



TURKISH MOVIES IN FORMER OTTOMAN TERRITORIES: PROPAGANDA OR JUST AN EFFICIENT SOFT POWER IN TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY?

University Lecturer Ecaterina-Elena MAȚOI, PhD

*Faculty of Security and Defense,
"Carol I" National Defense University, Bucharest*

Diana-Monica CONSTANTIN

*Student, Faculty of Security and Defense,
"Carol I" National Defense University, Bucharest*

The spread of propaganda by state or non-state actors through movies started almost a century ago. At the same time, the procedures used in movie production diversified and became more specialised, hence nowadays, a special product among the ones made for media channels attracts the eye of specialists in the field of influential communication: Turkish movie series focusing on former Ottoman Empire's glorious past. Many such series have succeeded in conquering the audience from the Arab Peninsula and other parts of the world, particularly the series "Diriliş: Ertuğrul". This movie series, expanding on the legend of 8th century Muslim Oghuz Turks from Anatolia fighting against Christian Byzantines, crusaders and Mongols, was banned in Arab countries such as Saudi Arabia and Egypt, but enjoys high popularity in other countries. Current research aims to analyse essential elements from the above-mentioned movie series that might significantly influence public opinions and sentiments of population from the Arab countries that banned it, in order to answer the question from title.

Keywords: Central Asia; dizi soft power; propaganda; Ottoman Empire;

PRELEGOMENA

Motto: "Celebrating historic triumphs is a favourite pastime for many Turks. Tales of how Turkic peoples emerged from Central Asia, crossed the steppes to Anatolia, established the Ottoman Empire and ruled for centuries over large swaths of Europe and Asia are the subject of countless legends, poems and books". (Kinzer)

Since their arrival in Asia Minor (Anatolia), consolidated through the Malazgirt victory from 1071, the Turks came under the attention of historians, diplomats and politicians around the world. The Malazgirt (Manzikert) battle is a cornerstone in the history of nowadays Turkey; in this sense, the official news agency of Turkish government, Anadolu, was announcing in 2019: *"The President of Turkey marked on Sunday 948 years passing from Malazgirt battle, a historical victory for the Turks in Anatolia, almost a millennia ago"* (Anadolu Ajansi). This battle opposed the Byzantine Empire and Seljuk forces led by Alp Arslan on the 26 August, which ended in the Seljuk victory and capture of Byzantine king Romanus IV Diogene (EHISTORY).

Except an obvious relevance for the history of Turks, the Seljuk victory had geopolitical and geo-economic consequences in neighbouring areas, but also in further regions, since these events led to a *"realignment of power and commerce in Europe, that favoured exploration of the NEW WORLD by Spain and Portugal"* (Ibid.). Since this moment, the Turks remained at the top of history due to their *"martial power and organisational superiority"*, as Nuri Eren described them in her book (1963, p. 1) more than 50 years ago.

At the beginning of 20th century, the Ottomans/Turks were subjected to a high historical pressure *"due to their exposed weakness"* (Ibid.), whereas today, at the beginning of 21st century, Turkey resurges as an ambitious regional power, but also as one that cannot forget its heritage from a glorious empire stretching across three continents, *claiming* not only physical territories (Danforth, 2016; Sadek), but

At the beginning of 20th century, the Ottomans/Turks were subjected to a high historical pressure "due to their exposed weakness", whereas today, at the beginning of 21st century, Turkey resurges as an ambitious regional power, but also as one that cannot forget its heritage from a glorious empire stretching across three continents.



The period 1996-2019 is associated with a strong revival of Turkish cinematography, as one of the answers to Turkey's drastic transformation after the Cold War, period in which movie producers, in both art and commercial movie industries, returned to themes related to membership, identity and memory.

also “*hearts*” of many peoples, especially the ones from the former Ottoman territories, yet not limited to them (Karakaya, 2020).

Taking into consideration the background mentioned above, this research aims to analyse the context in which “*voices*” (The New Arab, 2020) appeared in the Middle East, claiming that Turkey is utilizing its entertainment industry – with a soft power role – in order to enhance and promote the “*Ottoman narrative*” in states like Egypt, United Arab Emirates or Saudi Arabia, through *dizi* movie series (Bhutto)¹. The sense of “*soft power*” as term utilized further in this research, is the classical one developed initially by Joseph Nye from Harvard University in 1990, to describe “*the capacity to attract and co-opt rather than constrain, use force or provide money as persuasion means*”.

Nowadays, the term mentioned above is complementarily used to describe the change in or influence on public opinion through channels “*less transparent and lobby of powerful political and non-political organisations*” (English Dictionary).

Relevant to this research is the fact that the period 1996-2019 is associated with a strong revival of Turkish cinematography, as one of the answers to Turkey's drastic transformation after the Cold War, period in which movie producers, in both art and commercial movie industries, returned to themes related to *membership, identity and memory* (Culture Trip). This new type of national cinematography, oriented towards winning back the internal traditional public, crossed the country's borders and attracted international audience. A brief historical retrospective on this industry indicates that it became one of the most prolific industries across the globe (Bhutto, Ibid.), experiencing a sustained growth during previous decade, as it can be noticed from the diagram presented below. According to Statista, the number of productions tripled in only 9 years (Statista). On this background, the *dizi* movie series were banned by some state actors from the Middle East region (France 24), as some researchers consider this type of movies to be propaganda instruments (Çevik, 2019).

¹ According to Arzu Ozturkmen, PhD, who teaches oral history at the Boğaziçi University in Istanbul, “*What Turkey produces for television are not soap operas, or telenovelas, or period dramas: they are dizi*”. (A/N).

Turkish Movies in Former Ottoman Territories: Propaganda or Just an Efficient Soft Power in Turkish Foreign Policy?

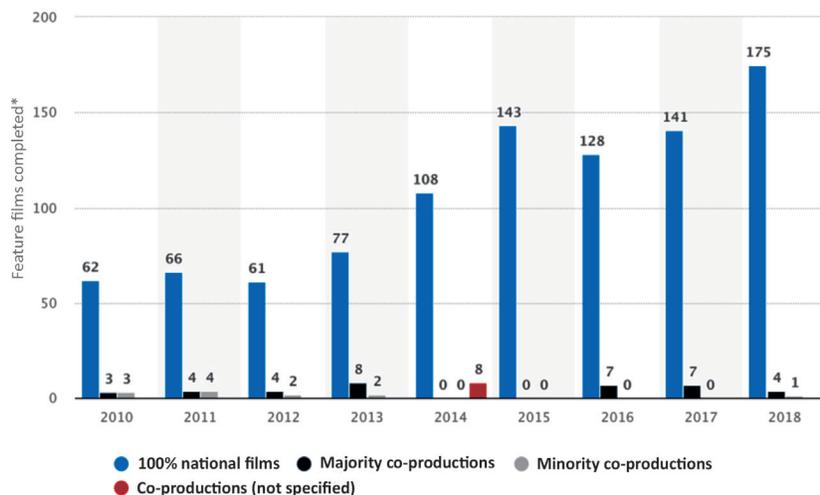


Figure 1: Evolution of movie production in Turkey for the period 2010-2018 (Statista)



ROMANIAN
MILITARY
THINKING

Peter Golden stated that the origins of Turkic tribes are not very clear; for a long period, it was asserted that their name was taken from the clans that had a common ancestor, presented to the world through tribal genealogies.

WHO ARE THE TURKS AND WHERE DO THEY COME FROM?

Peter Golden stated that the origins of Turkic tribes are not very clear; for a long period, it was asserted that their name was taken from the clans that had a common ancestor, presented to the world through tribal genealogies (Golden, 1992, p. 6). Furthermore, clear instantiations of the model for name introduction cannot be found until these populations were influenced by the Islam or the Mongols. At this point, the tribal, political or dynastic names probably appeared: *Selcük, Nogay, Osmanli, Cagatay* (Ibid.). Although there is no consensus with respect to the etymology of the noun “*Turk*”, according to Fuat Bozkurt the noun *türk* comes from the Chinese term *t’ou-kiue* of the 6th century, but this transliteration can be traced to the term *turküt* from Turkish language, meaning *powerful* (Bozkurt, 2014). Subsequently, the term was associated with further attributes like *maturity, youth, courageous, tough*. Nevertheless, another hypothesis presents the term *türük* as derived from *türe*, itself interpretable as *law, cultural standard* and *tradition*. Hence, there is a possibility to have had the term *türük* utilised to characterise people that respected customs and traditions (Ibid.).



The Turks inherited nomads from the Altai Mountains, eastward from Eurasian steps and southward from Yenisei River and Baikal Lake, from regions that are part of Outer Mongolia.

Their primitive and mobile civilisation was based on tribal organization, customs and social sanctions without formal government organs and laws specific to more advanced societies.

The Origin of Turks: from the Altai Mountains to the Middle East

The Turks inherited nomads from the Altai Mountains, eastward from Eurasian steps and southward from Yenisei River and Baikal Lake, from regions that are part of Outer Mongolia. Their primitive and mobile civilisation was based on tribal organisation, customs and social sanctions without formal government organs and laws specific to more advanced societies (Shaw, 1976, pp. 1-2). Their way of living consisted of raising cattle and predatory raids against rival tribes around their camp. The leader was called *khan*, while his main task was to spot pastures, organise and supervise military activities, but not to preside over internal affairs of the tribe. From a religious point of view, they venerated natural elements through a series of totems considered to have special powers, mediated by shamans, a sort of priests that had the ability to control spirits (Ibid., p. 2).

The changing political, military and climatic conditions in the Altai region sent successive waves of nomad populations against civilisations established at the step's borders. The nomads that migrated towards South and West, i.e. Eastern Europe, Middle East and Central Asia were later known as *Oghuz* among them, and generally as *Turkmen* or *Turks* for those who were attacked by them (Ibid.).

In an initial phase of history, the tribes and communities from the Middle East were protected naturally by Hindu Kush, Elborz and Caucasus mountain ranges against the Central Asian nomad tribes, but the natural deference weakened between Hindu Kush and Aral Sea, in the region called Transoxiana (Encyclopaedia Judaica Encyclopedia)², the land beyond Oxus, in which a road of the nomads passed from their step directly to the region where is nowadays Iran. This became the focal point for major nomad penetrations from Western Asia (Shaw, Ibid., p. 2), a part of the invading populations being assimilated by cultures and civilisations situated at the borders of the Middle East, defending these territories against following waves of migration. This assimilation phase occurred for a few centuries, as long as Middle East's defence line was under the rule of Abbasid Dynasty from Baghdad, i.e. from 7th century to the beginning of 11th century (Ibid., pp. 2-3).

² According to Encyclopedia.com, "it is an ancient region of Central Asia, located between the Oxus and Jaxartes rivers, known to the Arabs as Ma-Waran-Nahr "across the river". In the medieval period, it was divided into several provinces, one being Khwarazm, with the two capitals Khiva and Urgench, and another Soghd, with the two capitals Samark and Bukhara".



The first and most popular Turkish entity of all times was the Göktürk Empire (552-744), that from its very beginning was divided in two parts, both under the suzerainty of leaders from North of China (Ibid.). Although it did not meet the criteria for a classical state entity – neither precise frontiers nor clear laws, and its leaders did not have a permanent residency – the empire was stretching from the Black Sea, along Asia and northern borders of Mongolia and China, to the Pacific Ocean. An important aspect related to this first empire of the Turks consists of evidence on contacts with civilizations situated southwards, from which they overtook state organization and the dynasty concept. The first Turkish inscriptions found along the Orhon and Yenisei Rivers from Central Asia are also dating back to this period (Ibid.).

With time, the nomad Turkish tribes converted to Islam during 8th and 9th centuries, and in 10th century, one of these tribes, i.e. the Seljuks, became an important power within the Islamic world and adopted a lifestyle characterised by Islamic orthodoxy, a central administration and taxing. In order to pacify other nomad Turkic tribes, the Seljuks guided the Oghuz towards the Eastern part of Byzantine Empire, in Anatolia. Among the pacified tribes, the one from which Osman Gazi (1259-1326) came and founded the Ottoman dynasty would distinguish itself (Sansal). He started to expand his control within Byzantine Empire and Asia Minor, moving the capital to Bursa in 1326. This is the nucleus around which the later Ottoman Empire will be formed, extending its influence in the South-East of Europe, Middle East North African coast and the heart of Central Asia, an entity that lasted until the beginning of 20th century (Ibid.).

Turkey, as it is known today, was created in the aftermath of the First World War, on 29th of October 1923, by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. In the period to come, Turkey experienced a process of western laicisation through the reforms of Atatürk, that included among others the interruption of religious and other types of titles, closure of Islamic venues, replacement of the Islamic law with a civil code inspired from that of Switzerland and a criminal code inspired from that of Italy (britannica.com). Similarly, these series of reforms led to recognition of equality between genders, full political rights for women, but also the replacement of the Turkish Ottoman alphabet with a new Turkish alphabet derived from the Latin one, etc. (Ibid.) In the decades to come, after the forced secularisation of what had remained from the former

With time, the nomad Turkish tribes converted to Islam during 8th and 9th centuries, and in 10th century, one of these tribes, i.e. the Seljuks, became an important power within the Islamic world and adopted a lifestyle characterised by Islamic orthodoxy, a central administration and taxing. In order to pacify other nomad Turkic tribes, the Seljuks guided the Oghuz towards the Eastern part of Byzantine Empire, in Anatolia.



Ottoman Empire, the resulting entity had double personality: an *Islamic* one and a *Kemalist* one. But this lasted until the appearance of AKP party in 2002, when the former personality began to dominate the latter.

SOCIAL IDENTITY AND PROPAGANDA

When identity and its basic concepts are discussed, it should be taken into account that a person is focusing on answers to questions like “*Who are you*” or “*What does it mean to be you?*”. Similarly, the *identity* is connected to essential values that shape choices, reflect who we are and what we appreciate, and relevant for current research, the tendency of most persons to adopt values of their parents or those of dominating cultures (Heshmat, 2014).

A very important vision on what identity represents and how this is capitalised on in our times belongs to James Feron from USA’s Stanford University. He claims that the term “*identity*”, in the sense used during the 20th century, derived mainly from Erik Erikson’s writings from the 1950s and that dictionaries did not manage, at that time, to catch the real sense of this modern word. Consequently, in the introduction of his work, Feron underlines that there are two possible senses associated to the term “*identity*”: a social category defined by membership rules and characteristics attributed, or by expected behaviours. Furthermore, Feron asserts in the same work that identity can help in understanding political actions and explains why identities are often perceived as a social construct (Feron, 1999).

The term “identity”, in the sense used during the 20th century, derived mainly from Erik Erikson’s writings from the 1950s and that dictionaries did not manage, at that time, to catch the real sense of this modern word.

Social Identity Theory

The social identity theory is considered one of the greatest contributions of Henri Tajfel to psychology. According to Tajfel, social identity is the feeling of a person based on membership to a group. In 1979, he stated that groups such as social class, family or football team that each person associates herself/himself with would be important sources of pride and self-respect. This is a consequence of the fact that groups offer a feeling of identity, membership to the social world. Therefore, the world is divided in “*them*” and “*us*”, based on a social classification process (McLeod). This theory was developed in Tajfel’s work on the effects of perception’s emphasis, due to his interest in social psychology vis-à-vis bias, discrimination, conflicts

within groups and social change. The theory was initially proposed by Tajfel and developed further with the help of his colleagues from Bristol University, Michael Biling, John C. Turner, Michael Hogg, but also other researchers (Boncu).



Mass Manipulation and Propaganda

In 1928, Edward L. Bernays published the work *“Propaganda”*, in which he defines conscious manipulation of masses as an important element in democratic societies and states about those who employ this mechanism of society that they act as an invisible government that truly rules a country (Bernays, 1928, p. 9). This can be achieved, according to Bernays, at the beginning of 20th century through written press, telegraph, radio and wirelessly, these means being very rapid at that time for spreading ideas (Ibid., p. 12). Certainly, if the paper was written nowadays, Bernays would have added the television and internet to the means enumerated above. Concerning the term *“propaganda”*, this is used to define the more or less systematic effort to manipulate the beliefs of target audience, their attitudes, gestures or actions through symbols like clothes, music, monuments, trends or symbols. The ones that practice propaganda generally have a precise goal and deliberately select arguments, facts or symbols in order to present them favourably – often by hiding the truth and distorting relevant facts, in order to ensure the desired effect upon subjects of propaganda (Smith, 2020).

The term “propaganda” is used to define the more or less systematic effort to manipulate the beliefs of target audience, their attitudes, gestures or actions through symbols like clothes, music, monuments, trends or symbols.

The use of this term dates back to 1622, in connection to the work *Congregatio de Propaganda Fide – The Congregation for Propagation of Faith*, an organisation of Roman Catholic cardinals founded in 1622 meant to ensure the continuity of religious activities and missions in various environments (Orsy, 2019). The first propaganda operation from modern times led officially by the government of a state took place in 1916 during 28th US president, Woodrow Wilson (White House). Wilson’s administration set up a government propaganda commission, that according to Noam Chomsky, managed to transform a pacifist population in one willing to involve in conflict and defeat the enemy in order to save the world in just 6 months (Chomski, 1991, p. 5). Among those that actively involved in President Wilson’s project was John Dewey, philosopher, psychologist, reformer of education and supporter of social reform (Hildebrand, 2018).



The technological progress achieved in recent years, especially in the field of telecommunications, rapidly transformed the capacity and opportunities of state and non-state actors to influence, society, television and social media being the main and most promising means for this purpose. One of the most relevant examples in this sense is the recent case of fraudulent Facebook data usage by Cambridge Analytica during 2016 US elections period.

The Impact of Propaganda through Social Media Networks

The technological progress achieved in recent years, especially in the field of telecommunications, rapidly transformed the capacity and opportunities of state and non-state actors to influence, society, television and social media being the main and most promising means for this purpose. One of the most relevant examples in this sense is the recent case of fraudulent Facebook data usage by Cambridge Analytica during 2016 US elections period. This case, according to Sergei Tchakhotin – an expert in study of Nazi propaganda, brings back old discussions on propaganda and its capacity *to enter the minds of masses* (Nahon-Serfaty, 2019), and although many decades passed since the two world wars, there are still methods available to inoculate emotions, but this time through social media networks. Hence, Cambridge Analytica developed a methodology that allowed it to establish psychological profiles for Facebook users and, by touching “*emotional buttons*”, to modify political preferences and behaviour of users (Ibid.). Today, governments, corporations or political parties have the capacity to process unlimited data and establish algorithms that distribute messages and images in order to penetrate more and more divided public segments.

Statistical data indicates that nowadays, across the globe, each person watches on average 3 hours of TV/video content daily (Watson, 2019) and approximately 78,000 hours in the entire life (Anderer et al., 2019). This data underlines the importance of movie production globally and their potential to transmit messages with which state and non-state entities aim to target population segments according to certain particularities.

TURKISH MOVIE SERIES – PROPAGANDA INSTRUMENT OR JUST AN EFFICIENT SOFT POWER IN TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY?

Beginning with 2010, the narrative according to which Ottoman history was characterised by extravagance, conquests and power games became one of the most popular and watched themes from Turkish entertainment production. This popularity is explained by Burak Oztecin from Istanbul’s Bilgi University as a consequence of crisis times, especially when history can play a significant role in shaping identities: *“the recent interest for Ottoman stories and narrations*

is not something baseless, or outside context – on the contrary, it has a historic base”, he declared for Meenakshi Ravi, The Listening Post (Al Jazeera, 2020).

Additionally, Dr. Arzu Ozturkmen, history professor at Boğaziçi University from Istanbul, states that *dizi* Turkish productions are not soap operas, but a special type of movies with unique narratives and attractive music, that became very popular in recent years (The Guardian, 2019). This type of movies evolved between 1990 and 2000 in a semi-structured manner, with characteristics of a story naturally transposed, with almost real-time dialogue, taking place slowly. Musical, textual and visual rich diversity distinguished the *dizi* from a classical soap opera, the former exhibiting a special, authentic narrative flux (Özturkmen, 2018).

Dizi productions contributed to a consolidation of Turkey’s image in the Middle East, but also to economic gains from abroad; for example, they generated \$ 350 million revenue in 2017, when compared to only \$ 10 million in 2008 through exports of the same type of productions (Grater, 2017). The massive increase in revenue coming from these movie series reflects the demand from international audiences, that enjoy fictions produced in Turkey. This country produced the highest number of such series rated as best productions watched outside own borders: 23 Turkish series were identified among top ten most watched programs from 11 foreign countries (Erşen, 2017).

Consequently, approximately 25% of fiction movie series imported by 78 countries were Turkish, Russian Federation occupying the second place with 15%, followed by the USA with 7%, Brazil and Mexico sharing the same place with 6% each (Ibid.).

Turkish External Policy under Adaletve Kalkınma Partisi (AKParti) at the beginning of 21st century

In order to analyse the Turkish “soft power”, the new era and the transformational process that took place for decades in Turkish foreign policy should be analysed. Some researchers assert that starting with Turgut Özal’s administration, Turkey began to implement a series of *soft power* policies in the Middle East, Central Asia, Balkans and Caucasus respectively (Nuroğlu, 2020). Nevertheless, after his death, the liberalization process and transformation of external policy did not continue until Adaletve Kalkınma Partisi (AKParti) reached power



ROMANIAN
MILITARY
THINKING

Dizi Turkish productions are not soap operas, but a special type of movies with unique narratives and attractive music, that became very popular in recent years. This type of movies evolved between 1990 and 2000 in a semi-structured manner, with characteristics of a story naturally transposed, with almost real-time dialogue, taking place slowly.



In Turkey, the “soft power” discourse served AK Parti’s agenda at various levels. Emphasizing on Turkey’s role as leader across the Middle East, and the Muslim world in general, the governing party managed to reaffirm itself on the internal political scene.

External policy under AK Parti was focused on a vision pursuing improvement of relations with neighbours, or privileging the former Ottoman space. The political and economic engagement in Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Iran or Syria enhanced significantly Turkey’s position in this region.

in 2002, a moment in which a stage of visible a consistent change in external policy began, from a model based on rivalry and suspicion to a culture of friendship and cooperation (Ibid.). As mentioned at the beginning of this article, the *soft power* concept originates in the USA, but it has been adopted and used extensively by analysts from various countries, like the ones from BRIC countries (Brazil, Russia, India and China), as well as states like Turkey. Nowadays, the concept is perceived and utilized as a political indicator on the international scene, on which a country is developing its diplomatic endeavours (Benhaïm, 2015).

In Turkey, the *soft power* discourse served AK Parti’s agenda at various levels. Emphasizing on Turkey’s role as leader across the Middle East, and the Muslim world in general, the governing party managed to reaffirm itself on the internal political scene. The speech on AK Parti’s devotion in external action, through promotion of Turkey’s rise in the world based on values and reconstruction of its national identity is the expression of the way in which external policy became an election argument for the party of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan before and after 2011 elections (Ibid.). Beyond its internal political purpose, i.e. to win votes (AK Parti being sometimes considered an Islamist party in the public space, but also by some researchers) (Yavuz, 2009), soft power had an important function, called by observers, especially the ones favouring AK Parti, the *demilitarisation of Turkey’s external policy*, in an initial expansion phase. This development pursued important aspects with respect to AK Parti’s position, like reducing the role of the army on the internal political stage, contributing also to the marginalisation of former bureaucratic elites (Ibid.).

Therefore, external policy under AK Parti was focused on a vision pursuing improvement of relations with neighbours, or privileging the former Ottoman space. The political and economic engagement in Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Iran or Syria enhanced significantly Turkey’s position in this region (Ozpek, Demirag, 2014). Nevertheless, the most efficient method to transmit Ottoman values proved to be the popular *dizi*, that slowly conquered audiences from the Arab world through historical narratives that underline unity, religion and values.

The Impact of Turkish Movies in Arab-Muslim Space

In the Middle East, Turkish movies series are facing certain Arab governments' opposition, due to concerns related to their potential cultural impact upon population. Although there are barriers in place, like differences between Turkish and Arabic languages, the demand for Turkish productions increased in Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan (Gulfnews) and Iraq (Erşen, 2017), more types of productions being demanded: historical, drama or entertainment. They are transmitted either through Arab satellite channels or through subscription based online services that allow customers to watch the productions without commercials or even without internet connection (offline) after downloading, like Netflix.

Diriliş: Ertuğrul (Revival of Ertuğrul) – or the Turkish equivalentto of “Game of Thrones”

Diriliş: Ertuğrul is one of the most known Turkish movie series, situated today on place 3 in the top Internet Movies Data Base (IMDb) for Turkish series by popularity (IMDb, Tv Series). This series won the Best Director Award at the Golden Butterfly Awards 2018. The 150/170 original episodes (for Netflix they were resized and turned into 448) directed by Metin Gülnay and based on texts written by Mehmet Bozdağ present the rise of the Ottoman Empire, amid tribal conflicts and both internal and external conspiracies against it. After a closer look, the values that are glorified become obvious: bravery, courage, but also the cordiality and tenderness experienced by heroes as part of an extended family – the tribe – while the main character, Ertuğrul, interpreted by the stoic but charismatic player Engin Altan Düzyatan is the typical model of virtue. Social order described in the Kayi tribe is par excellence patriarchal, but one in which the women that take care of the tribe are also very good fighters and even leaders of community. The lack of erotic scenes is obvious, while the passionate love is expressed in short philosophical explosions, in which other's virtues are exalted, and the worries when one is missing for unknown reason spread in the extended family (Firstpost).

Initially, the series was transmitted through state television in Turkey between 2014 and 2019. Outside Turkey, the production is described on one hand as cultural propaganda, while on the other as similar to a HBO blockbuster; the series consists of 5 seasons,



ROMANIAN
MILITARY
THINKING

Diriliş: Ertuğrul is one of the most known Turkish movie series, situated today on place 3 in the top Internet Movies Data Base for Turkish series by popularity. This series won the Best Director Award at the Golden Butterfly Awards 2018.



The use of internet in promoting the series was a real success as well, Al-Noor website providing the English subtitles for Youtube.com, the series being further transmitted by other platforms. In 2017 alone, the series was watched by 200 million people, Saudi Arabia topping this classification with 600'000 visualisations.

recorded in the period 2014-2019, that emphasise the heritage of the country's founding dynasty, on the cultural values and unity specific to this culture, with a resounding success at home, and in the Arab-Muslim space, the series being doubled in literary Arabic by actors like Rashid Assaf and Mona Wassef, two well-known Syrian movie players. The use of internet in promoting the series was a real success as well, Al-Noor website providing the English subtitles for Youtube.com, the series being further transmitted by other platforms. In 2017 alone, the series was watched by 200 million people, Saudi Arabia topping this classification with 600,000 visualisations (Bassiouni, 2020). The fact that historical subjects are approached in such super-productions, in Turkey but also in certain Arab countries, are financed by large media corporations, that themselves receive state help. Consequently, the political messages that are sometimes perceived in some scenes from *dizi* movies make these series to look like part of propaganda campaigns of some regional state actors, that compete with other regional actors (Ibid.).

Diriliş: Ertuğrul – Soft Power, Propaganda or Just a Movie Series?

The reactions of Arab authorities came initially late, with respect to the impact that subtitled Turkish series can have on population, but as the interest for the series raised, across more population segments, the reactions started to appear. One of the methods used to counter the success of Ertuğrül Arab countries, was the propagation of another series, i.e. *Kingdoms of Fire* on the pan-Arab broadcasting channels. This action aimed at countering the cultural conquest that Turkey had achieved through *Diriliş: Ertuğrul*. Through *Kingdoms of Fire*, the positive image of the Ottoman Empire projected in *Diriliş: Ertuğrul* should have been removed, as this empire was instantiating an era of pan-Islamic unity (Sheraz, 2020).

Egypt was one of the countries declaring that Turkey is attempting to create “an area of influence” in the Middle East, by employing *soft power* means, to attract Arab population. The declaration of Egypt's Dar Al-Iftaa, The Global Fatwa Index, an organisations concerned with issuing fatwas related cult of life and related aspects, declared, according to Al-Monitor, that the “it aims to revive the Ottoman Empire in the Middle East and regain sovereignty over Arab countries which were previously under Ottoman rule”, hence the paper claims further

that the Turkish series should be banned in this country, suggesting that the series hides political and material purposes (Middle East Monitor).

After Egypt, two further states prohibited watching the series, UAE and Saudi Arabia. They also claimed that the topics addressed in the series had a political and historical loading and represent a threat, as Turkey attempts to raise its credibility in the Arab regions (Eyüpoğlu, 2020).

But the recognition that Turkey enjoys internationally nowadays is not only due to the speech of President Erdogan or AK Parti, but also organizations like TİKA. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Turkey began to consolidate relation with former Turkic republics from the Union. In a first step, TİKA was founded during 1992 as an international agency for technical assistance within the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, and then moved under direct authority of the prime-minister in 1999 (Akıllı, Çelenk, 2018). Through Tika, Turkey started to initiate actions based on opportunities in the former Soviet territory. Nowadays, TİKA carries out development and assistance projects in over 140 countries on five continents, becoming one of Turkey's motors nationally and internationally. Many TİKA projects have significantly contributed to a positive recognition of Turkey throughout the world (Ibid.).

CONCLUSIONS

Propaganda as a method in fulfilling hidden objectives, that engages special, symbolic themes in order to convince population segments, has been employed under different forms from ancient times, and represented an efficient instrument for influencing identities of communities or ethno-religious minorities in foreign countries or cultures. Movies became an instrument of choice in this sense starting with the beginning of 20th century.

The ways in which it promotes and implements foreign policy, no matter the instruments used, the timing, i.e. beginning of 21st century, and the geopolitical context in which the instruments are employed represent just a favourable environment for suitable policies.

Therefore, despite the efforts by some countries to ban the Turkish movie series *Diriliş: Ertuğrul* on national land channels or via satellite, the production enjoyed success on the internet, managing to consistently appear on social media platforms. The portray of Ertuğrul posted on Facebook pages of more young Arab speakers is a testimony



ROMANIAN
MILITARY
THINKING

The ways in which it promotes and implements foreign policy, no matter the instruments used, the timing, i.e. beginning of 21st century and the geopolitical context in which the instruments are employed represent just a favourable environment for suitable policies.



in this sense, while the death of character *Bamsi Alp's* son from a different movie provoked strong reactions, like the one of a young Kuwaiti posting “*condolences on behalf of Kaya clan, may Bams's son soul rest in peace*” (Bassiouni, 2020).

Hence, it is difficult to answer the question posed in the title. First and foremost, claiming that *dizi* Turkish series are propaganda instruments without considering the actual economic gains presented in more sources would be superficial. Equally, the enormous success of these productions in the Arab-Muslim/Muslim is facilitated by geographical proximity, a common history for a relatively long period and last but not least, sharing of certain common values deriving from the Qur'an. Hence, we come back to the question from title: *are they propaganda, or just a form of soft power taken to the rank of smart power? Or a little bit of everything?*

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

1. Akilli, E., Bengü, Ç. (2018). “*TİKA's Soft Power: Nation Branding in Turkish Foreign Policy*”. In *Insight Turkey*, www.insightturkey.com/article/tikas-soft-power-nation-branding-in-turkish-foreign-policy, retrieved on 20 October 2020.
2. Amadeo, K. (2020). “*6 Rich Countries That Own Most of the World's Oil*”. In *The Balance*, www.thebalance.com/gulf-cooperation-council-3306357, retrieved on 12 September 2020.
3. Anderer, J. et al. (2019). “*Survey: The Average Person Will Watch More Than 78,000 Hours Of TV*”. *Study Finds*, www.studyfinds.org/survey-the-average-adult-will-watch-more-than-78000-hours-of-tv/, retrieved on 13 October 2020.
4. Bassiouni, M. (2020). “*The History of Arab-Turkish Relations as Told on Tv Series*”. *Orient XXI*, orientxxi.info/magazine/the-history-of-arab-turkish-relations-as-told-on-tv-series, 3614, retrieved on 12 October 2020.
5. Bârgăoanu, A. (2018). *FAKE NEWS*. Evrika Publishing.
6. Benhaïm, Y., Kerem, Ö. (2015). “*The Rise and Fall of Turkey's Soft Power Discourse*”. In *European Journal of Turkish Studies*, nr. 21, retrieved on 12 September 2020.
7. Bernays, E.L. (1928). *Propaganda*. New York: H. Liveright.
8. Bhutto, F. (2019). “*How Turkish TV Is Taking over the World*”. In *The Guardian*. Guardian News and Media, www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2019/sep/13/turkish-tv-magnificent-century-dizi-taking-over-world, retrieved on 18 October 2020.
9. Boncu, Șt., *Psihologia Socială*. “*Cursul 31: Identitatea socială*”, pdf version, retrieved on 30 September 2020.

10. Chomski, N. (1991). *Media Control: The Spectacular Achievements of Propaganda*. Seven Stories Press.
11. Danforth, N. (2016). "Turkey's New Maps Are Reclaiming the Ottoman Empire". *Foreign Policy*, foreignpolicy.com/2016/10/23/turkeys-religious-nationalists-want-ottoman-borders-iraq-erdogan/, retrieved on 18 October 2020.
12. Eren, N. (1963). *Turkey Today and Tomorrow. An Experiment in Westernization*. Pall Mall Press.
13. Erşen, E.B. (2017). "From 'Rosalinda' to 'Sıla': Turkish TV Series Top Global Imported Content Market". *Daily Sabah*, www.dailysabah.com/business/2017/10/07/from-rosalinda-to-sila-turkish-tv-series-top-global-imported-content-market, retrieved on 12 September 2020.
14. Etheredge, L. (2011). *Persian Gulf States: Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, Oman, and the United Arab Emirates*. Britannica Educational Pub., in Association with Rosen Educational Services.
15. Eyüpoğlu, K.N. (2020). "Following in UAE, Saudi Footsteps, Egypt Issues Fatwa Banning Turkish TV Series". *Yeni Şafak*, [www.yenisafak.com/en/news/following-in-uae-saudifootsteps-egypt-issues-fatwa-banning-turkishtv-series-3511681](http://Gzt.com, www.yenisafak.com/en/news/following-in-uae-saudifootsteps-egypt-issues-fatwa-banning-turkishtv-series-3511681), retrieved on 12 October 2020.
16. Fearon, J.D. (1999). "What Is Identity (As We Now Use the Word)?". California: Stanford University.
17. Gillespie, C.A. (2002). *Bahrain*. Chelsea House Publishers.
18. Golden, P.B. (1992). *An Introduction to the History of the Turkic Peoples: Ethnogenesis and State-Formation in Medieval and Early Modern Eurasia and the Middle East*.
19. Grater, T. (2017). "How Turkey Has Become a European TV Drama Powerhouse". *Screen*, www.screendaily.com/news/how-turkey-has-become-a-european-tv-drama-powerhouse/5120941.article, retrieved on 30 September 2020.
20. Heshmat, S. (2014). "Basics of Identity". *Psychology Today*, Sussex Publishers, www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/science-choice/201412/basics-identity, retrieved on 30 September 2020.
21. Hildebrand, D. (2018). "John Dewey". *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Stanford University, plato.stanford.edu/entries/dewey/, retrieved on 4 October 2020.
22. Johnson, J. (2020). "Feature Film Production: Turkey 2010-2018". *Statista*, www.statista.com/statistics/439212/feature-film-production-turkey/, retrieved on 18 October 2020.
23. Karakaya, Y. (2020). *The Conquest of Hearts: The Central Role of Ottoman Nostalgia within Contemporary Turkish Populism*. *American Journal of Cultural Sociology*, 8, <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41290-018-0065-y>, retrieved on 12 September 2020.



24. Kinzer, S., *Quotes. Brainy Quote*, Xplore, www.brainyquote.com/quotes/stephen_kinzer_652268?src=t_turks retrieved on 17 October 2020.
25. McLeod, S. (1970). "*Social Identity Theory*". *Social Identity Theory. Simply Psychology*, www.simplypsychology.org/social-identity-theory.html, retrieved on 30 September 2020.
26. Nahon-Serfaty, I. (2019). "*The Hypodermic Effect: How Propaganda Manipulates Our Emotions*". *The Conversation*, theconversation.com/the-hypodermic-effect-how-propaganda-manipulates-our-emotions-94966, retrieved on 10 October 2020.
27. Naqīb, KH. (2014). *Society and State in the Gulf and Arab Peninsula: a Different Perspective*. Routledge.
28. Nuroğlu, E. (2013). "(PDF) *TIKA and Its Political and Socio-Economic Role in the Balkans*". *Research Gate*, Unknown, www.researchgate.net/publication/261002554_TIKA_and_its_Political_and_Socio-economic_Role_in_the_Balkans, retrieved on 12 September 2020.
29. Nye J.S. Jr. (1990). *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power*. Basic Books: New York.
30. Orsy, L.M., Huizing, P.J. (2019). *The Corpus Juris Canonici* (c. 1140-c. 1500). *Encyclopædia Britannica*, www.britannica.com/topic/canon-law/The-Corpus-Juris-Canonici-c-1140-c-1500, retrieved on 12 September 2020.
31. Ozpek, B.B., Demirag, Y. (2014). "*Turkish Foreign Policy after the 'Arab Spring': from Agenda-Setter State to Agenda-Entrepreneur State*". Taylor & Francis, www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13537121.2014.922806, retrieved on 12 September 2020.
32. Öztürkmen, A. (2018). "*Turkish Content': The Historical Rise of the Dizi Genre*". *TV/Series*, RIRRA 21, journals.openedition.org/tvseries/2406, retrieved on 11 October 2020.
33. Sadek, A.H. "*Turkey: Between Border Conflicts and Regional Expansion*". *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, www.washingtoninstitute.org/fikraforum/view/turkey-between-border-conflicts-and-regional-expansion, retrieved on 18 October 2020.
34. Sansal, B. "*The Ottoman Empire*". *The Ottoman Empire. All About Turkey*, www.allaboutturkey.com/ottoman.html, retrieved on 28 September 2020.
35. Senem B.Ç. (2019). *Turkish Historical Television Series: Public Broadcasting of Neo-Ottoman Illusions*. *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, retrieved on 18 October 2020.
36. Shaw, S.J. (1976). *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey. the Rise and Decline of the Ottoman Empire, 1280-1808*. Vol. I. Cambridge University Press.
37. Sheraz, U. (2020). "*Saudi Arabia Wants to 'Expose' Turkey's Dirilis Ertugrul with Kingdoms of Fire*". *Lens*, propakistani.pk/lens/saudi-

- arabia-wants-to-expose-turkeys-dirilis-ertugrul-with-kingdoms-of-fire/? , retrieved on 12 October 2020.
38. Smith, B.L. (2020). "Propaganda". Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., www.britannica.com/topic/propaganda, retrieved on 2 October 2020.
 39. Vaisi, R. et al. (2020). "Climate Change Threats, Opportunities, and the GCC Countries". Middle East Institute, www.mei.edu/publications/climate-change-threats-opportunities-and-gcc-countries, retrieved on 12 September 2020.
 40. Watson, A. (2019). "Average TV Viewing Time by Country and Age". Statista, www.statista.com/statistics/276748/average-daily-tv-viewing-time-per-person-in-selected-countries/, retrieved on 13 October 2020.
 41. Yavuz, M. (2009). *Introduction: What Is an Islamic Party? Is the AKP an Islamic Party?* In *Secularism and Muslim Democracy in Turkey*. Cambridge Middle East Studies. Cambridge University Press, retrieved on data de 20.10.2020.
 42. Al Jazeera. (2020). "Ertugrul: Turkish TV's Ottoman Phenomenon Goes Global". Turkey. Al Jazeera, Al Jazeera, www.aljazeera.com/program/the-listening-post/2020/6/28/ertugrul-turkish-tvs-ottoman-phenomenon-goes-global/, retrieved on 20 October 2020.
 43. Al Jazeera. (2020). "Qatar's Economy Shrank 6.1 Percent in Q2 – Worst in Eight Years". Qatar. Al Jazeera, Al Jazeera, www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/10/14/bbqatars-economy-shrank-6-1-percent-in-q2-worst-in-8-years, retrieved on 12 October 2020.
 44. Arab, The New. "Egypt Tells Muslims to Boycott Ertugrul and Other Turkish Dramas in Bizarre Anti-Erdogan Fatwa". Alaraby. The New Arab, english.alaraby.co.uk/english/news/2020/2/11/egypt-targets-turkish-dramas-in-anti-erdogan-fatwa, retrieved on 18 October 2020.
 45. Center, Strauss. "Strait of Hormuz – Oil in the Persian Gulf". The Strauss Center, www.strausscenter.org/strait-of-hormuz-oil-in-the-persian-gulf/, retrieved on 12 September 2020.
 46. Culture Trip. (2012). "The Rise, Fall and Resurgence of Turkish Cinema". Culture Trip. The Culture Trip, theculturetrip.com/europe/turkey/articles/the-rise-fall-and-resurgence-of-turkish-cinema/, retrieved on 12 September 2020.
 47. Daily Sabah (2017), www.dailysabah.com/business/2017/10/07/from-rosalinda-to-sila-turkish-tv-series-top-global-imported-content-market retrieved on 30 September 2020.
 48. "Egypt Fatwa Bans Ertugrul, Turkish Soaps". Middle East Monitor, www.middleeastmonitor.com/20200212-egypt-fatwa-bans-ertugrul-turkish-soaps/, retrieved on 12 October 2020.
 49. *Encyclopædia Britannica* (2019), www.britannica.com/topic/canon-law/The-Corpus-Juris-Canonici-c-1140-c-1500., retrieved on 2 October 2020.



50. *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (2020). Encyclopedia.com, www.encyclopedia.com/religion/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/transoxiana retrieved on 15 September 2020.
51. France 24. (2018). “Drama over Saudi-Owned Channel’s Turkish Soaps”. *France 24*, www.france24.com/en/20180307-drama-over-saudi-owned-channels-turkish-soaps, retrieved on 18 October 2020.
52. *History – The Official Portal of the UAE Government*, u.ae/en/about-the-uae/history, retrieved on 12 September 2020.
53. “Manzikert (Malazgirt)”. *EHISTORY*, ehistory.osu.edu/battles/manzikert-malazgirt, retrieved on 17 October 2020.
54. Nationsonline.org, Klaus Kästle. (2018). “Map of the Persian Gulf”. *Nations Online Project*, www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/map/Persian-Gulf-Map.htm, retrieved on 23 September 2020.
55. “Resurrection: Ertuğrul, Currently on Netflix, Far Exceeds Its Reputation as a ‘Turkish Game of Thrones’ – Entertainment News, Firstpost”. *Firstpost*, www.firstpost.com/entertainment/resurrection-ertugrul-currently-on-netflix-far-exceeds-its-reputation-as-a-turkish-game-of-thrones-8576051.html, retrieved on 20 October 2020.
56. “Sheikh Mohammed Bin Thani: The Amiri Diwan”. *Amiri Diwan*, www.diwan.gov.qa/about-qatar/qatars-rulers/sheikh-mohammed-bin-thani?sc_lang=en, retrieved on 20 October 2020.
57. *SOFT POWER – Definiția și Sinonimele Soft Power*. In *Dicționarul englez*, educalingo.com/ro/dic-en/soft-power, retrieved on 14 September 2020.
58. “Woodrow Wilson”. The White House. The United States Government, www.whitehouse.gov/about-the-white-house/presidents/woodrow-wilson/, retrieved on 10 October 2020.
59. “The World Factbook: Bahrain”. *Central Intelligence Agency*. Central Intelligence Agency, www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ba.html, retrieved on 12 September 2020.
60. “The World Factbook: Kuwait”. (2018). *Central Intelligence Agency*, Central Intelligence Agency, www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ku.html, retrieved on 12 September 2020.
61. “The World Factbook: Qatar”. (2018). *Central Intelligence Agency*. Central Intelligence Agency, www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/qa.html, retrieved on 12 September 2020.
62. “Turkish President Marks 1071 Victory at Malazgirt”. *Anadolu Ajansi*, www.aa.com.tr/en/turkey/turkish-president-marks-1071-victory-at-malazgirt/1564704, retrieved on 17 October 2020.
63. “TV Series, Turkey”. IMDb. IMDb.com, www.imdb.com/search/title/?title_type=tv_series, retrieved on 29 September 2020.
64. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Kemal-Ataturk/The-Turkish-republic>, retrieved on 20 October 2020.
65. <http://www.stanford.edu/~jfearon/papers/iden1v2.pdf>, pp. 2-3, retrieved on 30 September 2020.

Turkish Movies in Former Ottoman Territories: Propaganda or Just an Efficient Soft Power in Turkish Foreign Policy?

66. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/about-the-white-house/presidents/woodrow-wilson/>, retrieved on 4 October 2020.
67. <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2019/sep/13/turkish-tv-magnificent-century-dizitaking-over-world>, retrieved on 30 September 2020.
68. www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13537121.2014.922806, retrieved on 14 October 2020.



ROMANIAN
MILITARY
THINKING