special cups for your guests
- whole family living together including the elderly
- Islamic rituals such as Ramadan
- greeting parents and elderly by kissing their hands
- greeting by kissing on the cheek
- breakfast and dinner including large families gathering in the morning and in the evening to eat similar dishes (not corn flakes and coffee in the morning for instance but tea and bread, cheese, jam)

**OBJECTIVE 2: MIRRORING OR INFLUENCING?**

The second object is to show a relationship between the current Muslim Arab women’s state-of-mind as revealed in the current political and sociological atmosphere and in these soap operas - how they are mirroring and to some extent influencing their way of thinking and acting?
In order to answer this question, we need to look at it on two different levels – macro and micro. **At the macro level**, we can show that these series are **mirroring the Arab women's state-of –mind**. **At a micro level**, or in daily life, social and behavioral changes indicate that the soap operas are, in fact, **influencing them**. In this section we will see look into these two levels in more detail.

**MACRO LEVEL**

The Arab society, especially the female sub-culture, is **ready for a change**. They are looking for a country which can act as a role model to show the successful blending of the Eastern and Western values - **a country that does not deny its Islamic roots but which also does not make religion its points of reference in everyday life**. Arab women are also gaining their voice; they are **demanding more freedom and democracy** for themselves both at home and outside the home.

**Searching for a role model:**

This interest is also a reflection and extension of Turkey’s rising image as a role model country in the region, according to a survey done by TESEV (Turkey Economic and Sociological Survey Foundation). In 2009, in 8 countries\(^{21}\) with 2267 people, Turkey's likability in the region increased 5% in one year to achieve an 80% favorable rating\(^{22}\). In the same report, Turkish TV series are seen as an important factor contributing to this increase. In general, 78% of people in Middle East reported that they had at least once watched a Turkish TV series. The well known researcher and journalist Taha Akyol wrote an interesting article about the subject stating the same TESEV research results and claiming that these TV series make an impact in reinforcing the rising values of “freedom of women,

\(^{21}\) Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, Iraq, Palestine and Turkey

\(^{22}\) Please refer to Annex B page 80 for the table
democracy and equality." According to Akyol, one proof of this theory is that 61% of people in the region see Turkey as a “model”\textsuperscript{23}.

The paragraph below is taken from an Arabic newspaper (John Dagge 2008)

Adib Khair, head of the Syrian-based Sama Productions which dubbed Noor into Arabic, said the show’s popularity lies in the fact that it taps into the region’s aspirations. “It’s us in the Middle East as we’d like to be in 15 years’ time,” said Khair. "It’s us, as we want to be socially, politically, economically; it’s what we aspire to. You see rich and poor, you see people inside a restricted and religious society, but religion is not something that is enforced on them. Look at the cars, fashion, homes; it’s aspiring. I’m showing you how a poor person in our part of the world would love to be looked at. It’s a reflection of the audience and their aspirations.”

Graham Fuller, former Chief of Middle Eastern Affairs at the CIA and currently working at Simon Fraser University Canada as a history professor, made this comment to Newsweek Turkey in 2009:

“Most of the Arab countries are following Turkey because in on hand it is Muslim and on the other hand it is modern, strong and independent. Now there is a new element to add which is the influence of the Turkish TV series on social and cultural transformation of Arab world. Because there are no statistics, no political messages or ideologies in these series, it is more interesting and durable this way. They show daily lives of ordinary people and Arabs see how Islam can be part of this daily life. (Fuller 2009)

\textsuperscript{23} Please refer to Annex B page 81 for the table
Breaking the boundaries…

Arab women today are in a state of transition. The recent uprising in the Middle East and North Africa, the revolution in Tunisia and Egypt, the protests in Yemen, Bahrain even Saudi Arabia show that women as well as men demand more freedom and democracy. The pictures we keep seeing on our television screens or internet sites contradict the usual stereotyping of Arab women in the Western media which is passive, without a voice or opinion and almost always covered fully or partially. The difference between this uprising and the others, which have been occurring regularly for the past 10 years, is not only the influence of social media, it is also that women are upfront this time, playing key roles in organizing the events. For example, in Egypt, it was a young woman named Asma Mahfouz who inflamed the fire of revolution by putting an emotional video on Youtube begging people to come and demonstrate on the 25th of January in the name of freedom and democracy. According to a recent TIME article she became “The leader of the revolution” (Carla Power 2011). Tahrir Square in Cairo was transformed into a peaceful revolution center in a very short time. As Ahdaf Soueif puts it in a recent interview24, Tahrir was a civic space where everybody would gather, even with their young kids, bringing food for the
demonstrators or medicines for the street hospitals. This kind of sharing, caring, peaceful environment could not be created without a major feminine influence. After the regime change, it was another young girl, 17 year old high school student Sanaa Seif, who published a newspaper called El Gornal to voice the activists' opinions, despite the fact that she lacked the necessary governmental permission to publish it. She said “It is time to push the borders of freedom”

The e-mail interviewee answered some questions about the influence, and here is a response for the following question:

Would you agree or disagree with this statement? “Arab women’s high interest on these series is just a sign that they are going through a transition period and demanding more freedom and modernity in their lives”

"I fully agree, most of the Arab women have been oppressed in one way or another, be it by their fathers at some point or their spouses and even by their sons, it is only natural that they react and rebel and demand for freedom and liberty.”

KA Research findings support this:

63% agreed that Arab women’s interest in the Noor series is a sign that they are dissatisfied and would like greater freedom and rights.

24 8/03/2011, www.democracnow.org
MICRO LEVEL

There is no doubt that Arab women are influenced by these series one way or another. The kind of influence varies by specific country because, as mentioned before, all the Arab countries are not the same. Women in Saudi Arabia may only ask their husbands to be more romantic like Muhannad, as they can’t go so far as to demand going out and driving, whereas in the West Bank a young girl can sit with their male friends in a café with her parents’ permission after seeing the series. It is obvious that one of the main areas that women get influenced by these series is the nature of the relationship between men and women.

Here is another response from the e-mail interviewee for the question:

Do you think these series have an influence (negative or positive) on Arab women particularly? If YES, what kind of influence?

“Surely, these series have an influence on Arab women but I am not sure of the nature of this influence, what is positive for some women could be regarded as negative to their spouses and vice versa. By watching this kind of series on a daily basis and during almost 365 days women cannot but become more demanding, more liberal and more independent.”

On the secondary data, KA Research’s finding was:
“26% of the women agreed that the series had changed their sentiments towards male-female relationships.” (KA Research 2008)

Some interesting quotes and anecdotes were also found during the desktop research. The following quotes are taken from a TV program called Global 3000 program on DW-TV 2009:

“Turkish shows helped bring some taboos down. Relationships between young men and women are becoming more common in our society that’s why our
"If it wasn't for the Turkish series, I probably wouldn't be here tonight (in a trendy café with her male friends). For my parents accepting the idea of me hanging out with my male friends after school… only after watching the series, now they say so what!" (Nidaa Faraaj Ramallah / West Bank)

There is also very harsh criticism from the religious authorities, further proof that there is an influence on women. In Saudi Arabia, Grand Mufti Sheikh Abdul-Aziz Al Sheikh issued a fatwa (a religious decree) banning all the Muslims watching Turkish soap operas. He said:

“It is haram (forbidden by Islam) to watch Turkish series, they are replete with wickedness, evil, moral collapse and war on virtue that only God knows the truth of" (Egypt Daily News 2008)
This article from the Aljazeera website shows how serious these objections can be and how threatened these Islamic clerks feel by the soap operas\textsuperscript{25}.

It is not only with fatwas but also with humor some people show their objection. For instance, a recent cartoon demonstrates how these series became influential in a very short time. It shows modern illnesses – Mad cow disease, swine flu and Noor!\textsuperscript{26}

\textsuperscript{25} You can read the full article on this link: http://english.aljazeera.net/news/middleeast/2008/09/2008913181844832341.html

OBJECTIVE 3: ARE THESE SOAP OPERAS A TOOL OF DIPLOMACY?

The third objective of this thesis is to attempt to understand if these series are becoming an important communication tool of cultural diplomacy between Turkey and Arab nations. There are some signs indicating that two cultures are becoming closer due to these series. However when this question was asked during the primary research, findings were mixed.

Do you think these TV series helped two cultures to come closer? How?

<table>
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<th>YES</th>
<th>MAYBE</th>
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<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
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Table 2 Responses from on-line survey

And here are two quotes – one saying Yes and one saying No:

“Not really because what we see in these series is rather a very “open minded” way of life and society which is not the case in all Arab countries”

"Yes. Arabs got to know a lot of things about Turkish culture through these series especially the ones who have not been to Turkey”

Secondary research is more supportive - KA Research finding:

“56% of the women interviewed felt their views regarding Turkey had been altered after watching the Noor series.”
One anecdote on the subject:

“In Riyadh, Turkish Ambassador Naci Koru was talking to a high level Saudi diplomat and the first 15 minutes was about “Under the Linden Trees” and Mr. Koru after facing lots of questions about the soap operas in different occasions, had to take some lessons from his wife to learn who is who and what's happening in these series. (Newsweek Turkey 2009)

One Arab diplomat said once:

“These TV series succeeded in 6 months something that diplomacy couldn’t for decades” (Newsweek Turkey 2009)

And a quote from an Arab tourist in Istanbul, talking to AFPTV:

“When all the people saw Muhammed and Noor, I think, they decided to go to Turkey. Before we knew about Turkey, we studied at school but we didn’t know it was so nice” (Rasha Taha Al Hawamdeh from Jordan)

Nurçin Yıldız raises an interesting point in her study (2010) by saying that:

“If today a little girl from a small village in Syria could talk about Cappadocia or Ankara, this is a direct result of the high interest on these soap operas”

There are signs which indicate that in terms of tourism, business and the overall image of Turkey, these series are becoming an effective tool. However, one should be cautious not to use this data to conclude with certainty that there is a rapprochement of two cultures due to the Turkish soap operas. More research will be needed in this area before any such conclusions can be drawn.
CHAPTER VI - CONCLUSION

“We must get away from the habit of thinking in terms of what the media do to people and substitute it for the idea of what people do with media” (James Halloran 1970)

The purpose of this thesis was to do an in-depth analysis of the growing interest in Turkish soap operas among Arab women within the context of mass media communication, audience research, culture and society and to understand the impact they are making on Arab Women.

In order to establish a solid ground for the research, a new communication model (Hodkinson 2011) is introduced which includes all the elements of mass communication by taking into consideration a broader social and cultural environment within which the media operates.

One critical assumption made in this analysis is that the media has some influence on media users. However, it is also important to note that a TV audience though receptive is not mindless, and the process of watching TV is not routine and passive.

As Fulcher and Scott say in the book of Sociology (2007):
“People will respond to cultural imports in the context of their own situation and values.”

The objectives of this study were:
- To understand the socio-cultural reasons for the popularity of soap operas among Arab women
- To see if these series are mirroring and influencing Arab women’s state-of-mind, their way of thinking and acting
- To study if these series are becoming an important communication tool of cultural diplomacy between Turkey and Arab nations

In order to fulfill these objectives, an intensive secondary research has been undertaken. The researcher found many books, reviews and articles on the topic of impact of soap operas on women in general as well as newspaper articles and TV programs from different countries about Turkish series and Arab women. Some surveys done in the Middle East related to the topic were also used in the analysis in order to understand the impact. The researcher conducted an on-line survey, a face-to-face and by e-mail contact with 13 Arab women (11 for on-line survey and 2 for interview) ages between 23 and 37 by using purposeful sampling and applying snowball technique to choose these respondents who were from Syria, Egypt, Bahrain, Palestine and Lebanon. Although there are differences between these Arab countries, there are enough similarities in terms of language, religion, traditions and values to use the term “Arab World”. That is why several Arab countries were included in this research rather than concentrating on one particular country.

First objective was to understand the reasons behind this popularity. There was enough information available to make a complete analysis and to understand the socio-cultural reasons. Primary data from on-line survey and the face-to-face interview was a rich source; in addition to that there were plenty of quotes from interviews done by the journalists and TV reporters on the particular subject. It surfaced that the Turkish life style was an ideal blend of Eastern and Western values, and this is a very attractive factor for Arab women, especially in a period that they are looking for more freedom without losing their Eastern values and their Islamic identity. They would like to have some modernity, but they don’t want to be seen as “Westernized”. This is quite unique to the Arab World. Islam plays a dominant role in people’s daily lives, everything they do is referenced
back to Islam and they are judged by the Islamic rules. It is exactly at this point that most Arab women would like to make some improvements; they don’t want to lose their Muslim identity but would like to have more freedom and equality. And Turkish series are reflecting exactly this balance; they are the visual proof of modern Muslim life. They give a message to Arab women that a woman doesn’t have to choose only being a Muslim or liberal, she can be both.

This quote from NYTimes interviews with young Arabs (NYT 2011) makes the point:

“I really dream of an Islamic but secular country” (Mariam Abu Adas)

The similarities and differences between Arab and Turkish culture have been also looked at to identify some key values we see in these series which attract this particular audience. The Arab women in their society, their struggles, their frustrations, their aspirations were reviewed and observed. The recent uprising in the Arab World and sudden interest of Western media on the Arab Women was also important in helping to gain access to some valuable insights. We also reviewed Soap Operas as an established feminine genre in the world and how women get influenced by them. The universal story lines and themes were identified. In the analysis chapter, two series, Gümüş and Under the Linden Trees, were introduced by their story line and main characters. The relevancy of these stories and characters to the Arab audience were reviewed. The familiar subjects, lives, traditions and habitudes were identified by using narrative and semiotics analysis.

The second objective was to see if there was a real influence or not. This was looked at on two levels – are these series mirroring the state-of-mind of Arab women or are they influencing it? The answer, with the data available so far was that both were occurring. At the broader sense, these people are looking for a role model and Turkey, according to some research, is a perfect model for majority of Arab people. (TESEV 2009) More importantly Arab women are
experiencing a transformation; they are demanding more rights and more freedom, as we have seen in so many quotes. They are up-front, gaining their voice, changing their own minds, as one young woman said to NYTimes:

“We can’t just say there must be change. There must be a change in our minds!” (Imane Zerouali, Morocco 2011)

In the narrow sense, in other words, in their daily lives, there is no doubt that Arab women get influenced by these series. One of the main areas is the nature of the relationship between men and women. They start demanding more from their husbands for instance and don’t say yes to every demand made on them by their men or society at large. This woman from West Bank talks about it on a TV program:

“There are some problems because women start complaining, why don’t you treat me like Muhannad, bring me flowers, be more romantic?” (Global 3000 program on DW-TV 2009)

In order to fulfill this second objective, the researcher reviewed the existing survey done already, along with papers, articles and some quotes from Arab women. However, the researcher feels that more study is needed, especially to understand the influence these series are making on women in different Arab countries. There were some obstacles during the research; geographical distances and budget limitations were a barrier to run some focus groups for instance. In the future, this kind of qualitative research is needed in order to identify the deeper impact of these series on Arab women in each country.

The third objective of understanding if these series were becoming an important communication tool of cultural diplomacy between Turkey and Arab nations was
a more challenging one to achieve. In the Turkish media there were plenty of articles claiming that two cultures were indeed coming together, even the New York Times article headline was “Turkish Soap Opera Diplomacy” (2009). However, when asked in the primary research, the answers were mixed and the same hesitation runs through Arab media articles or in on-line forums. Some Arabs see this as a temporary trend while other more extreme views are even suggesting that the Turkish programs should be banned because of bad influence. Therefore, the researcher suggests that some more studies have to be done in order to assess this question better.

This study is a modest contribution to the body of knowledge about the impact of Turkish soap operas on Arab women from a communication point of view by taking into consideration similarities and differences of two high context cultures.

In conclusion, one would say by looking at the recent ratings of Turkish soap operas in Arab World that this trend is here to stay for a while. As Muhammad Jamjoom a reporter for CNN says:

“These days in Turkey, it seems that small screen is transmitting a bigger picture than ever before” (CNN, 2011)

This thesis attempted to shed a light on this phenomenon from a communication point of view and hopefully other more in-depth studies will follow a similar path.
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ANNEXTURES
ANNEXURE A

The Geert Hofstede analysis for the Arab World

The high Power Distance (PDI) ranking is indicative of a high level of inequality of power and wealth within the society. These populations have an expectation and acceptance that leaders will separate themselves from the group and this condition is not necessarily subverted upon the population, but rather accepted by the society as their cultural heritage (Geert Hofstede 2011)

The high Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI) ranking of 68, indicates the society’s low level of tolerance for uncertainty. In an effort to minimize or reduce this level of uncertainty, strict rules, laws, policies, and regulations are adopted and implemented. The ultimate goal of these populations is to control everything in order to eliminate or avoid the unexpected. The society does not readily accept change and is very risk adverse. (Geert Hofstede 2011)

The Masculinity index (MAS), the third highest Hofstede Dimension is 52, only slightly higher than the 50.2 average for all the countries included in the Hofstede MAS Dimension. This would indicate that while women in the Arab World are limited in their rights, it may be due more to Muslim religion rather than a cultural paradigm. (Geert Hofstede 2011)

Individualism (IDV) ranking at 38, compared to a world average ranking of 64. This translates into a collectivist society and is manifested in a close long-term commitment to the member ‘group’, that being a family, extended family, or extended relationships. Loyalty in a collectivist culture is paramount, and overrides most other societal rules. (Geert Hofstede 2011)
The Geert Hofstede analysis for Turkey

Source: http://www.geert-hofstede.com
ANNEXURE B

TESEV 2009 Report

“The Perception of Turkey in the Middle East”
by Mensur Akgün, Gökçe Perçinoğlu, Sabiha Senyücel Gündoğar


What is your opinion about the following countries?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Total Region</th>
<th>Region Total</th>
<th>01 ERG</th>
<th>02 JOR</th>
<th>03 LEB</th>
<th>04 PAL</th>
<th>05 KSA</th>
<th>06 SYR</th>
<th>07 IRAQ</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jordan</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lebanon</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palestine</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saudi Arabia</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syria</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*This calculation does not include the results of the respondents’ own countries.

In the seven countries where the research was conducted, a total of 2000 people were asked what they thought about Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Turkey and were asked to choose from one of the following choices: “very favorable,” “somewhat favorable,” “somewhat unfavorable” or “very unfavorable.” The table above reflects the responses given as percentages, combining the values for the responses of “very favorable” and “somewhat favorable”. When evaluating the total weight of the responses in the region, in the first column answers that survey respondents gave about their own countries were included, in the second column, when doing the calculations, the survey respondents’ own countries were not included.
Turkey as a model for Arab countries

When the responses given were scrutinized:

- 61% of respondents were agreed with the concept of Turkey being a model for Arab states. This in stark contrast to the accepted notion that Turkey’s secular nature hinders it from being a model for the region.

- Syria and Palestine stand out as the two countries that thought that Turkey could be a model for the region with 72% and 73% of participants respectively responding positively. Even in Saudi Arabia, which is quite conservative in structure, more than half of the respondents (55%) agreed that Turkey could be a model.
ANNEXURE C

Gümüş (Noor) key image

Mehmet Fikri, Gümüş (Noor), Mehmet (Muhannad), Şeref in their seaside mansion

Ihlamurlar altında (lost years) key image

The main poster of the series with leading characters
ANNEXURE D

Arab fans at the seaside mansion of Gümiş in Istanbul

These photos are taken from a website called kenthaber.com
http://www.kenthaber.com/Haber/kultur-sanat/Dosya/gundem/arap-turistler-yalida-kivancin-pesinde/b1596a81-ff8b-408d-90c0-caa572eea88b
# ANNEXURE E

**ON-LINE SURVEY DONE BY THE RESEARCHER**

## Turkish TV dramas influence on Arabic women

### 1. Are you regularly watching Turkish TV series on Arabic channels?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>YES</td>
<td>72.7%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NO</td>
<td>27.3%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- answered question: 11
- skipped question: 0

### 2. If yes, which one / ones are you following or used to follow?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response Text</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mohammad &amp; Nour</td>
<td>Feb 9, 2011 2:26 AM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forbidden love &quot;Eshq memnou&quot;</td>
<td>Feb 11, 2011 3:21 AM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forbidden Love, Asi, Lover is forever</td>
<td>Feb 11, 2011 6:03 AM</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- answered question: 9
- skipped question: 2

### 3. If yes, which one / ones are you following or used to follow?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response Text</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>asi, gummo, asheq, mamnou, sanawat, dhia, biniir gece, ramada alhub, WaTamdi Al Ayam, Al Gareeb &amp; many as all are amazing</td>
<td>Feb 12, 2011 8:43 PM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>all of them</td>
<td>Feb 12, 2011 8:50 PM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alia Alesh Al ammocua</td>
<td>Feb 12, 2011 11:13 PM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al Awrak Al Moutakita Al Ouchik El Mamnou</td>
<td>Feb 14, 2011 10:50 PM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Almost all the series which were translated to arabic, bytheway I put Turkish Dish (Satellite) but I wish turkish channels put either English or Arabic subtitle because I dont understand the language</td>
<td>Feb 16, 2011 12:31 AM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not regularly but occasionally, the best series would be 'Noor'</td>
<td>Feb 17, 2011 1:20 PM</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. What are the main reasons to watch these series?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interesting stories</td>
<td>72.7%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beautiful actresses / handsome actors</td>
<td>72.7%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nice scenery and venues</td>
<td>72.7%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dubbed in street Arabic makes it easy to follow</td>
<td>54.5%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good alternative to Egyptian dramas</td>
<td>72.7%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>answered question</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>skipped question</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other (please specify)

1. good deep actors, view, nice villas, clothes, simple make up, love stories, views, music, songs, amazing acting, but too long, good looking actors, food, restaurants, hotels, high production not cheap.

2. the Hero's match each other & well choosen, nature view, good production & filming, deep acting so real, music is amazing, love, nice villas, nice cars, romance, respect the elderly, only problem most are very long sometimes gets boring & repeated.

3. Interior design ideas, home decorating, photos, pictures & accessories.

4. It's a good change from American series.

4. How often do you watch them?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Everyday</td>
<td>54.5%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once a week</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Couple of times a week</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occasionally</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>answered question</td>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>skipped question</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5. Usually with whom do you watch them?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alone</td>
<td>72.7%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With my husband</td>
<td>27.3%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With my girlfriends</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With my kids</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With other family members</td>
<td>54.5%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other (please specify) 0

6. In your opinion, why do you think these series became so successful among Arabic women?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response Text</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relevant to their daily lifestyle</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because of the handsome actors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicely directed, good looking actress and actors, Nice stories, nice scenes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>similar culture but more open, The Arabic dialect they used is very close</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and real</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is quite relaxing, If you miss a few episodes you can still catch up,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>it is available on the internet so easy access at any point and wherever you</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>are</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In my opinion, I think we have some few things in common with the turkish</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>costumes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>good deep actors, view, nice villas, clothes, simple makeup, love stories,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>views, music, songs, amazing acting, but too long, good looking actors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the actors &amp; actresses are very talented, classy, nice stories &amp; nice stories</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>different standards &amp; different life styles drama, rich, poor, students, the</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>maids in the kitchen, the coverage is very good</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>same reasons above</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nice stories, nice actors, somehow more realistic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The stories are nice, the culture of Turkey and more and more.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It has a modern twist to it, and Turkish actors and actresses tend to have</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a mixture of Middle eastern and western physical features, making it more</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>appealing to viewers.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
7. Did you visit Turkey before these series?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>YES</td>
<td>80.0%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NO</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

answered question 10
skipped question 1

8. Did you visit Turkey after these series?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>YES</td>
<td>54.5%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
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<td>NO</td>
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answered question 11
skipped question 0

9. Do you think these TV series helped two cultures to come closer? How?

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answered question 10
skipped question 1

10. What are the main difference between Turkish series and Egyptian series? (in terms of production, story line, action, actors...)

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answered question 11
skipped question 0
9. Do you think these TV series helped two cultures to come closer? How?

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<th></th>
<th>Response Text</th>
<th>Date/Time</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Not really because what we see in these series is rather a very &quot;open minded&quot; way of life and society which is not the case in all Arab countries (nor in Turkey anyway)</td>
<td>Feb 9, 2011 9:23 AM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Yes the arabs got to know a lot of things about Turkish culture through these series especially the ones who have not been to Turkey</td>
<td>Feb 11, 2011 3:21 AM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>No I don't think so, as far as watching Turkish series, it seems to me that when our Arab society is more conservative, theirs is quite liberal...</td>
<td>Feb 11, 2011 6:03 AM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>I think these series attract people to visit turkey</td>
<td>Feb 11, 2011 1:11 PM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>yes, we enjoy more...</td>
<td>Feb 12, 2011 8:43 PM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>Feb 12, 2011 8:50 PM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>kind of Arabs were influenced by Turkish culture long ago, we just like them.</td>
<td>Feb 12, 2011 11:13 PM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>I don't think so</td>
<td>Feb 14, 2011 10:50 PM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>In away yes</td>
<td>Feb 16, 2011 12:31 AM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Turkish TV channels are very popular in all Middle East regions including the non-Arabic speaking nations such as Iran. As a result, they are widely appreciated and accepted regardless of Turkey's efforts to become an EU member through westernization.</td>
<td>Feb 17, 2011 1:20 PM</td>
</tr>
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10. What are the main difference between Turkish series and Egyptian series? (In terms of production, story line, action, actors...)

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<td>1</td>
<td>Egyptian are more dramatic</td>
<td>Feb 9, 2011 2:29 AM</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>I honestly prefer Egyptian series, they include more down to earth stories, they are more realistic (people from different social backgrounds, not everyone is super rich), the bulk of the story is interesting, and the production is better. As for the actors, Egyptian actors are definitely more professional than the new Turkish actors who are succeeding because of their looks rather than their performance.</td>
<td>Feb 9, 2011 9:23 AM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Production of Turkish is much nicer; it's outdoors as well as indoors while Egyptian one are mainly indoors The Turkish are more stylish and classy and polite that Egyptian and makes you enjoy and relax when you watch them</td>
<td>Feb 11, 2011 3:21 AM</td>
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ANNEXTURE F

Face-to-face Interview Guide

1. Which series do you watch?
2. Do you follow them from the beginning, meaning (i.e. from the first series)?
3. How often do you watch them?
4. Do you have friends and family members watching them?
5. Why do you think Arab women are watching these series with a growing interest?
6. Do you believe similar values play a role in this decision?
7. What kind of influence do you think these series make on Arab women?
8. How about age groups? Do you think there is a difference? Or all age groups are watching them?
9. Did you know / visit Turkey before these series?
10. Do you think these series are helping Turkey and Arab countries become closer?

E-mail Interview Guide for additional research

- Do you think these series have an influence (negative or positive) on Arab Women particularly? YES or NO

- If YES, what kind of influence? (for instance we hear things like, women demanding more romance from their husbands because they see it in these series, or young girls want to meet with their male friends in the cafes etc.), do you observe or hear this kind of behavior?

- And finally would you agree or disagree with this statement “Arab women’s high interest on these series is just a sign that they are going through a transition period and demanding more freedom and modernity in their lives”