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THE REPRESENTATION OF FEMALE CHARACTERS IN
TURKISH TV SERIES IN 2010s:
HOW NEO-OTTOMANISM CHANGED THE DEPICTION OF WOMEN?

Ekin Deniz GÖRK
119611049

Asst. Prof. Ayşegül KESİRLİ UNUR

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**The Representation of Female Characters in Turkish TV Series in the 2010s:
How Neo-Ottomanism Changed the Depiction of Women?**

**2010'lu Yıllarda Yapılmış Türk Televizyon Dizilerinde Kadın Karakterlerin
Temsili: Yeni-Osmanlılık Kadın Tasvirini Nasıl Değiştirdi?**

Ekin Deniz Görk

119611049

Tez Danışmanı: Dr. Öğr. Üyesi Ayşegül Kesirli Unur (İmza)
İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi

Jüri Üyesi: Prof. Dr. Burak Özçetin (İmza)
İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi

Jüri Üyesi: Doç. Dr. Çiğdem Yazıcı (İmza)
Üsküdar Üniversitesi

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*“Gosh, I even want to thank Nicola Walker,
and she’s not even in it”**

* Sarah Lancashire, BAFTA TV Awards, 2017.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

FOREWORD.....	iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	v
LIST OF FIGURES.....	vii
LIST OF TABLES.....	x
ABSTRACT.....	xi
ÖZET.....	xii
INTRODUCTION	1
1. ORIENTALISM AND THE ORIENTALIST ICONOGRAPHY	16
1.1. ORIENTALISM	16
1.1.1. Gendered East	25
1.1.2. Masculine Gaze of Orientalism	26
1.1.3. Harem Iconography.....	29
2. NEO-OTTOMANISM AND TURKISH HISTORICAL DRAMAS	35
2.1. EARLY YEARS OF REPUBLIC.....	35
2.1.1. Gender of Republican National Narrative	37
2.1.2. Republican Years and Beyond.....	41
2.2. NEO-OTTOMANISM	44
2.2.1. Ottomania	49
2.3. OTTOMAN-THEMED TELEVISION SERIES IN EARLIER YEARS	51
3. DEPICTION OF WOMEN IN OTTOMAN-THEMED TELEVISION SERIES OF 2010s	55
3.1. ORIENTALIST REPRESENTATION OF SULTANS: MUHTEŞEM YÜZYIL.....	56
3.1.1. Muhteşem Yüzyıl and Orientalism.....	60
3.1.1.1. Fatma Sultan	61
3.1.1.2. Favourites	65
3.1.1.2.1. Hürrem Sultan	65
3.1.1.2.2. Firuze Hatun	71
3.1.1.2.3. Nurbanu Sultan.....	72

3.1.2. Muhteşem Yüzyıl and Its Position Within Neo-Ottomanism	76
3.2. ORIENTALIST REPRESENTATION OF SULTANS: MUHTEŞEM YÜZYIL: KÖSEM	77
3.2.1. Muhteşem Yüzyıl: Kösem and Orientalism.....	81
3.2.1.1. Valide Sultans	84
3.2.1.1.1. Valide Safiye Sultan	84
3.2.1.1.2. Valide Mahpeyker Kösem Sultan.....	88
3.2.1.2. Aunts and Sisters	93
3.2.1.3. Sanavber Hatun	95
3.2.2. Muhteşem Yüzyıl: Kösem and Its Position Within Neo-Ottomanism	97
3.3. EXCLUDED REPRESENTATION OF THE WOMEN OF ABDÜLHAMİD'S FAMILY: PAYİTAHT ABDÜLHAMİD.....	98
3.3.1. Payitaht: Abdülhamid and Orientalism.....	101
3.3.2. Payitaht Abdülhamid and Neo-Ottomanism	105
3.3.2.1. Rahime Perestu Valide Sultan.....	106
3.3.2.2. Seniha Sultan	109
3.3.2.3. Bidar Kadınefendi.....	111
3.3.2.4. Naime Sultan	115
CONCLUSION	120
REFERENCES	123

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1 The Favourite Sultana, Etienne Jaurat, 18th century.	32
Figure 1.2 Turkish Woman Resting after her Bath, J.B. VanMour, 1714.	33
Figure 2.1. Members of the Oriental Travel Club from Leipzig during their trip to İstanbul, anonymous, 1906, Pierre de Gigord Collection.....	50
Figure 2.2. Ottoman-themed photograph studio in İstanbul, c.2019	51
Figure 3.1. Muhteşem Yüzyıl, E106.....	62
Figure 3.2. Muhteşem Yüzyıl, E106.	63
Figure 3.3. Muhteşem Yüzyıl, E106.....	63
Figure 3.4. Muhteşem Yüzyıl, E126, Fatma Sultan with her husband.....	64
Figure 3.5. Muhteşem Yüzyıl E01.	65
Figure 3.6. A Woman in the Hamam, Artist unknown.....	66
Figure 3.7. Muhteşem Yüzyıl, E01.....	66
Figure 3.8. Sultanın Hamamı, Joseph Marie Jouannin-Gaver Jules Van, 1840.....	67
Figure 3.9. Muhteşem Yüzyıl E01.....	68
Figure 3.10. Muhteşem Yüzyıl, E65.....	69
Figure 3.11. The Harem Favourite, M. Belloni, 19th century.	70
Figure 3.12. Muhteşem Yüzyıl, E66.....	72
Figure 3.13. Muhteşem Yüzyıl, E106.....	73
Figure 3.14. Muhteşem Yüzyıl, E108.	74
Figure 3.15. Muhteşem Yüzyıl: Kösem, E01	82
Figure 3.16. Muhteşem Yüzyıl: Kösem, E01	83
Figure 3.17. Muhteşem Yüzyıl: Kösem, E01	83
Figure 3.18. Harem, Aubry de La Matraye, 1723.....	84
Figure 3.19. Muhteşem Yüzyıl: Kösem, E01.....	84

Figure 3.20. Muhteşem Yüzyıl: Kösem, E01.....	85
Figure 3.21. Muhteşem Yüzyıl: Kösem, E01, Safiye Sultan.	86
Figure 3.22. Muhteşem Yüzyıl: Kösem, E01, Safiye Sultan.	86
Figure 3.23. Muhteşem Yüzyıl: Kösem, E01.....	87
Figure 3.24. Muhteşem Yüzyıl: Kösem, E01.....	88
Figure 3.25. Muhteşem Yüzyıl: Kösem, E01	89
Figure 3.26. Muhteşem Yüzyıl: Kösem, E16, she wears a plain tiara.....	89
Figure 3.27. Muhteşem Yüzyıl: Kösem, E45	89
Figure 3.28. Muhteşem Yüzyıl: Kösem, E57	90
Figure 3.29. Muhteşem Yüzyıl: Kösem, E20.....	90
Figure 3.30. Murder of Kösem Sultan, Sir Paul Rycout, 1694.	92
Figure 3.31. Muhteşem Yüzyıl: Kösem, E60, death of Kösem Sultan.	92
Figure 3.32. Muhteşem Yüzyıl: Kösem, E09, Fahriye Sultan.	94
Figure 3.33. Muhteşem Yüzyıl: Kösem, E45, Gevherhan Sultan.....	94
Figure 3.34. A Young Lady Having Her Hair Combed, Osman Hamdi Bey, 1880.....	95
Figure 3.35. Muhteşem Yüzyıl: Kösem, E45, Sanavber Hatun.....	96
Figure 3.36. Payitaht Abdülhamid, E01, detail from Abdülhamid's office. ..	102
Figure 3.37. Fatih Atını Denize Sürerken, Fausto Zonaro, 1908.....	102
Figure 3.38. Payitaht Abdülhamid, E01, detail from Abdülhamid's office. ..	103
Figure 3.39. Fatih Sultan Mehmed, Fausto Zonaro, 1907.	103
Figure 3.40. Payitaht Abdülhamid, E07.	107
Figure 3.41. Payitaht Abdülhamid, E08.	108
Figure 3.42. Payitaht Abdülhamid, E01, Seniha Sultan (left).	109
Figure 3.43. Payitaht Abdülhamid, E01, Seniha Sultan at her home.....	111
Figure 3.44. Payitaht Abdülhamid, E01, Seniha Sultan visiting her brother Sultan Abdülhamid on his office.....	111
Figure 3.45. Payitaht Abdülhamid, E01, Bidar Kadınefendi (right).....	113
Figure 3.46. Payitaht Abdülhamid, E01, Bidar Kadınefendi in the harem. ..	113

Figure 3.47. Payitaht Abdülhamid, E01, Bidar Kadınefendi.....	114
Figure 3.48. Payitaht Abdülhamid, E01, Naime Sultan.	116
Figure 3.49. Payitaht Abdülhamid, E04, Naime Sultan	117
Figure 3.50. Payitaht Abdülhamid, E04, Naime Sultan	117
Figure 3.51. Payitaht Abdülhamid, E18.....	118

LIST OF TABLES

Table. 3.1. Characters' Relation Chart.....	59
Table. 3.2. Family Tree.....	60
Table. 3.3. Characters' Relation Chart.....	80
Table. 3.4. Family Tree.....	81
Table. 3.5. Characters' Relation Chart.....	101
Table. 3.6. Family Tree.....	101

ABSTRACT

During the early years of the republic, Turkish state tried to cut off its ties with Ottoman past, but it couldn't succeeded. Instead, Ottoman nostalgia grew within the public and started to show its effects on the cultural and daily products, beginning from the late 1970s. This nostalgia later named as neo-Ottomanism and re-defined with almost every other administration, since each of them approaches to the Ottoman past differently. When 2002 staged to the victory of AKP (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi - Justice and Development Party), a political Islamist right wing party, the official attitude against to Ottoman Empire started to change once again. By the date of this study completed—2022—, the party is close to celebrate its 20th anniversary in power. After the six election victories in a row within the twenty years, AKP has managed to built its own era in both the political and cultural history of The Republic of Turkey. As being one of the powerful emotional motive of the period, neo-Ottomanism effected television contents along with many other cultural mediums. Therefore Ottoman-themed television series became a sub-genre in Turkish television dramas, and the decade of 2010s, staged big number of Ottoman-themed television series.

This dissertation visually analyzes television series which are based on this Ottoman nostalgia. It uses textual analysis on the three television dramas from the decade of 2010s, *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* (2011-2014), *Muhteşem Yüzyıl: Kösem* (2015-2017), *Payitaht Abdülhamid* (2017-2021), and examines the depiction of women in realms of these series. By using the genre theory, it claims the depiction of women in those series which are created with the neo-Ottomanist nostalgia, changed from using the orientalist iconography to using a new iconography within this decade.

Keywords: genre analysis, neo-Ottomanism, orientalism, Turkish television series, women representation

ÖZET

Cumhuriyetin erken yıllarında Türk devleti, Osmanlı geçmişiyle olan bağlarını kesmeye çalıştı, ancak bu konuda başarılı olamadı. Onun yerine halk arasında Osmanlı nostaljisi büyüdü ve geç 1970'lerden başlayarak kültürel ve günlük ürünlerde etkisini göstermeye başladı. Bu nostalji daha sonradan yeni-Osmanlılık olarak adlandırıldı ve herbiri Osmanlı geçmişine farklı şekilde yaklaştığından neredeyse her yeni hükümetle bu terim yeniden tanımlandı. 2002 yılı siyasal İslamcı sağ kanat bir parti olan AKP'nin zaferine sahne olurken Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'na karşı olan resmi tutum bir kez daha değişmeye başladı. Bu çalışmanın tamamlandığı tarih itibariyle—2022—, parti, yönetimdeki yirminci yılını kutlamaya yaklaşmış bulunuyor. Bu yirmi yıl içerisinde peş peşe altı seçim zaferinden sonra, AKP, Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'nin hem politik tarihinde hem de kültürel tarihinde kendi devrini inşa etmeyi başardı. Bu dönemin oldukça güçlü duygusal motiflerinden biri olan yeni-Osmanlılık, birçok farklı kültürel mecranın yanısıra televizyon içeriklerinde de etkisini gösterdi. Bu sebeple Osmanlı temalı diziler Türk televizyonunda bir alt-janr olarak yer edinirken, 2010'lar oldukça fazla sayıda Osmanlı temalı diziye ev sahipliği yaptı.

Bu tez, bahsi geçen Osmanlı nostaljisi içerisinde üretilmiş televizyon dizilerinin görsel analizini yapmaktadır. 2010'lu yıllardan üç dizi olan, *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* (2011-2014), *Muhteşem Yüzyıl: Kösem* (2015-2017), ve *Payitaht Abdülhamid* (2017-2021) dizilerine tekst analizi yapmakta ve dizilerin yarattığı evren içerisindeki kadın tasvirini incelemektedir. Tür analizi metodolojisini kullanarak yeni-Osmanlılık akımı içerisinde üretilmiş bu dizilerdeki kadın tasvirinin, 10 yıllık süreç içerisinde orientalist ikonografiden, kendine has bir ikonografiye büründüğünü öne sürmektedir.

Anahtar kelimeler: tür analizi, yeni-Osmanlılık, oryantalizm, türk televizyon dizileri, kadın temsilleri.

INTRODUCTION

Paddy Scannell writes that contemporary television is a technology that experienced in daily basis for storytelling, while it is also a news service.¹ The nature of television offers countless formats of programming, from news to talkshows, from reality TV to television series. This variety comes from the variation of television genres. Every format and genre has its own conventions to create familiar characteristics between the shows. Naturally, these conventions are as vary as genres, so each genre becomes the subject of different studies and analysis processes. This study is focusing on the genre of historical dramas and more specifically Ottoman-themed historical dramas in Turkish television. Therefore before getting into Ottoman past and contemporary historical television dramas of Republic of Turkey, I'd like to explain the genre theory.

Every piece of art work has a genre to define its characteristics. From literature work to cinema, from sculpture to radio, from paintings to television. Jane Feuer writes about genre that "the term implies that works of literature, films, and television programs can be categorized; they are not unique. Thus genre theory deals with the ways in which a work may be considered to belong to a class of related works."² In his book *Genre*, Stephen Neale defines genres as the components in the machine of cinema.³

As systematised forms of the articulation of meaning and position, they are fundamental part of the cinema's mental machinery. Approached in this way, genres are not to be seen as forms of

¹ Paddy Scannell, "Television and History", in *A Companion to Television*, ed. Janet Wasko, (New York: Wiley-Blackwell, 2005), 51.

² Jane Feuer, "Genre Study and Television" in *Channels of Discourse, Reassembled : Television and Contemporary Criticism*, ed. Robert Clyde Allen, (Chapel Hill : The University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 138.

³ Stephen Neale, *Genre*, (London: BFI Publishing, 1980), 19.

textual codifications, but as systems of orientations, expectations and conventions that circulate between industry, text and subject.⁴

In a way, genres are like user guides both for the creator and the audience. Story, settings, colours, music, iconography and many more, eventually become the conventions of particular genres and create the essence of familiarity within the genre. "Conventions are frequently-used stylistic techniques or narrative devices typical of (but not necessarily unique to) particular generic traditions."⁵ Each side, creator and audience, knows what to expect, since those "conventions function as an implied agreement between makers and consumers to accept certain artificialities, but such artificialities work in specific contexts."⁶ Which means, every genre has its own meanings for its conventions.

Conventions, which are the generic elements of each genres, create familiarity by being repeated from one film to other. "Repetition also helps generate audience knowledge, allowing viewers to weigh a film's variations against the genre's preordained, value-laden narrative system."⁷ This way, stylistic features become related with particular genres and offer short-cuts in story-telling process of the film. As Schatz covers it, "a genre film...involves familiar, essentially one-dimensional characters acting out a predictable story pattern within a familiar setting".⁸

Grant underlines that along with narrative characteristics, "conventions also include aspects of style associated with particular genres."⁹ Since mise-en-

⁴ Idib: 19

⁵ Barry Keith Grant, *Film Genre: From Iconography to Ideology*, (London: Wallflower Press, 2007), 10.

⁶ Idib: 10.

⁷ Neale, *Hollywood and Genre*, 196.

⁸ Thomas Schatz, *Hollywood Genres: Formula, Filmmaking, and the Studio System*, (New York: Random House, 1981), 6.

⁹ Grant, *Film Genre*:, 11.

scene is the term to cover every visual details of a filmic reality, what he meant as style is the mise-en-scene of films. Depending on his offer, each genre has its own generic aesthetic and mise-en-scene characteristics. He boldly underlines the importance of iconography for building up genre mise-en-scenes.

[...] that familiar [/] symbols in works of art have cultural meaning beyond the context of the individual work in which they appear - to the medium of cinema. Icons are second-order symbols, in that their symbolic meaning is not necessarily a connection established within the individual text, but is already symbolic because of their use across a number of similar previous texts.¹⁰

In other words, some particular objects have their own meanings before they become part of the filmic realm, and they carry these meanings onto the realm. It's, in a way, the same principle what genres do. "In genre films, iconography refers to particular objects, archetypal characters and even specific actors."¹¹ The repetition which creates genre, builds genre's own iconography too. Therefore each genre has its own characteristic iconography that equipped with its own meaning. Because, as Grant underlines, "like conventions, iconography provides genres with a visual short-hand for conveying information and meaning succinctly."¹² In other words, iconography provides quickness for both the creator and the audience to tell what the story is about.

This genre system also includes television contents but since television is a broader medium, its contents are varied and major genres are not handy to define their features. As Feuer underlines on the subject matter:

¹⁰ Idib: 11-12.

¹¹ Idib: 12.

¹² Idib:12.

Film and television, however, are culturally specific and temporally limited. Instead of employing a broad category such as 'comedy,' we need to activate specific genres such as the 'screwball comedy' (film) or the 'situation [/] comedy' (television), categories that may not correspond to or necessarily be subspecies of the literary genre of comedy.¹³

Therefore there are variety of genres like sub-genres and locally hybridised genres along with the main genres. Television uses the genres and formulas that the film industry had built "in order to predict audience popularity"¹⁴, according to Feuer. Historical dramas are one those common genres that television inherited from cinema in its early days and still using.

In its basic definition, historical drama is "a fiction film showing past events or set within a historical period."¹⁵ It either based on true historical events and historical figures or set in past periods. Either way, "the reader or viewer is asked to contemplate the fact that what they are reading or viewing is *not* history but a *representation* of history."¹⁶ The genre focuses on creating spectacle from the past by fictionalizing it.

Chris Robé reminds the early periods of film criticism and underlines one of the main objections about the genre: "spectacle's stupefying obsession with the details of *mise-en-scène* forestalled the ability to develop nuanced themes and sociohistorical contexts."¹⁷ The critical approach to the genre and genre itself have

¹³ Feuer, *Genre Study and Television*, 139-40.

¹⁴ Idib: 144.

¹⁵ "Film Genres", in *Dartmouth Library*, <https://researchguides.dartmouth.edu/filmgenres/historicals>

¹⁶ Stephanie Russo, "'You are, like, so woke': Dickinson and the anachronistic turn in historical drama", in *Rethinking History: The Journal of Theory and Practice*, 2021, vol. 25(4), 536.

¹⁷ Chris Robé, "Taking Hollywood Back: The Historical Costume Drama, the Biopic, and Popular Front U.S. Film Criticism", in *Cinema Journal*, 2009, Vol.48(2), 72.

changed over the years for many reasons but an important characteristic of the genre which underlined in this early criticism stayed same: obsession with the details of mise-en-scene. In historical dramas, the iconography should have the visual elements of the past.

[...] the viewer is invited to revel in the details through which it is signalled that the past is *not* the present, such as clothing, settings and modes of behaviour. Those details become very important in establishing that whilst the past can be rendered understandable to modern audiences, it is also not the same as the present.¹⁸

More than narrative, mise-en-scene is what make a film or a series an example of historical drama. As it was mentioned above, mise-en-scene mostly depends on the iconography of genre. Therefore historical dramas are relying on the iconography of the time that the drama was settled. In this case, it is more important for the historical dramas that how does it show it, than what does it tell.

The iconography that historical dramas are tend to use has some characteristics. Ronald Bergan explains these characteristics as; "lavish costumes and design that succeed in capturing, in meticulous detail, the ambience of the particular era in which they are set."¹⁹ In other words, '(lavish) costumes and design' is the key of the genre. Details of the setting is a strong character of the films and series of the genre, since they are the ones to mark the period of the story. Castles, palaces, mansions are very common architectural structures, along with horse-carriages and pre-tech daily life instruments. Even though the genre interact with other genres, most of the time, and inherit offer a hybrid iconography, these features of historical drama iconography are inevitable.

¹⁸ Russo, "*You are, like, so woke*":, 537.

¹⁹ Ronald Bergan, *The Film Book: A Complete Guide to the World of Cinema*, (London: DK, 2011), 91.

Since glamour and magnificence are the goals for mise-en-scene, it is common to see women with their gorgeous gowns or detailed clothes are taking leading roles in historical dramas. Of course it is the story's demand that who takes which role in the film and series but having female characters in leading roles, even it is a male-leading story, is very common.

Almost every country and culture uses the genre for the narratives of their own historical events and past stories. Turkish television is no exception. Locally produced series have been using this genre since the early days of television broadcasting in Turkey. In Turkish example, literary adaptations mark the beginning of historical drama genre usage. BBC was the role model for the adaptations and "in 1974, TRT reached out to the prominent directors of Turkish cinema and asked them to adapt classical Turkish novels for television."²⁰ Since these adapted novels were early classics of Turkish Literature, which were written in late Ottoman Empire era, "the settings of these dramas were inevitably historical."²¹ In other words, Ottoman Empire era is the most common period that the historical dramas are set in, in Turkish television series. Stories that take place in pre-Ottoman Empire is relatively a new theme. Because of this endless repetition of Ottoman-past in historical dramas, Ottoman-themed contents became a sub-genre of their own.

It is important to keep this in mind that for Turkish television, Ottoman-theme is not a total genre but a powerful narrative to be used with almost every genre. Therefore it can be named as sub-genre of historical dramas. Since representation of past almost automatically brings historical-drama conventions, Ottoman-past narratives, and Ottoman iconography, makes anything historical

²⁰ Ayşegül Kesirli Unur, "In the midst of the global and the local: Neo-Ottoman detectives of Filinta" in *Critical Studies in Television: The International Journal of Television Studies*, 2020, Vol. 15(4), 357.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1749602020956974>

²¹ Idib: 358.

drama. So it is not unusual to see hybrid genres like soap-opera and historical drama or police procedural and historical drama with Ottoman setting.

Ottoman-themed television series is not a new theme in Turkish television. Beginning from the early periods of Turkish Radio and Television Corporation (TRT), which is a state-run broadcasting organization, Ottoman past found its way onto the screen. TRT started its television trial broadcasting in 1968. In 1974, TRT, with the aim of "increasing the percentage of locally produced programmes, [...] reached out to the prominent directors of Turkish cinema and asked them to adapt classical Turkish novels for television."²² *Diyet* (1975), *Pembe İncili Kaftan* (1975), *Aşk-ı Memnu* (1974-1975) are few examples of the early productions. Since these adapted novels were early classics of Turkish Literature, which were written in late Ottoman Empire era, "the settings of these dramas were inevitably historical."²³ TRT followed this common trend of producing local narratives with global generic formulas,²⁴ and produced countless series and television films. Thus "historical dramas with Ottoman settings appeared as a subcategory in this endeavour."²⁵

Ottoman-themed series of Turkish television will be explained more detailedly in the next chapters, but before exploring those series, I believe it is important to understand orientalism, orientalist iconography, and neo-Ottomanism first. Because, after all, Ottoman Empire was a state that belonged to the East, therefore Ottoman iconography that the contemporary series are commonly relying on, has orientalist essence. In addition to the orientalist essence, the way of approaching to the Turkish history is very effective on the contemporary

²² Idib: 357.

²³ Idib: 358.

²⁴ Idib: 359.

²⁵ Idib: 358.

television series. Therefore history, as a general concept, is also very important for historical dramas.

Since history is not autonomous but written by ruling elites, it is far from being the sole truth. It tells an elected past, from a point of view which belongs to the writer and the dominant ideology of the time. As it is an androcentric world that we are living in, what the history tells is also androcentric past. This centralization of men, turns history into a sexist concept, which women couldn't make it to the official versions of it. In addition to already being written sidedly, the past that the history had written is also being affected and changed by daily ideologies and mentalities. Such a change takes places either because of nostalgia or because it needed to be different in order to serve today. Either way, history becomes the subject of endless intervention. The bold sexism in the history is an example of this.

Fatmagül Berktaş underlines a crucial correlation which lead people onto an androcentric mentality. According to her, while women correlated with nature, un-touched cosmos itself, men correlated with human 's achievements.²⁶ Therefore civilization became the product of men, not people in general. Depending in this context, while human development correlated with men, underdevelopment correlated with women. This gender-based correlation of civilization left its mark in almost everything which is related to humankind. For instance, world politics.

Similar to women's position within the history, which created by androcentric characteristic of the civilization, the East also has ripped off from a just representation in the history due to Eurocentric characteristic of the civilization. When the world divided into two sides by an imaginary line the need

²⁶ Fatmagül Berktaş, "The Construction of Woman as "Other" in 19th Century English Popular Culture", in *Kadın Araştırmaları Dergisi* 0, (2012), 83-84.

to define both sides emerged. Since this division established according to the context of Eurocentrism, the process of defining the sides also followed the outline of the same context. Because it's in the east of Europe, for instance, the whole region get to be called the East or the Orient. While the West was taking the centre point of this dichotomy, the East get defined as the contrast of the West. Moreover, since the main dichotomy between nature and civilization was depending on gender binary; the dichotomy of the West and the East also inherited this gender-based correlation. Therefore, while the West associated with everything that symbolizes masculine identity such as civilization, development, and reason, the East was associated with pejorative conceptions of femininity like being uncivilized and underdeveloped.

As being one of the most complex and gifted ideologies of civilization history, orientalism, emerged from this dichotomy of the West and the East, and had built a generic mentality over the approach to the East—the Orient. Orientalism is the Westerner attempt "to understand, codify, and govern according to"²⁷ characteristics of local traditions on one hand, and also an attempt to represent the East, for the eyes of people of the West on the other hand. In order to build up this representation of the East, the ideology produced its own iconography which relies on female body.

Throughout the oriental iconography, the East mostly represented with exotic, and over sexualized women figures along with architectural spaces such as bazaar, hamam and harem. As one of the important figures of Middle East region, Ottoman Empire also represented with women figures, more specifically with the women of Sultan's harem. Since "harem was a place closed to the external world, a sort of forbidden city, and that both local and foreign sources on this subject

²⁷ "Orientalism" in *Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/science/Orientalism-cultural-field-of-study>

were insufficient."²⁸ This secrecy fed up the sexual fantasy and desire of the artists and "made the harem the most intriguing part of the Orient for Westerners."²⁹ What the oriental iconography has represented as the Empire in the countless paintings, is a one-dimensioned, despised, and sexualized existence, through the female body. When the Ottoman Empire collapsed and the Turkish Republic established, the women's body became the centre of attention once again, but this time with the endeavors of the republican elite.

Early twentieth century was the dawn of the nation-based states, and the Republic of Turkey was also established in that vein, in 1923. Therefore, instead of offering itself as the inheritor of Ottoman Empire, the Republic focus on building a new branding for itself, a westerner state in the East. In this process of rebranding, after the long years of represented through over sexualized women in harem, the Republic gone with the converted image of oriental women. Addition to getting a westerner image, the Republic was also determined to cut its ties with the Ottoman Empire, especially the cultural ties. Countless reforms actualized by this aim, including establishing new national narrative and a new image of Turkish women.

With the establishment of the Republic, the question of 'how should a Turkish woman be?' became a discussion topic. Kemalist male writers and politicians wanted to define 'Turkish woman' so that they can designate the political, social and moral behaviours of women.³⁰ Which they did. They established a Turkish woman image that is secular and 'modern' in clothing and behaving but not exposing oneself. She is a very well educated 'independent'

²⁸ Zeynep İnankur, "The World of Ottoman Women and the 'Harem' as Seen by Western Painters" in *Portraits from the Empire: The Ottoman World and the Ottomans from the 18th and 20th Century with Selected Works of Art from Suna and İnan Kıraç Foundation Collection*, (İstanbul: Pera Müzesi Yayınları, 2006), 91.

²⁹ İdib: 91.

³⁰ Yaprak Zihnioğlu, *Kadınsız İnkılap: Nezihe Muhiddin, Kadınlar Halk Fırkası, Kadın Birliği*, (İstanbul: Metis, 2019), 225.

person but also a self-sacrificing and loving mother for the next generations of the Republic of Turkey.

Even though the one of the main attempts was changing the orientalist approach onto the Ottoman Empire, the republican state eventually ended up with orientalist iconography again over the Ottoman past. The image state tried to change become part of the representation of its past. This self-orientalism continues to exist within with the emotional motive of neo-Ottomanism, through many different shape and contents, including television series.

After the 1980 military coup, many of the oppressed ideologies came into daylight in Turkish social and intellectual life, and Ottoman nostalgia was one of them. Beginning from this period, along with the increase of Ottoman nostalgia and, neo-Ottomanism got shaped as an emotional motive in social life. Since this motive is not solid but gets redefined in every other period, the public's generic relation with the Ottoman past changes with it accordingly. Another redefinition in neo-Ottomanism took placed with Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (AKP) government. After the political turmoil of 1990s, AKP won the election in 2002 as the majority of the parliament. While election of 2002 was marking the beginning of AKP administrations in Turkey—until the day, 2022, the party won six elections in a row—it was also marking the beginning of a new socio-cultural era. Ottoman-themed historical dramas domain the media of this era.

Since the big part of the 2000s and the decade of 2010s have passed under AKP's decisive rule, party's version of neo-Ottomanism started to build its own national narrative. For such an attempt of building a new narrative, the government's need for media contents become irrefutable. While the 2000s were marking the beginning of extreme politization of television dramas in Turkey, as Kumru Berfin underlined, 2010s marked the golden era of Ottoman-themed

series, as the outcome of relaunched neo-Ottomanist nostalgia.³¹ "As they build their iconography on the markers of the Ottoman past, Turkish television dramas appropriate the rising neo-Ottomanism in Turkey while continuously reproducing the past in the present in accordance with their ideological positioning."³² In other words, along with the increase in the number of Ottoman-themed series, representation of the daily politics in these series also increased and each production become a representative of particular ideologies.

Since TRT was the only broadcasting organization in Turkey until the 1990s, what was seen on the TRT's television contents deeply effected the generic television characteristics in Turkey. During this long years of broadcasting monopoly, TRT preserved its state-run characteristic, and "what was shown, talked about and quoted became politically sensitive."³³ In such environment where TRT was the only screen to reach out to the public, governmental interference became inevitable for the institution. Ayşe Öncü offers the general director appointments as the proof of how governments approached to the institution and wanted to keep it under their control. "With each change of government, a new general director of TRT was appointed – with 10 different general directors between 1971 and 1989."³⁴

The governmental interference continued to exist throughout the history of TRT and caused politization of its contents from time to time. This politization didn't effect television dramas of TRT only but also the ones in many other channels. On subject matter, Ayşegül Kesirli Unur writes that Turkish television

³¹ Kumru Berfin Emre Çetin, "The 'Politization' of Turkish Television Dramas," in *International Journal of Communication* 8(2014), 2478.

³² Unur, *In the Midst*, 361.

³³ Ayşe Öncü, "The Banal and the Subversive: Politics of Language on Turkish Television," in *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 2000 Vol 3(3):301

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/136754940000300303>

³⁴ Idib: 302.

dramas "turned into a battleground for opposing [/] political ideas."³⁵ Since different ideologies continue to exist within the public, different approaches to the Ottoman past are continuing to shape different Ottoman Empire representation. Together with the change in the new national narrative, how women are represented in historical dramas, are also changed, accordingly to the contemporary neo-Ottomanist discourse.

Throughout the 2010s two main ideologies shaped these Ottoman-themed series: Orientalism and neo-Ottomanism. As a young woman who is still witnessing the change of social codes and has been targeted at least one of these Ottoman-themed television series, I wanted to lead a study over the outcomes that women inherited from this political change. Therefore this study aims to analyze the depiction of women within this ten-year period of Turkish television.

This decade has been chosen, because, even though beginning of neo-Ottomanism and Ottomania is around mid-1980s, 2010s is the decade it became part of the daily life of both the Turkish people and people of the region. This decade has seen three general elections, one re-election, and one of the biggest protests of the country's history, Gezi Park Protests. 2015 while marking the mid-decade it was also the year of first election after the Gezi Park Protests. AKP won the majority for the fourth time yet couldn't reach the enough number to form a government. Thus the election canceled and repeated within three months. By this repetition AKP won the absolute majority in the parliament and it became the beginning of an AKP that is more aggressively active in order to establish its agenda. Since this fourth win renewed the self-confidence of the party, along with many others, party's version of neo-Ottomanism became more affective on Ottomania-based contents, and the tone of Ottoman-themed television series changed onto a toughen stage.

³⁵ Unur, *In the Midst*, 359-360.

In order to understand the characteristics of the iconographies that influenced the depiction of women in these Ottoman-themed historical television dramas, this dissertation majorly focuses on the discourses of orientalism and neo-Ottomanism in the history of the Republic of Turkey. By concentrating on three case studies from 2010s, *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* (2011-2014), *Muhteşem Yüzyıl: Kösem* (2015-2017), and *Payitaht Abdülhamid* (2017-2021), the study investigates the influence of these discourses on the depiction of women in these series. It makes textual analysis of five episodes of these chosen case studies which broadcasted in different channels for different target groups, with a particular concentration on the iconographies that inspired the representation of female characters in powerful positions.

The first chapter is designed around orientalism and orientalist iconography. Since the study is focusing on Ottoman-themed historical dramas, and orientalist iconography is one of the most common templates of these series, before heading up to the neo-Ottomanism and contemporary Turkish television series, orientalist iconography get analyzed briefly in this chapter.

The second chapter is following the ideological changes in the history of Republic of Turkey in order to analyze the obsession over the image of women throughout the social periods of the country. Within this context, westernization, republican national narrative and neo-Ottomanism explained. In addition to major periods of the history of the Republic of Turkey, historical television dramas and their connection with the neo-Ottomanism analyzed here. Historical and theoretical background of the study completed in this chapter.

In the final chapter, the answer has been searched for the question of the discourses of orientalism and neo-Ottomanism influenced the representation of

women in the Ottoman themed historical dramas by the analysis of selected case studies.

Along with the first episodes of every selected characters have appeared, the episodes that include bold examples of orientalist and neo-Ottomanist iconographies, have been chosen to analyze. In order to decode how the relation between the historical drama genre and culturally-shaped iconographies effected women depiction in these series, the tool of textual analysis used throughout the study. By this method the visual representatives of the changing iconographies of Ottoman-themed historical dramas traced in the series.

1. ORIENTALISM AND THE ORIENTALIST ICONOGRAPHY

1.1. ORIENTALISM

Dictionaries define the word 'orient' as a noun stands for the countries in the east and southeast of Asia.³⁶ Therefore it defines a region according to its position, which is 'east'. So the curial question here is where does the east starts? Where is the centre so there is a periphery of it? More importantly, whose east it is?

East becomes "the East" and turns into "Middle East" when the word defines a region's position in relation to the Europe, within the Eurocentric context. This centralization created a powerful dichotomy in centuries ago and its effects still divide the world onto two parts, by imaginary borders. In his book *The East-West Dichotomy*, Thorsten Pattberg writes that "the first recorded historian who deliberately portrayed the 'east' (Persians) and the 'west' (Greeks)" was possibly Herodotus.³⁷ But he does this by defining them "as mutual antagonists".³⁸ According to Pattberg, this dichotomy offered by Herodotus was underlining the different approaches and interpretations of life between two different cultures, yet was not about putting one above the other or building up a hierarchy between them. Later Pattberg continues to explain the early steps of creating the 'Other' and building up this discriminative binary system:

Others, Thucydides and Xenephone, similarly, found it natural to employ strong polarities and concentrate on the 'otherness' of the East, while accepting the necessity of resistance to external force

³⁶ "Orient" in *Oxford Dictionaries*, accessed June 13, 2022, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/tr/sözlük/ingilizce/orient>

³⁷ Thorsten Pattberg, *The East-West Dichotomy*, (New York: LoD Press), 1

³⁸ Idib: 1

by defining a Western 'self'. Thus came into being the first system of the so-called East-West dichotomy. ³⁹

This dichotomy within the world culture has survived centuries, rise of empires and their ends, the revolutions that erupted and monarchies that crashed to ground, wars and peace, power and authority changes... The dichotomy survived and continue to divide the world in an unrealistic way as the West and the rest, which is its eternal 'Other', the East.

Remarkably, the East-West dichotomy, as if an invisible hand dealt the right cards, still persists to determine world affairs and history despite long and enduring phases of centrism, trials of expansion, colonialism and empire, alliances and ganging-ups, rivalry of false beliefs in superiority.⁴⁰

It is a false belief of superiority or not, like the authority of a playwright holds over its play, the West holds a systematic superiority over the rest by being the one who tells the generic story of the world history. Whoever holds the pen, manipulates the story. Even though every nation tells its own story, naturally, the first to come to mind is the western version, especially within the global context. More specifically in social sciences, one must start with underlining the similarity or the differences of the subject matter with the western version of the story, since the acceptable theories and approaches are the products of it. Thereby in any context, the ultimate normative reference point becomes, almost automatically, the West and one starts to explaining from this point. The 'us' that created by the West is so powerful, that, one who belongs to the Eastern 'us' must define oneself as the other, by the perspective of the West.

³⁹ Idib:1

⁴⁰ Idib: 40

It's a perfectly fed and established system that still stands strong as the base of world affairs. Thus in order to decoding the characteristics of East-West dichotomy and its effect several theories and concepts are built. *Orientalism* is one of the important concepts.

Even though in today's world *orientalism* comes up to mind as an art movement at first, it actually was and still is bigger than this. The construction of the term may depends on the geographical location but it covers up far more than this. It is an approach for the beginning, a mentality, a way of explanation and interpretation, a style and many more. Edward Said starts his famous book *Orientalism* by underlining this layered situation of the term:

[...]what I shall be calling *Orientalism*, a way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient's special place in European Western experience. Orient is not only adjacent to Europe; it is also the place of Europe's greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other. In addition, the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) [/] as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience. Yet none of this Orient is merely imaginative. The Orient is an integral part of European *material* civilization and culture.⁴¹

As its next-door neighbour, the Orient is the main Other of Europe and the Western world in the bigger picture. It's the whole package that West can define itself by not being similar to it, or as Said has put it, by being its contrast. From

⁴¹ Edward Said, *Orientalism*, (GB: Penguin, 2003), 1-2.

this approach, one can easily say, the West is what is not Orient. Thus defining the Orient, drawing its image, telling its story is quite important for the Western world in order to not only telling its own story but also for feeding its own power. The basic mentality here can be explained as, the more image of Orient is different, the better civilization that West has.

Historically, the Orient has been defined by putting the Western world in a central position. In such a way to support this argument Zeynep Çelik states that "The division of world history into Antiquity, Middle Age, Early Modern Age, and Contemporary Times assumed that everything outside Europe was linked to Europe, that other civilizations were not autonomous."⁴² In other words, everything rises from an Eurocentric realm. And Said offers this Eurocentric orientalism turns into a "corporate institution" with its own systemic approaches, in the late 18th century.⁴³

If the world—human civilization (?)—can be divided by the binary of the East and the West based on the theory of Otherness then we can assume that there are established solid differences between these two—imaginary—parts. Since this division accepts the civilizations of the two sides in a reductive interpretation as if each sides has only one whole characteristic, the list of these so-called differences are only unrealistic explanations. Yet again, orientalism is already depends on the reductive interpretations about the East and as approaches the East as an undifferentiated Other. On the other hand, building up these differences as a whole concept and autonomic system of its own is already a political decision of 'modern people' of the West.

⁴² Zeynep Çelik, *Europe Knows Nothing about the Orient: A Critical Discourse from the East (1872-1932)*, (Istanbul: Koç University Press, 2021), 25.

⁴³ Said, *Orientalism*, 3.

The difference between east and west was always on the table but the knowledge about these geographies started to be systematically created beginning from the 18th century which proliferated this difference. Said explains it with the need of exhibiting the Orient at the museums:

Under the general heading of knowledge of the Orient, and within the umbrella of Western hegemony over the Orient during the period from the end of the eighteenth century, there emerged a complex Orient suitable for study in the academy, for display in the museum, for reconstruction in the colonial office, for theoretical illustration in anthropological, biological, linguistic, racial, and historical theses about mankind and the universe, for instances of economic and sociological theories of developments, revolution, cultural person[/]ality, national or religious character.⁴⁴

This was a one-way ticket to being an object to be represented through the eyes of the creator. An idea that nearly half of the world's culture can be defined by only a few different styles of representatives and fit into a museum, holds an enormous superiority over the one to be represented. In this point, the Orient became a still image in the visual bank of Western civilization, a painting that is frozen in time, captures only a little, an idea that shaped according to its target group but not a living, breathing creature on its own way. This urge of creating a short-cut representation erased the differences between the countries and nations of the East; the Near East and Middle East became an image while the Far East becoming another one.

According to this process of diminishing the original character, it can be said that orientalism is not an approach to understand the East but an ideology in

⁴⁴ Idib: 7-8.

total that established a group of canonic ideas about the civilization in the East and thus Ottoman Empire, and it shaped colonial and post-colonial world accordingly. This systematic approach of orientalism is a well covered package, and "is not an airy European fantasy about the Orient, but a created body of theory and practice in which, for many generations, there has been a considerable material investment."⁴⁵

In his book, *The Theft of History*, Jack Goody writes, "Europe had stolen the history of the East by imposing its own versions of time and of space on the rest of the Eurasian world."⁴⁶ By doing this, Europe took the authority of telling the story from its own perspective. It should not be taken as a wickedness, it is more a dominance game that each side tries to win, and build its power. Edward Said defines the power of authority as it creates its own forms:

There is nothing mysterious or natural about authority. It is formed, irradiated, disseminated; it is instrumental, it is persuasive; it has status, it establishes canons of taste and value; it is virtually [/] indistinguishable from certain ideas it dignifies as true, and from traditions, perceptions, and judgments it forms, transmits, reproduces.⁴⁷

In other words, this authority is a gaze that the ownership belongs to western civilization and east is being its eternal exotic object to being looked at. Within the orientalist concept, western civilization has the power of looking at its Other, east. About being object to be studied, Abdel-Malek, cited by Zeynep Çelik, states that; "the Orient was considered as an 'object' stamped with an otherness. It was passive, non-participating, characterized by a 'historical' subjectivity, above all, non-active, non-autonomous, non-sovereign with regard to itself."⁴⁸ The authority

⁴⁵ Idib: 6.

⁴⁶ Jack Goody, *The Theft of History*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 286.

⁴⁷ Said, *Orientalism*, 19-20.

⁴⁸ Çelik, *Europe Knows Nothing about the Orient*., 16.

western civilization holds here, turns the east an object to study, to talk about and to look at.

Being able to look, sounds very natural for every human being with their capability of seeing yet the act itself has the power hierarchy in its essence. The powerful one looks and the others are being looked at. If we take paintings as the oldest recorded data of looking and seeing processes, Berger's explanation over power relation between the painter and the object simply explains the situation:

Images were first made to conjure up the appearances of something that was absent. Gradually it became evident that an image could outlast what it represented; it then showed how something or somebody had once looked ~ and thus by implication how the subject had once been seen by other people. Later still the specific vision of the image-maker was also recognized as part of the record. An image became a record of how X had seen Y.⁴⁹

The one who looks has the power of manipulating the one who is being looked at. It doesn't have to be an intended manipulation, yet the limits of seeing or processing of what is being seen bring deformation over the information about the object. Since modern societies built themselves over power relations, a rightful act as advantageous as looking—and manipulating, 'naturally' lands onto the hands of the powerful societies. With the power invested in this look, the West condensed countless different cultures, nations and lifestyles into one image of the East.

Orientalism was strongly effective on paintings, not for the artistic urge but mainly for the educational urge to show what is being meant when one say

⁴⁹ John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, (London: Penguin, 2008), 10.

"the Orient", to the people of the West. This affect in the painting covers a period that can roughly be outlined between mid-18th century and the late 19th century, though, like rest of the art movements, orientalism in paintings cannot be declared as completely finished. MET (Metropolitan Museum) underlines that orientalist painting belongs to a world before twentieth century for sure: "The Orient—including present-day Turkey, Greece, the Middle East, and North Africa—exerted its allure on the Western artist's imagination centuries prior to the turn of the nineteenth century."⁵⁰ And British Museum, one of the important collectors of orientalist paintings in the world, describes oriental painting as a product of both fantasy and reality:

'Orientalism' refers to the representation of the East in Western art which often blurred the line between fantasy and reality. The Orientalist art movement reached its height during the 19th century and is perhaps best known today for its production of impressive oil paintings and works on paper. These paintings were popular in the 19th century, as Europeans and North Americans increasingly turned their attentions to cultures overseas. The works were mostly by male Western artists, made to satisfy an enormous public interest in the lands of the Middle East and North Africa.⁵¹

The 19th century, that is mentioned above as when the popularity of oriental painting has increased, was the time of touristic travelling to the East for upper class people of European countries becoming an event. The famous *Grand Tour*, that is basically a long vacation "for young aristocrats to visit Paris, Venice, Florence, and above all Rome, as the culmination of their classical education"⁵²,

⁵⁰ "Orientalism in Nineteenth-Century Art", accessed June 13, 2022, https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/euor/hd_euor.htm

⁵¹ "An Introduction to Orientalist Painting", accessed June 13, 2022, <https://blog.britishmuseum.org/an-introduction-to-orientalist-painting/>

⁵² "The Grand Tour", accessed June 13, 2022, https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/grtr/hd_grtr.htm

was getting bigger by addition of the new destinations like Ottoman Istanbul and Anatolia, Egypt and more countries in North Africa. Since "the idea of the Grand Tour, [was] a practice that introduced Englishmen, Germans, Scandinavians, and also Americans to the art and culture of France and Italy"⁵³ beginning from the late 16th century, the characteristic of the tour stayed same after the new additions and the East became a subject for not only statesmen but also for European/Western citizens who can afford to travel. By the 19th century, economical and political balance between Christian Europe and Muslim Middle East was changed for the sake of European side, thus:

Increasing wealth, stability and political importance enabled more and more people to travel so while a typical Grand Tourist was likely to be a young British milord completing his education, prolonged trips were also undertaken by artists, designers, collectors, agents of the art trade, and large numbers of the educated public, including many women.⁵⁴

With the increase in the number and diversity of the travellers it became more important to represent the East to the ones who never leave the West. After all, creating a work would be the solid proof of their travel onto the 'exotic lands', thus, they put out countless work. By the time 19th century close to the end, oriental works were coming from almost every art form, from novels to paintings, from sculpture to early photographs. Throughout this period the world handed "rooms full of orientalist paintings [and many other works] that present Muslims and Muslim cultures as the object instead of being the owner of the gaze".⁵⁵

⁵³ "The Grand Tour", accessed June 13, 2022, https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/grtr/hd_grtr.htm

⁵⁴ "What was the 'Grand Tour?'" , accessed June 13, 2022, <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/petworth-house-and-park/features/what-was-the-grand-tour>

⁵⁵ Reina Lewis, "Kültür Değişimi ve Haz Politikaları", in *Mekânın Poetikası, Mekânın Politikası: Osmanlı İstanbulu ve Britanya Oryantalizmi*, ed. Zeynep İnankur, Reina Lewis, Mary Roberts, (İstanbul: Pera Müzesi Yayını, 2011), 53.

Even it does carry the name of the region, *orientalism* is not belongs to the Orient. Because it is not decoding the original features of the East, but it is a total concept of looking onto the the 'Orient', by the eyes of an outsider's, from the West. Instead of trying to understand and explain what does the East include in its massive lands and who are the people of this region, what motive that have; orientalism builds up biased information about the region and its diverse cultures in an attempt to put Western civilization in a central position. While, like every other nation, Eastern countries have their own unique characteristics, orientalism draws an East with one dimension and ignores the complexity of the region. Either it's the nature of observation or not, the western definition and representation of the East, holds an enormous deal of manipulation and endlessly works for creating the eternal Other of the Christian Western civilization.

1.1.1. Gendered East

Fatmagül Berktaş underlines a crucial correlation which lead people onto an androcentric mentality. According to her, while women correlated with nature, un-touched cosmos itself, men correlated with human 's achievements.⁵⁶ Therefore civilization became the product of men, not people in general. Depending in this context, while human development correlated with men, underdevelopment correlated with women. This gender-based correlation of civilization left its mark in almost everything which is related to humankind, including orientalism.

By the relief that comes from naming the region the Other, European countries found it easier to invade or colonized the Eastern countries. During the late Ottoman era, colonialism was shaping the world politics and lives of millions

⁵⁶ Berktaş, *"The Construction of Woman*, 83-84.

of people. It leads the big part of the world onto a war and change the borders, nations and societies massively.

Together with the Otherness, the concept that linked the civilization to the male order and 'chaotic' nature to the female existence, Western civilization correlate the Eastern culture(s) with a more feminine characteristic which they define as the 'body' of underdevelopment. Because, according to their mentality, "in the evolutionary development of the race women had lagged behind men, much as 'primitive people' lagged behind Europeans."⁵⁷ Thus the East desperately needs both of the West's knowledge and its divine controlling hand over their head. Top of the professionally equipped and emotionally fed orientalist ideology, the countless repetition of representing the whole region and culture(s) as a woman who needs to be tamed by wise white man of the West, all the different parts and cultures of the East imagined as a one dimensional female figure. The next section focuses on how this imagination of the Western gaze influenced the representation of the East in Orientalist paintings.

1.1.2. Masculine Gaze of Orientalism

As it was mentioned earlier, orientalism was and still is strongly effective on paintings. Since the paintings are one of the most common and effective representation mediums, every ideology creates its own images and repeatedly produces them. Throughout the centuries paintings met the new mediums like photography, films and television contents, and because of the endless need to continue to feed up the created representation of the East, the production continued in all those mediums. Even though the mediums and contexts vary a little, the repeated image haven't change: exoticized, eroticized female body.

⁵⁷ Idib: 87.

This gendered correlation between Eastern objects in the paintings and Western painters that have painted those paintings are not built by the power of looking only but also by the majority of works that are portraying women and their way of living in the artistic period of Orientalism. The number of art works that represents imaginary female characters from the East is quite many. "The depiction of women occupies an important place in orientalist iconography. In large part this is due to the cult of the harem and the fantasies related to it, one of the greatest themes in orientalist literature and painting."⁵⁸ The reason those works count as imaginary and fantasied is because harem was a completely private part of the houses thus it is not likely that those works were depending on in-person visits or experiences by the artists. In this context Zeynep Çelik underlines:

This is [Oriental women], of course, one of the particularly loaded themes of Orientalist discourse, imbued with unsubstantiated assumptions, superficial observations, exoticization, eroticization, and flights of fancy. Its strong appeal to large groups of people in the West resulted in particularly rich repertoire that stretched across literature, painting, and photography. Women became the centerpiece of this other world and, in turn, the discourse on Muslim women became an object of passionate rebuttal from both men and women of the 'Orient'.⁵⁹

What Çelik underlines above is decoding the characteristics of not the East's culture itself but the West's. The choice that has been made to represent the East is neither coincidence nor autonomous but intentionally built. "As such, representations of women in 19th century culture cons[titute] a specific discourse

⁵⁸ İnankur, *The World of Ottoman Women*, 91.

⁵⁹ Çelik, *Europe Knows Nothing about the Orient*., 34.

from the viewpoint of a specific agent who retains and exercises power: the white colonialist male."⁶⁰

In a similar attempt to explain the 'white colonialist male's power hunger-ness, Leslie Pierce builds direct correlation between the power hierarchy of masculine domination and tyranny of orientalist approach to paint women:

One of the most fertile periods for the production of texts and images treating this theme was the late sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries, and the most frequent subject the court of the Ottoman sultan. Preoccupied with its own forms of monarchical absolutism, Europe elaborated a myth of oriental tyranny and located its essence in the sultan's harem. Orgiastic sex became a metaphor for power corrupted.⁶¹

The way masculine hegemony defines its power and rights over the female existence, Western civilization defines itself over the East. Moreover it diminishes the East into a single image of *harem* which was not only an uncommon practice but also including pornographic desire. And as Fatmagül Berktaş has put it; "as masculinity became increasingly identified with rationalism and culture, women were regarded as constantly tempting men away from the path of reason and morality."⁶² This hunger of the West's to represent the East through women figures –exotic, waiting to be conquered women figures– brings another level onto the hierarchy. With the orientalist approach, Western culture does not only scorn the East but does this by scorning the female gender and correlating it to the East as a whole.

⁶⁰ Berktaş, *The Construction of Woman*, 86-87.

⁶¹ Leslie Pierce, *The Imperial Harem: Women and Sovereignty in the Ottoman Empire*, (US: Oxford University Press, 1993), 3.

⁶² Berktaş, *The Construction of Woman*, 86.

1.2.3. Harem Iconography

Throughout the all process of 'defining' the East as and through female body, the representation placed in *harem*. The word almost became synonymous with orientalism and Ottoman Empire itself more specifically. But, as many other attempt, this was also a process to diminish the Eastern culture(s) onto a sexist and 'uncivilised' image.

Harem is generally used to refer to the institution which inhabits countless women in the sexual service of the sultan which leads to the "depictions of harem as a place of pleasure and entertainment crowded with odalisques and concubines."⁶³ In an androcentric world, it sounds more powerful to define ownership over countless women for personal entertainment/joy of the sultan. But the truth is the word stands for a few different meanings and none of them is near to be a royal brothel. The word's exact translation from Arabic is protected, sacred and venerable thing or place.⁶⁴ It mostly stands for a section at homes that belongs to women who live in that house. Besides women, only male members of the family are allowed in this section. It is also being used for the wife or the female partners. In another saying it is the private side of a family that created by both a gender-dependend relation between people and an architectural features. In this context, Irvin Cemil Schick underlines the unique situation of the word harem that "denotes both a space and a category of people."⁶⁵

It is a category of people because a member of a *harem*, is either directly related to the male head of the family or at the service of him. Could be his

⁶³ Çelik, *Europe Knows Nothing about the Orient*, 21.

⁶⁴ Abdülkerim Özeydin, Nebi Bozkurt, "Harem" in *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi vol. 16*, (Ankara: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı Yayınları. 1997), 138-152.

⁶⁵ Irvin Cemil Schick, "The Harem as Gendered Space and the Spatial Reproduction of Gender" in *Harem Histories: Envisioning Places and Living Spaces*, ed. Marilyn Booth, (Durham, N.C. and London: Duke University Press, 2010), 69.

mother, wife, daughters and little sons or female staff. Either way her—the member of a harem—communication or relation with other men is limited, according to the social status of the head of the family. And it is a space because where those women live in the house gets to be named as harem too and has its own physical features. For instance, it generally positioned far away from the street and its windows are open to a private yard. It functions as the very heart of the house by being in the centre and being the control point of houseworks. Thus the harem section of the Ottoman palaces were where female members of the sultan's family, young women on the service of sultan in sexual intercourse, women at the general service, sultan's children and, after a turning point, sultan himself live. It was not a royal brothel but a highly functioning private family section. Leslie Peirce underlines harem's holy side in order to show the importance of it in the life of Ottomans:

A harem was a zone in which certain individuals or certain forms of conduct were forbidden—in other words, a kind of sanctuary. In the Ottoman world of the sixteenth century, the most revered spaces were known as harems—the interior of a mosque, the Muslim sacred compound in Jerusalem, and, above all, the two holy cities of Mecca and Medina. That the Ottomans characterized the zone surrounding the sultan as a harem reminds us of how they understood and assessed power—that one moved inward toward it, not upward.⁶⁶

This highly private and unreachable existence of harem created a mysterious aura which leads orientalist writers and artists think, imagine, fantasize and work on it: the unknown life of Ottoman women... As an ultimate object of

⁶⁶ Leslie Peirce, *The Empress of the East: How a European Slave Girl Became Queen of the Ottoman Empire*, (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2017), 137.

masculine desire, female body and within this context, the body of a foreign culture's female members couldn't escaped to be in the spotlight of masculine fantasy.

As it was mentioned in the earlier part, orientalist iconography mostly occupied by depiction of women. This iconography roses from the masculine West and feminine East dichotomy—which also explained above—and creates women figures which are the creation of masculine fantasies. As Wendy Shaw explained;

While orientalist artists embodying malicious images for the East by harem, despots, wild animals, bedouin tribes and slave markets; they also whip upped the desires to take a part within the despotism and lustful places which are despised and isolated by civilized masculine subjects [of the West].⁶⁷

This oppressed desire, found the East as a landscape to be represented in. As Baharoğlu has added; "within the minds of Westerners', the unchanged notions of the East have always been same: excessive sexual desire, tyranny, heresy, habit of neglecting, underdevelopment and inertia."⁶⁸ Also, "presenting Eastern people with the flaws such as greediness, slackness and hypocrisy is framed process to sublimate Western values."⁶⁹ Thus, in a world of androcentrism defines its power and any kind of values over female existence, such notions that has been used to define the East in a bad shape needed to be represented through either directly female body or male oppression over female body. Either way female body and more specifically *harem* and *hamam* (Turkish bath) sceneries became an

⁶⁷ Wendy M. K. Shaw, "Yüce ile Pitoresk Arasında", in *Mekanın Poetikası, Mekanın Politikası: Osmanlı İstanbulu ve Britanya Oryantalizmi*, ed. Zeynep İnankur, Reina Lewis, Mary Roberts, (İstanbul: Pera Müzesi Yayını, 2011), 117.

⁶⁸ Ömer Naharoğlu, "*Oryantalizm, İslam ve Türkler*", (İstanbul: Toker Yayınları, 2006), 77.

⁶⁹ Hilal Erkan, "*Hollywood Sinemasında Oryantalizm*", (İstanbul: Kırmızı Kedi, 2009), 95.

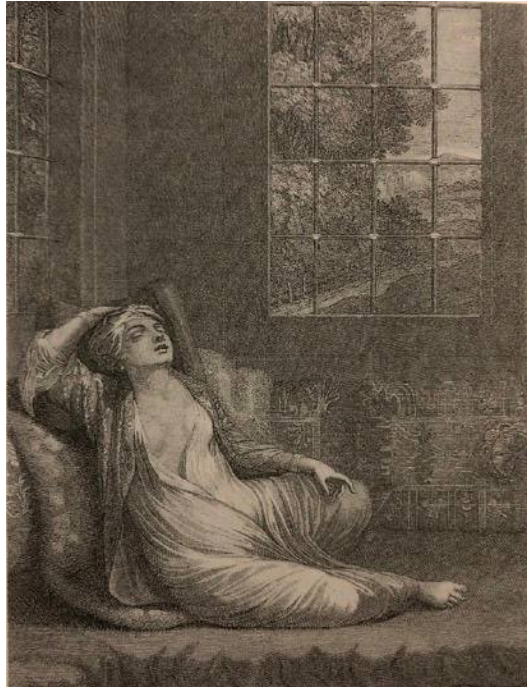
important part of orientalist iconography so the masculine mentalities can feel themselves 'powerful'.

Addition to harem and hamam sceneries there are particular patterns in clothing; face veil, baggy trousers, loose chiffon fabrics. Similar to harem and hamam are real architectural structures, veils, hijabs, baggy trousers were actively used pieces for dressing by big part of the females in the region. What makes them products of male fantasy is the way that they have been used in orientalist iconography. In common use, those pieces were aiming to cover female body without showing the body lines, which is an attempt to 'protect' women from male gaze. But in the harem iconography those pieces take over the role to create mystery and desire, opposite of the first attempt to protect. In other words, a daily piece of clothing turned into a sexual fantasy item within the oriental realm which kneaded by Westerner male fantasy.

Figure 1.1 *The Favourite Sultana*, Etienne Jeaurat, 18th century.



Figure 1.2 *Turkish Woman Resting after her Bath*, J.B. VanMour, 1714.



Naturally the Westerner approach to the Orient cannot be the only one to blame on this systematic sexism and discrimination. There is the whole civilization history behind it. Within the smaller example of the Middle East region, countries and cultures that diminished under the name of the Orient, played their own parts.

Not including women into the social life and work force for centuries, keeping them away from basic human and citizenship rights are on one hand; correlating their existence with chaotic nature, so it would be justified to reshaping their identities and bodies due to use them as walking showcases of a masculine creating process on the other hand, the systematic oppression continued to exist, throughout regions, nations, ideologies and centuries. Depending on the sexism that is inherent in history, cultures and societies; new contents are also

built over this mentality. Thus it still actively effects women's lives around the globe.

Since it's a Eurocentric world that we are living in, western countries' approaches to other cultures, leave their mark on the generic concept of mentalities. In addition to international relations, creative works such as literature, cinema and television, have the marks of this generic concepts on their contents. In other words, how the West sees both itself and rest of the world is quite effective on fictional realms of artistic works. Along with iconographies, the genres are designed based on this Western-based approach. As it underlined throughout this chapter, women's position both in these mentalities and the artistic outcomes is crucial and oppressed. Moreover, while orientalism was following this principle as an approach from the outside, the regional countries of the East are also followed a similar mentality against their own female citizens, from the representation styles to identification models, from oppression to objectify them for masculine desire. Chapter 2 designed to decode depiction of women in particular social approaches that shaped the Republic of Turkey throughout the years, in order to understand the depiction of women in the series of 2010s.

2. NEO-OTTOMANISM AND TURKISH HISTORICAL DRAMAS

2.1. EARLY YEARS OF REPUBLIC

Before hading up to complex characteristics of neo-Ottomanism, I believe it is important to understand the early years of the Republic of Turkey. Since historical connection with the Ottoman past has become a subject to discuss under the republican state, the stages that the country lived through played important roles in the establishment of neo-Ottomanist ideologies.

In a romantic way of saying, when Republic of Turkey has risen from the ashes of Ottoman Empire no one could ever imagine that the agenda of the state would be this loaded. When the republic declared itself as a socially different state from its predecessor, Ottoman Empire, building a new narrative to bring its people together was needed. With the fact that nations are imagined communities⁷⁰ that are bound together by means of a constructed national narrative, republic had gone into its own version of national narrative. Since the group of people, which were aimed to be kept together under this new administration, were under transition from a multinational and multicultural imperial group to a nation-based group; the narration of the past and the envisioned future needed to be changed according to the needs of this new group. In addition to the new national narrative, a radical change, which was defined as modernisation, in the state was aimed by the new republican government.

As an outcome of orientalist ideology, centuries long investment onto the Eurocentric world division and years under colonialism, the West has landed the title of being the good one, the great one, the powerful one; while the East was landing the lower position in every other title. Eventually, economical, social and

⁷⁰ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, (London: Verso, 1983).

political actors get defined through their relations to these two worlds. In this mentality, while westernization correlated with modernization; tradition along with religion and local cultural structures correlated with underdevelopment and archaicness.⁷¹ In a simple mentality that is depending onto this black and white binary, in order to modernise a state one must repeat what the West has done. In other words, westernization shines bright as the only way of modernization in this context.

This understanding of correlating the process of modernization with westernization didn't start with the Republic of Turkey but with the Ottoman Empire in its late era. The attempts such as Imperial Edicts in 1839, the establishment of a parliament in 1856⁷², and reorganization of schools were aiming to keep the state intact by following the steps of westernization. Even though this approach was a way to condense the West into a one-dimensional entity—just the same way the West sees the East—, and putting the bar to reach on this imaginary high level of so-called the West.

In the case of the Republic of Turkey, the leading figures of this change, in other words, founding fathers of the new state, were soldiers who fought in the Independence War. Having founders whose backgrounds are military service is a pattern that is common in the region. As Sancar has underlined; in the countries like Turkey, Egypt and Iran; the process of nationalisation and national independence movements which took place against the colonial Western armies, interlocked to each other. Therefore, military institutions and establishing a modern army became closely linked to the national movements in the pursuit of becoming a nation.⁷³ In other words, military undertake the role of starting a new

⁷¹ Serpil Sancar, *Türk Modernleşmesinin Cinsiyeti: Erkekler Devlet, Kadınlar Aile Kurar*, (İstanbul: İletişim, 2012), 44-45.

⁷² "Tanzimat", *Britannica*, accessed June 13, 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Tanzimat#ref51906>

⁷³ Sancar, *Türk Modernleşmesinin*, 44.

phase of modernization. What was important here is "unlike many third world modernisation projects, the Turkish one did not start in a formally colonial or postcolonial setting. Rather, it was initiated by the Ottoman Empire's elite"⁷⁴. Thus the required knowledge and theoretical discussions on democratic life style were already started decades ago, as it mentioned above.

Since, the westernization has continued to being taken as modernization by the time republic had established, the founding years of Republic of Turkey had passed under military based authority that took the West as a model to shape the social setting in the country. By this so called western style the image that aimed for the society was secular, educated, equal under a democratic administration. Naturally this transition demanded great many changes, starting from a new national narrative. Since educating the nation was the first and most important step on this road to change, republican regime, along with educating men from every social classes, started to educate women. Including women onto social life, equip them with political rights, re-imaged the nation and created a different representation for the republic. In other words, the republic used women as the window of the new regime and reshaped them according to the new secular ideology.

2.1.1. Gender of Republican National Narrative

The first generation of the Republic was landed a huge amount of duty to establish a Turkey that is a part of 'Western world' and women of this particular generation were handed greater role to both establish and represent this utopian Turkey. Since orientalism rests its power by representing the East through 'underdeveloped' female figures, during the process of declining the representations of orientalism, using women had seen as a reasonable

⁷⁴ Esra Özyürek, *Nostalgia for the Modern*, (London: Duke University, 2006), 12.

counterattack. The first generation of the republic's duty was providing this transition from to be known through the orientalist iconography to be known through a westernized image.

This first generation had been targeted to be educated according to the new narrative, by the republican state. In such relation, the state taken the fatherly position for itself and defined the generation as the precious children of the republic. Esra Özyürek defines this first generation as life-time 'children' of the republic who could never grow old since the dream haven't been fulfilled.⁷⁵ She also adds the emotional motive which lays under this label, after several interviews with the first generation of republic; "this name refers to their association with the mythologized early Turkish Republic, itself as a child of the country's founding father."⁷⁶

This first generation had also inherited the role of being teachers for the next generations. This role was so important that they entitled as the 'soldiers of the education army' who would fight against ignorance. "Most important, the new generation of teachers would embody the principles of the new state, which educated, disciplined, and watched over its citizens." Moreover, as being the daughters of the republic, women of this educator generation were, as Özyürek has put out, "simultaneously the most prevalent objects and subjects of the Republican reforms."⁷⁷ Therefore the responsibility that given to them was "both talking about the new nation and also publicly representing its latest body"⁷⁸ within their personalities and in their image.

⁷⁵ Idib: 32.

⁷⁶ Idib: 32.

⁷⁷ Idib: 34.

⁷⁸ Idib: 34.

Whether they were teachers or not, Turkish revolution build itself over female image since the founding elites declared the main differences between the empire past and republican now as making women visible in social life. Taking this act of 'making women visible' as the starting point, Republic of Turkey enforced a group of reforms that regarded women as the backbone of the nation. However, more importantly, women were perceived as the mothers of the next generations, in other words, the creators of the up-coming citizens, who would hopefully become dutiful children of the state. Şükrü Sim and Semih Göncü cite from Mustafa İri's unpublished thesis and highlight the early years of the republic as the period of motherhood, which had declared as the primary duty of women in order to include women to the process of development.⁷⁹ In other words, Turkish women handed a duty to bring healthy human beings into the world and then transform those human beings into perfect citizens in the eyes of the republican state. This way women would simultaneously take a serious part in the development of the nation while continuing to perform the eternal role of being mother.

Since the role of women was being showcase of this about-to-rose modern nation, being a good mother was not enough. They should continue to display the republican image to their children even inside the house. So along with feminine jobs had shaped for women also a generic outlook had been created. The clothing pieces like abaya, headscarf, niqab forbidden from social life. Esra Özyürek writes how elderly Republicans insisted that "there wore no religious people around and women did not veil", the few ones who veiled "would even wear shorts during the gymnastic demonstration" during her interviews.⁸⁰ In these interviews one can see that for the ones who lived through the process of creating the new national

⁷⁹ Şükrü Sim and Semih Göncü, "Türk Sinemasında Öğretmen Temsilinin İncelenmesi: Vurun Kahpeye ve Sürgün Filmlerinin Karşılaştırmalı Analizi", in *Televizyon Dizilerinin Keşfi: İçerik, Anlam ve İşlevleri*, ed. Yenal Göksun, (İstanbul: Kaktüs, 2018), 201.

⁸⁰ Özyürek, *Nostalgia*, 50.

narrative for republican state, the ideology exists within the image. Thus how women dress is almost synonymous with their emotional and ideological relation with the state.

To conclude this part, comparing to the past, it is true that the position of women had changed by "the adoption of the Turkish Civil Code in 1926."⁸¹ This was a radical change to equip women with social rights. But the bolder attempt was enfranchisement of them. Deniz Kandiyoti underlines that "these rights were not obtained through the activities of women's movements, as in the case of Western women's struggle for suffrage, but were granted by an enlighten governing elite committed to the goals of modernisation and Westernization."⁸² Even though, with such a comment, Kandiyoti washes away the efforts of names like Nezihe Muhiddin, Şükufe Nihal and many more, for the political rights of women which started back in late Ottoman era, she is right about that the women rights are "given" by men and more importantly shaped by men. It made possible a new narrative where "Turkey presented itself as a country electing women to its parliament and thereby symbolically claimed its rightful place among other Western democratic nations."⁸³ In other words the new position of women changed the total image of the state.

Even though it looks like a perfect luck and opportunity to be equipped those rights by the state without a nation-level women movement, it is important to keep in mind that neither women arisen from the mud by the divine hands of the republic nor they collectively had chosen to be the symbols of westernization and democratization through their personalities and bodies. What happened was that women of all classes, but especially middle and lower classes, spent most of

⁸¹ Deniz Kandiyoti, "Emancipated but Unliberated? Reflections on the Turkish Case." *Feminist Studies* 13, no. 2 (1987): 320. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3177804>

⁸² Idib: 320.

⁸³ Idib: 321.

their lives by being secluded from the life outside home, deprived of formal education and common rights under the reign of the Ottoman Empire. When the republic is established the same women dressed up and memorized the rule book of this 'modern' new state. Even though the ways were changed, the core of oppression stayed unchanged: women were declared as the creators of a nation but they were not included in the decision making processes. They were pushed to follow the guidelines which were created by the men of the state.

2.1.2. Republican Years and Beyond

The republican history has its ups and downs as any other country. Until the turn of the millennium the country has seen two official military coups—1960 and 1980—, one military memorandum—1971—, one 'post-modern' coup in 1997, countless rallies, student and labor movements, endless years under the martial law. 1980 coup seemed like ended movements in the streets with a quite bloody way. Even though streets were calmer compared to 1970s after the coup, 1980s and 1990s were still staging horrific occasions.

1990s also witnessed the empowerment of what has been suppressed for decades; far right Islamist movements. After the uninterrupted governance of ANAP (Motherland Party) from 1983 to 1991, the era of coalitions and re-elections have started. When the coalition government between Tansu Çiller—center right—and Deniz Baykal—center left—lead the government into a chaos, an early election took place in December 24th, 1995. Refah Partisi (Welfare Party) entered to parliament as the first party. "Although the RP received the highest number of votes in the elections, it could not obtain the majority to form the government on its own."⁸⁴ Thus RP leader Necmettin Erbakan tried to form a

⁸⁴ Meral Öztoprak, "A Critical View on the Idea of Rising of Conservatism in University Graduates in Turkey" in *Contemporary Research in Economics and Social Sciences* 3, No. 2, (2019), 250.

coalition government for the next two months. Since Erbakan failed, "ANAP formed a coalition with Doğru Yol Partisi (True Path Party) and "after this coalition broke, DYP formed the 54th Government with RP in the prime minister of Necmettin Erbakan."⁸⁵

After only eight months, "statements and actions with Islamic content made by leading figures and municipal mayors of the party, as well as increasing concerns for secularism, led the country to the February 28 military intervention"⁸⁶ and the Erbakan government resigned in 30 June 1997. New coalition formed by Mesut Yılmaz governed until 25 November 1998, which is the longest coalition government of Turkish history. After Yılmaz's resignation⁸⁷, Bülent Ecevit form a government, in 11 January 1999 until the next election, 18 May 1999.

During the political turmoil that the decade has seen, people were suffering from this instability in politics and economy. Turkish politics were mostly shaped by the right-wing voters until 1990s already but "what makes this period different from previous periods is that 'Islamic/conservative' right-wing politics starts to take the place of 'traditionalist liberal' center-right."⁸⁸ 1990s were the period that the conservatism turning into political Islamist movement.

Same decade was also marking the 75th anniversary of the republic—1998—and the two sides of the society—seculars and islamists—were filled with their own nostalgic feelings to the past. While seculars—mostly called Kemalists, after Mustafa Kemal—commemorate early republican years—1930s—as the period the country is going forward fastly and adapting a secular way of living; islamist were

⁸⁵ Idib: 250.

⁸⁶ Idib: 251.

⁸⁷ "ANASOL-D Bitti", *Hürriyet*, 26 November 1998, <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/anasol-d-bitti-39049638>

⁸⁸ Öztoprak, *A Critical View*, 251.

reminding the religious side of those early years. Özyürek reminds the front pages of two newspapers; one showing Mustafa Kemal in a ball room with ladies in dresses and men in suits, other was showing Mustafa Kemal on the opening of the parliament, standing side by side with a hodja and praying for a good future for his nation.⁸⁹ After years of Republican version of the past now there were a new path to use different representatives for the same past.

Along with the on-going polarization between political sides in the capital, the polarization between women of two sides were climbing through their image in the streets all around the country. Women who prefer to wear hijabs and headscarfs were making themselves visible in the social life after years of republican oppression, they were also becoming the showcases of the re-powering rightist ideology. While they were fighting for regaining the social status that they lost because of the westernized image of the republic, they were also searching the past of their own.

In this context, White points out the 1980s and 1990s as the years of emotional change within the public. She says that "While Atatürk attempted to isolate the Republic from its Ottoman past, the 1980s and 1990s saw a widespread nostalgia for things Ottoman."⁹⁰ This nostalgia, as a version of reminding the past led both the social discourse and political discourse onto the search. And the realization of even though there might be one past, one history, there are countless different versions of it depending on what the teller aim to tell, came along. The way of reminding the past and telling it in order to defend an idea today is the way to legitimate an ideology. What has started to happening in the 1990s is to tell the republican history from the perspective of the ones who suppressed for their religious way of living for decades. Talking over the same historical background

⁸⁹ Özyürek, *Nostalgia*, 151-152.

⁹⁰ Jenny B. White, *Islamist Mobilization in Turkey : A Study in Vernacular Politics*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002), 30.

but building up different structures from it is not unique for the Turkish example, but the way Neo-Ottomanism finds itself a way to the daylight as a complex process that changes the social and political scenery rapidly, is one of the great examples.

2.2. NEO-OTTOMANISM

When AKP (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi or Justice and Development Party) has elected in 2002, no one could imagine their reign would be this long, maybe including themselves. Having the same administration for almost twenty years now, without any major changes, has created its own era and eventually its very own culture with its newly established figures. One of the strongest characteristics of this culture that shaped the era is *neo-Ottomanism (Yeni Osmanlılık)*.

This term became part of Turkish citizens' daily life as well as politics, especially in the last decade. Nagehan Tokdoğan explains the term in its basic level as it is a story that has been established as a tool to knowing the world, understand it and make interpretation about it, creating social and political identities accordingly, and also it is a political narrative where people and collectivities position themselves in it.⁹¹ It is a relation that is constantly being rebuilt with the Ottoman past. Over the years the emotional investment into this term both by governments and by the public grew bigger, and it became one of the most effective templates in arts and daily life in Turkey in the last years.

As it mentioned earlier, in its early years The Republic of Turkey tried to cut off its ties with the Ottoman past of the state. By this aim, the differences between the two states were underlined. Even though almost every administration shaped their own relation with Ottoman past, current AKP administration

⁹¹ Nagehan Tokdoğan, *Yeni Osmanlılık: Hınç, Nostalji, Narsisizm*, (İstanbul: İletişim, 2018), 15.

established a bold connection between the historical heritage of Ottoman Empire. Instead of underlining the differences between empire past and republican now, like earlier administrations, similarities between these two different types of states are enforced by governmental agencies. Therefore the nostalgic concept of neo-Ottomanism became a daily subject for the public, and a strong influence for popular culture products.

Looking back to the Ottoman past holds the feeling of nostalgia before anything else. Even though the term nostalgia originally used for Swiss soldiers who were suffering homesickness in seventeenth century, the term "is now a widespread feeling shared by millions of people at the margins of the Western world."⁹² It is longing for the bygone days in a way and mostly used for reminding the glorified past. In the political context, as Esra Özyürek puts out, "nostalgia [...] turns objects, relations, and concepts into commodities and transforms political expression by converting it to an issue of personal interest."⁹³ By turning a political subject into a personal interest, it becomes easier to give people a motive, a movement to follow up. According to Özyürek, The Republic of Turkey—along with many other examples around the world—relies on the collective nostalgic feelings for the different periods of the republic and the sultanate. For example, as Josh Carney cited from Nora Fisher Onar, there are "six different representations of the Ottoman past in accordance with various political groups in Turkey."⁹⁴ This variety on the stories that are belong to different periods of the past give different groups of people the nostalgic images that they need for their own narratives. And "nostalgia, in this context, becomes a convenient desire that can transform public concepts such as the national past or identity into personalized commodities."⁹⁵ In

⁹² Özyürek, *Nostalgia for the Modern*, 8.

⁹³ *Idib*: 8.

⁹⁴ Josh Carney, "Re-creating history and recreating publics: the success and failure of recent Ottoman costume dramas in Turkish media," in *European Journal of Turkish Studies*, 19 (2014): 95.

⁹⁵ Özyürek, *Nostalgia*: 9.

other words, nostalgia is a concept that gets established according to the politics, moreover it "is a political ideology, as well as a discursive and a sentimental condition."⁹⁶

The political output of neo-Ottomanism is quite complex and transformative for society and also its bold effect on the cultural products is quite visible. Nicholas Tromans underlines that popularity of collecting orientalist paintings among the elite classes of Middle Eastern countries starting from late 1980s was signalling both the feeling of nostalgia and the acceptance of the outsiders' look onto themselves. He offers; Arabic collectors value the European [orientalist] paintings because those paintings are reminding to them what is lost now; culture, architecture and sceneries.⁹⁷ What should not to be forgotten here is that those paintings are not the representations of a 'real' past of the East but an imagined Western version of it. In other words, there is a shift in the imagination of the past in the Middle East. Instead of imagining the past based on local knowledge people started to identify with the fantasized images from the Orientalist paintings. Thus neo-Ottomanism is not as simple as missing once-a-magnificent empire only, rather it's a politically established nostalgia to fantasized images of Ottoman past. Within the decades those images had changed according to the changes on the neo-Ottomanist mood.

Within the recent neo-Ottomanist context, what mostly underlined about Ottoman Empire, from today's nostalgic perspective is the imagination of "[...] multicultural, pious, just, and harmonious cradle of civilization."⁹⁸ The empire, in its bright days, was a quite big state. Its borders were including big parts of

⁹⁶ Idib: 19.

⁹⁷ Nicholas Tromans, "Eve Götürmek? Oryantalist Resim ve Sanat Pazarı", in *Mekanın Poetikası, Mekanın Politikası: Osmanlı İstanbulu ve Britanya Oryantalizmi*, ed. Zeynep İnankur, Reina Lewis, Mary Roberts, (İstanbul: Pera Müzesi Yayınları, 2011), 68.

⁹⁸ Murat Ergin and Yağmur Karakaya, "Between neo-Ottomanism and Ottomania: navigating state-led and popular cultural representations of the past" in *New Perspectives on Turkey*, no. 56 (2017): 37.

Eastern Europe, Near East and Northern Africa. As an inevitable result of being a state that geographically sits in Europe, Asia and Africa, it housed for a very cosmopolite public, especially in some regions like Anatolia and Balkans. It was an empire of central administration and people from many different nations was living under it.

It was an empire that was 'proudly' defining itself as the home for seventy-two and a half nations—ethnicity of Gypsy counts as a half nation in this official context. But from a more critical perspective, the pride that comes from being a multicultural empire is a very new discourse compared to the long centuries of the Ottoman Empire. It is rather a nostalgic product of neo-Ottomanism which only repaints the nineteenth century Istanbul and some other parts of the empire. On subject matter, Amy Mills underlines that "the Ottoman legacy has become a catchall geographic imaginary produced locally: leftists, human rights activists, secularists, and intellectuals, as well as Islamist politicians and conservative, nationalist policy makers, invoke Ottoman multi-ethnic tolerance as they engage in local identity politics."⁹⁹

Since neo-Ottomanist nostalgia is a product of today's world, its discourses are using today's terminology. This nostalgia draws an empire where all the nations—ethnic groups of the empire—were living under harmony. In this context, it is important to keep in mind how Anthony Smith defines nation; "[it's] a product of nationalism" and "an expression of modernity's need for 'high cultures.'"¹⁰⁰ This is also what neo-Ottomanist nostalgic proposal needs: a social harmony between different groups of people which is created by the state's high culture. Therefore the daily foreign politics, which relies on neo-Ottomanism,

⁹⁹ Amy Mills, "The Ottoman Legacy: urban geographies, national imaginaries, and global discourses of tolerance", in *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, Vol. 31, 1 (2011):193.

¹⁰⁰ Anthony Smith, "Images of the Nation: Cinema, Art and National Identity", in *Cinema and Nation*, ed. Mette Hjort, Scott MacKenzie, (London: Routledge, 2000), 42

could justify itself for a united Middle East region rule by Turkish governments. In this attempt, "the shared Ottoman past is seen as being instrumental in Turkey's effective presence in the Middle East, North Africa and the Balkans."¹⁰¹

As it was mentioned, the perfect harmony of Ottoman Empire is a modern imagination. But if there was a period of harmony, Öncü suggests that the opening of new European style hotels and cafes and many other common places can be read as the early steps into the idea of this harmony, since these places "allowed the upper crust of Ottoman elite to intermingle with the city's native and foreign bourgeoisie."¹⁰² This intermingling mostly started when Ottoman elite raced up to catch European countries both in social and political life in the nineteenth century and it was the capital Istanbul who celebrated foreign intellectuals and local non-Muslim intellectuals. As Çağlar Keyder suggests, "this was a time and place when cosmopolitanism could be born"¹⁰³ in the social setting, but until then the public and political discourse was more about tolerating non-Muslims. Yet political output of neo-Ottomanism mostly offers Ottoman Empire as the divine example of being a state that established the balance and harmony between the various groups of people, and it was the European states that damaged this union. In other words, unlike the early republican offer to define Turkey as westernized us; in today's politics neo-Ottomanism is being used to support Easterner us against to Westerner them.

The political conjuncture that uses neo-Ottomanist nostalgic feelings is the subject of another study. Since this study designed to focus on visual characteristics of Ottoman-themed historical dramas in Turkish television, instead of digging the political side of neo-Ottomanism, I would like to move onto the

¹⁰¹ Burak Özçetin, "'The show of the people' against the cultural elites: Populism, media and popular culture in Turkey," in *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 2019, Vol. 22, 5-6 (2019): 946

¹⁰² Öncü, *The politics of Istanbul's Ottoman heritage*, 239.

¹⁰³ Çağlar Keyder, "The Setting", in *Istanbul: Between the Local and the Global*, ed. Çağlar Keyder, (Lanham, Md. : Rowman & Littlefield, 1999), 35.

effect of neo-Ottomanism in popular culture products, more specifically television series.

2.2.1. Ottomania

Like many other social concepts, neo-Ottomanism also gets its power by being highly visible in everyday life as well as public and political discourses. Since "neo-Ottomanism as a political project aimed at reviving the Ottoman past in a variety of domains," *Ottomania* is "this project's [neo-Ottomanism] counterpart in popular culture."¹⁰⁴ By turning the Ottoman past into a subject of everyday television or literature and daily products, neo-Ottoman ideology builds itself a very effective marketing that keeps it alive in every possible moment.

Murat Ergin and Yağmur Karakaya remind how *Ottomania* works successfully for neo-Ottomanism in cultural products. They offer that "the increasing interest in the Ottoman past can be analyzed through two separate, yet interrelated, analytical categories: neo-Ottomanism, and Ottomania."¹⁰⁵ While neo-Ottomanism stands for AKP's political agenda for being the regional power, "[...] Ottomania embraces popular culture with an emphasis on consumption of a wide spectrum of products, from bath packages to television series."¹⁰⁶ It is more about marketing the neo-Ottomanist ideology and creating a brand.

The Ottoman images which are chosen to represent this ideology throughout the marketing process are constructed according to the contemporary political imagination. Similar to orientalism's creation of its own reality by the selective features of the East, neo-Ottomanism, through Ottomania, creates its own images by the selected and distorted features of the Ottoman Empire.

¹⁰⁴ Ergin and Karakaya, *Between neo-Ottomanism and Ottomania*, 34.

¹⁰⁵ Idib: 36.

¹⁰⁶ Idib: 36.

This endless attempt to (re)create 'the Ottoman image' is not new. In the past, during late Ottoman era, the streets of old Istanbul were full of photography studios where tourists from Western countries could wear 'oriental Ottoman clothes' and recreate the image that they have seen in their museums. In such a way to mimic this experience, the same streets house photography studios where one can dress as Hürrem Sultan, Kanuni Sultan Süleyman or Abdülhamid II and many other historical figures today. This time, rather than serving to the Westerners in the search for oriental representations, they also serve others who lived under the Ottoman rule for centuries and gain their freedom from it but now building their own nostalgia to their 'shared-past' by the popularity of Ottoman-related contents. Along with tourists, those studios are serving to local people who look for embracing the long lost past in the shape that is created for them by the political climate. In other words, either it is marketing for the outsiders or fully new branding for the local and regional people, same process is being used for establishing the visibility of the ideology.

Figure 2.1. Members of the Oriental Travel Club from Leipzig during their trip to İstanbul, anonymous, 1906, Pierre de Gigord Collection



Figure 2.2. Ottoman-themed photograph studio in İstanbul, c.2019



Since "neo-Ottomanism is also instrumental in popularizing a new political identity at home"¹⁰⁷ and "media and popular culture are influential 'tools' and milieus by and in which populist ideas and themes are generated, promoted and propagated"¹⁰⁸, as Özçetin underlined, then the rise in the number of Ottoman-themed television series is no surprise.

2.3. OTTOMAN-THEMED TELEVISION SERIES IN EARLIER YEARS

Ottomania softens the complex ideological side of neo-Ottomanism and "pertains to the cultural aspects of the fascination with the Ottoman past."¹⁰⁹ By depending on the endless possibilities of the realm of television series to create this 'fascination', Ottoman past finds itself at the centre of the countless stories that occupy the screen.

One can easily tell by looking at the television series throughout the years of AKP governance, that Ottoman Empire has been on the screen in many shapes, changing from the depiction of the dynastic family to the no-name people in

¹⁰⁷ Özçetin, *The show of the people'*, 946-7.

¹⁰⁸ Idib: 952.

¹⁰⁹ Ergin and Karakaya, *Between neo-Ottomanism and Ottomania*, 40.

Ottoman cities and villages together with their daily surroundings. Many different groups of people, from different time periods and regions occupied the screen. *Esir Şehrin İnsanları* (2003-2003), *Elveda Rumeli* (2007-2009), *Bıçak Sırtı* (2007-2008), *Deli Saraylı* (2010-2010), *Ustura Kemal* (2012-2012) *Çalığışu* (2013-2014), *Osmanlı Tokadı* (2013-2014), *Filinta* (2014-2016), *Yunus Emre:Aşkın Yolculuğu* (2015-2016) can be count for Ottoman series that are telling the non-dynastic stories of the past.

Of course it wasn't only under AKP administration that Turkish television broadcast Ottoman contents. As it mentioned above, every administration had its own version of connection with Ottoman past. As it was mentioned above, during the 1970s and the 1980s TRT produced many costume-dramas that focus on the Ottoman past. They were either historical novels adaptations, such as *Çalışkuşu* (1986) and *Kuruluş Osmancık* (1988), or were play adaptations, like *IV Murat* (1981). Yet they were following up BBC traditions on the genre and telling the stories that belong to 'older and safer times of the Ottoman glory'. But it was under the AKP administration that the number of those television contents increased enormously and started to be known by their own sub-genre as Ottoman-themed historical dramas. Moreover, it was Erdoğan himself who suggested that –some of– those series are as valuable as history lessons,¹¹⁰ which was the discourse that blurred the line between the historical reality and historical fiction. Therefore Ottoman-themed series that are produced under the AKP administration are standing apart from the earlier examples.

Examples from this peak period will be analyzed detailedly in chapter 3. But before that, I would like to explain the examples if the earlier periods. Beginning from the millennium, Ottoman-themed television series have offered a

¹¹⁰ "Cumhurbaşkanı Recep Tayyip Erdoğan: Tarihi bilmek için Payitaht Abdülhamid'i izleyin", *TRT Haber*; December 31, 2017, <https://www.trthaber.com/haber/gundem/cumhurbaskani-recep-tayyip-erdogan-tarihi-bilmek-icin-payitaht-abdulhamidi-izleyin-345026.html>

wide range of stories and produced in various genres. *Esir Şehrin İnsanları* and *Deli Saraylı* were focusing on people of İstanbul, under the foreign occupation right after the First World War. *Ustura Kemal* and *Filinta* were detective stories that took place in the Ottoman capital. While *Yunus Emre:Aşkın Yolculuğu* was about the famous minstrel Yunus Emre from the Ottoman classical age, *Çalikuşu* was a novel adaptation from the late Ottoman period. As an alternative to Ottoman İstanbul and Anatolia, *Elveda Rumeli* told the story of conflicts and final eviction of the Turkish people in Macedonia between the years 1896 and 1907. *Osmanlı Tokadı* was a comedy that the characters were stumbling between the traditions of the Ottoman past and modern Turkey. While all the Ottoman television series were taking the Ottoman Empire as their setting, *Bıçak Sırtı* comes out as a modern story of Osmanoğlu family, who are the descendants of once-a-ruling-family.

Even though early and late 2000s have witnessed daily lives of Ottoman public or the final years of the empire as well as some sultanate stories, such as *Hürrem Sultan* (2003); the last decade was the time of powerful *padisahs* and sultans for sure. Ottoman television series that occupied television screen in the 2010s were the stories of early years of the state as a promising leader figure in the region, competent emperors and their heroic wins over foreign countries and women—naturally. The story of powerful, invincible fighter and also a just ruler persona have been told by many series from various genres. In those stories, the masculinity of rulers and together with him, masculinity of state itself polished constantly and more boldly in every other year. By the time the decade comes to an end, almost every national channel had its own Ottoman-themed series one way or another. The representation of unreachable masculinity in those series has reached to a quite serious level.

There are a few common actions that the productions are taking while turning the Ottoman heritage into a story in contemporary television. These TV series create a storyline between a fairy-tale and a superhero narrative, underlining Muslim Turkish people's extreme sagacity against the eyes which see them lower, putting masculinity upfront, and most visibly, changing the image of female members of Ottoman dynasty and Turkish people of the empire. In addition to those steps, iconographies of the older mentalities like orientalism are commonly used.

Based on the discussion in this chapter, it can be said that women's image is the first thing to be affected by the systematical changes in the society. Either it's the 'modern' narrative of the state or the more conservative one, it is women's image that put under construction. Starting from the very first steps of westernization attempts of the state; how women dress, how they behave, what responsibilities they should take became the topic of masculine-driven politics of the Republic of Turkey. By taking inspiration from this approach, every new movements tend to construct its own version of women's image. Along with many other tools, television series contribute to establishing these new images. Therefore along with the changing relations with the Ottoman past, the image of Ottoman women has changed in Turkish television series. In the next chapter, the study is going to focus on three Ottoman-themed television series from 2010s, in order to analyse how the depiction of Ottoman women changed.

3. DEPICTION OF WOMEN IN OTTOMAN-THEMED TELEVISION

SERIES OF 2010s

Even though beginning of neo-Ottomanism and Ottomania is around early 1980s, 2010s is the decade that it became one of the strong characteristics of the daily life of both the Turkish people and people of the region. As mentioned earlier, this decade has seen three general elections, one re-election, and one of the biggest protests of the country's history, Gezi Park Protests, along with AKP's fourth election victory. Since the official discourse of the party underlines the bold connection with the Ottoman Empire and glorifies the Ottoman past, after the fourth win, this discourse became more visible and effective. Thus television contents got affected by this strong discourse too and Ottoman-themed historical dramas became a sub-genre of Turkish television.

While the first half of the decade were staging to variety of series that fed by oriental iconography and western based approaches to the Ottoman past, second half staged to more masculine and glorified Ottoman past which shaped by daily neo-Ottomanist ideology. *Diriliş Ertuğrul* (2014-2019, TRT), *Kuruluş: Osman* (2019-..., ATV), *Barbaroslar: Akdeniz'in Kılıcı* (2021-..., TRT), can be named as examples here. Even though TRT is the leading name in the list of channels that broadcast such version of Ottoman-themed series, there are other channels such as ATV.

Since the governmental relation with the Ottoman past changed throughout this decade, the nature of historical dramas also changed accordingly. In order to analyze the change within the iconography in Ottoman-themed Turkish television series, three shows have been chosen as case study of this dissertation: *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* (2011-2014), *Muhteşem Yüzyıl: Kösem* (2015-2017) and *Payitaht: Abdülhamid* (2017-2021).

During the two and a half year long study, I've watched every episodes of four seasons of *Muhteşem Yüzyıl*, two seasons of *Muhteşem Yüzyıl: Kösem* and the first three seasons of *Payitaht Abdülhamid*. From this, 9 seasons-long visual content, fifteen episodes are chosen, as five episodes from each show, to analyze the iconography. Since the study focuses on depiction of women, female characters are chosen according to their influence on the storyline. Five characters from each show, and five episodes to cover both those characters and the genre conventions from each show are chosen to analyze.

The female characters in these series are categorized in different groups in an attempt to make the analysis easy to follow. The groups are divided according to the relation of the female characters to the sultan himself. This way, the study aims to explain not only the depiction of singular personas but the generic way of representing the women depending on their positions in the hierarchy of the harem.

3.1. ORIENTALIST REPRESENTATION OF SULTANS: *MUHTEŞEM YÜZYIL*

When TİMS Production cracked out the news that a big-budget TV series about the tenth sultan of Ottoman Empire, Kanuni Sultan Süleyman and his reign is under production, the news became a hot topic for not only the audience but also for many different ideological sides. *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* (The Magnificent Century) has marked the starting point of an un-interrupted era of Ottoman television series and caused countless discussions both in local and in international circles.

Muhteşem Yüzyıl was the highest budget TV series in Turkish television by the time¹¹¹ and "although the historical accuracy of the series is fiercely debated, the show has succeeded in constructing a coherent, stylized fictional world on screen."¹¹² As a soap opera that unfolds during the sixteenth century of Ottoman Empire, *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* served its audience all the features of the genre; "love triumphing over adversity, moral ambiguities, intrigue, scandals, plots and power struggles, melodramatic tensions of infidelity, betrayal, and lies."¹¹³ Dan Bilefsky defined the series as "a sort of 'Sex in the City' set during the 46-year reign of Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent"¹¹⁴, which the definition clearly referred to how easily *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* has been recognised through its repetition of well-known genre conventions and its orientalist iconography that is quite familiar for the Western audience.

Along with its historical drama and soap-opera hybrid genre characteristics, the detailed work that had been put on for the series can be count as another reason for its success. The production features about 70 recurring characters—and huge part of them portrayed by famous actors—while the number of extras reached out thousands. In addition to the enormous cast and crew, "the set is comprised of 6,000m² of interior space and 4,500m² of exterior space."¹¹⁵ This investment onto the production process, as Tüzün and Şen underlined, "reconstructs the ostentatious wealth of the period in each scene of the program, but also creates a spectacle that brings a glorified past into the present."¹¹⁶

¹¹¹ Selin Tüzün and Aygün Şen, "The Past as a Spectacle" in *Handbook of Research on the Impact of Culture and Society on the Entertainment Industry*, ed. Gülay Öztürk, (USA: IGI Global, 2014), 182.

¹¹² Idib: 185.

¹¹³ Esra Doğramacı, "A Revisionist Turkish Identity: Power, Religion and Ethnicity as Ottoman Identity in the Turkish series *Muhteşem Yüzyıl*", (MSc thesis, London School of Economics, 2014), 7.

¹¹⁴ Dan Bilefsky, "As If the Ottoman Period Never Ended", accessed June 13, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/10/30/movies/in-turkey-ottoman-nostalgia-returns.html>

¹¹⁵ Marc Guillet, " 'Ottomania' is becoming omnipresent in Turkey", *DISBOOK The West Asia 2*, 2013, 48.

¹¹⁶ Tüzün and Aygün Şen, *The Past as a Spectacle*, 185.

The 'glorified past' that the series has chosen to settle in is matching with the an important point that underlined in this dissertation's earlier chapters: picking up classical era of Ottoman Empire to talk over, is the part of westernization framing of the early Republican narrative. When the Republic of Turkey tried to cut off its historical and cultural ties with the Ottoman Empire, it was not the whole of the imperial past. It was the problematic final decades which lead the empire into a chaotic environment. The eras such as early and classical ages, that are giving the Republic a base to claim their rights on Anatolia and Balkans stayed accepted within the national narrative. In her study over the exhibiting the oriental paintings in the so-called-oriental countries, Reina Lewis reminds the ice-thin line between the naive nostalgia and planned contents that represent the past in a particular way to feed up political sides:

The majority of the popular culture elements contributed to the past so far have expanded the framework beyond the scope of the republic's historiography project that focuses on the older and safer times of the Ottoman glory (especially beyond Suleyman's 'glory' in the 16th century).¹¹⁷

In this 'republican' based context, picking up Kanuni Sultan Süleyman to make a television series about was an understandable choice, since he was both representing the older and safer times of Ottoman past—sixteenth century—and also the reign that made the empire to reached the far western point of its lands. Either way, Süleyman supports the version of history that the Republic had chosen to teach.

As explained in the earlier parts, westernization ideology that the Republic has pumped, was leaning onto the binary of the old ways and the new ways; old

¹¹⁷ Lewis, *Kültür Değişimi*, 57.

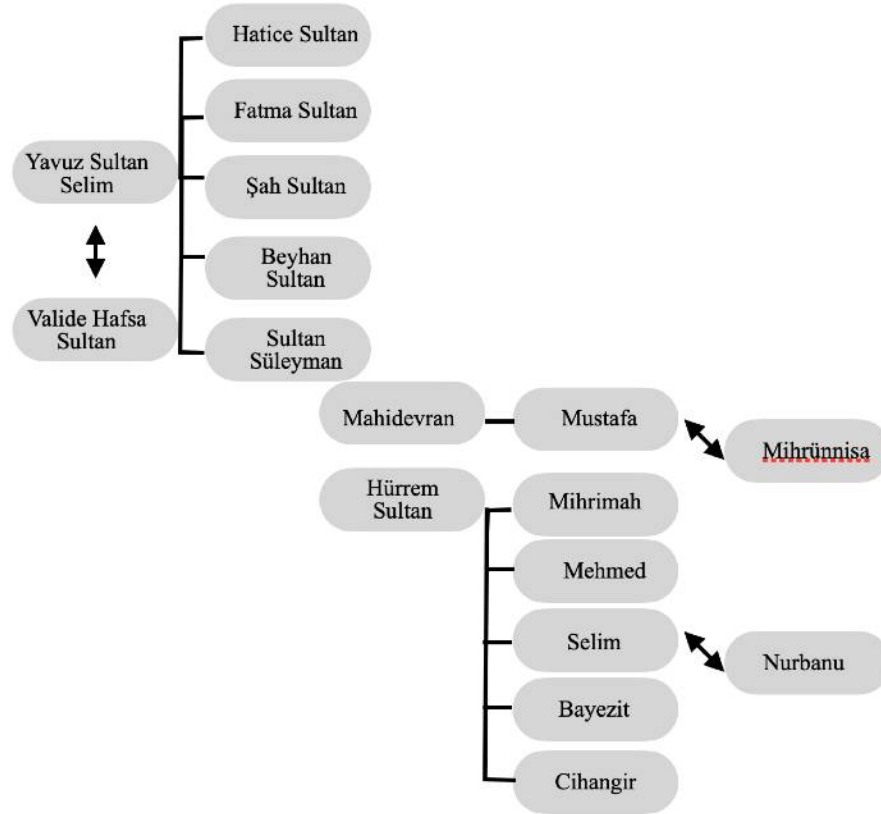
was being represented by the Ottoman past and the new by the newly established republic. National narrative and the formal history as it is told in history books followed up this discourse for decades. Creating an Ottoman image that is recreating the orientalist pictures and gravures while also pressing onto almost every key of orientalist ideology throughout the series is not only serving for the early republican envisagement of the Ottoman past which had to be left behind in order to be westernized but also building a familiar image for the Western audience who are still holding onto their orientalist knowledge about the region. In other words, the show does tell its story by using female body and feminine image, just like orientalist iconography and republican imagery of the Ottoman past.

As it was mentioned above, in order to analyse the iconography of the shows, four female character from each series have been chosen. In the case of *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* those characters are: Hürrem Sultan, Fatma Sultan, Firuze Hatun and Nurbanu Sultan. To prevent the complications about the characters, a chart to show the relation between the characters and Sultan Süleyman, added below, along with a family tree.

Table. 3.1. Characters' Relation Chart.

Mother	Sisters	Favourites	Daughter(s)
Valide Hafsa Sultan	Hatice Sultan	Hürrem Sultan	Mihrimah Sultan
	Fatma Sultan	Mahidevran Sultan	
	Şah Sultan	Firuze	
	Beyhan Sultan	Mihrünnisa Sultan	
		Nurbanu Sultan	

Table. 3.2. Family Tree.



3.1.1. *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* and Orientalism

Even though 'magnificent century' refers to the almost half-a-century-long reign of Süleyman, *Muhteşem Yüzyıl*, as a historical-themed soap opera, focuses on the love interest between Süleyman and his first concubine later wife Hürrem, rather than his statesman persona. Thus palace, more specifically *harem* section of the palace becomes automatically the main site of the series. Therefore, the scenery of the series turns to the most common iconography of orientalism; *harem*.

First episode opens up with the arrival of the news that Yavuz Sultan Selim has passed away and now Şehzade [prince] Süleyman becomes the Sultan

Süleyman. Parallel to Süleyman's personal beginning to his 46-year-long reign, audience meets Hürrem, by the time known as Aleksandra, who was captured by Tatars and on her way to İstanbul to be sold as either a slave to rich people or a concubine to the palace. The name 'Alexandra' is debatable, since she is known as 'Roxelana' in the foreign records and none mentioned in palace papers until she renamed as Hürrem. And in addition to this, as Leslie Peirce highlights constantly, that there is almost zero information about the Roxelana's earlier life or her family. Yet; "the most recent incarnation of Roxelana, in the Turkish historical television series *Muhteşem Yüzyıl*, [...] casts her as Aleksandra, daughter of a good priest, all of whose family is slain by her Tatar captors."¹¹⁸ Which possibly lead millions of audiences around the world to remember her with this biography.

After her arrival to the Topkapı Palace, an Ottoman image that is recreating the orientalist template begins to be constructed in the series. The questions such as how new concubines arrive onto the sultan's harem, where they sleep, how does the system of harem works, the hierarchy between members of harem and family, who teaches what to the new arrivals, and most importantly how a concubine seduce the sultan, are answered during this first episode. While doing so, the series imitates the orientalist canons.

3.1.1.1. Fatma Sultan

Even though orientalist iconography hadn't been focused on blood-relative women, since they won't be sexual figures enough, the generic image for rich oriental women, added to the created image of European princesses, together they create the image(s) of sultan's sisters Hatice Sultan, Şah Sultan, Fatma Sultan and Beyhan Sultan. Throughout the series, all four of the sisters are represented but while Hatice, Fatma and Şah becoming active characters, Beyhan Sultan seen

¹¹⁸ Pierce, *Empress of the East*., 26.

only a few times. She was living faraway from the capital as a widow due to, as Peirce had put it, "Suleyman's dedication to guarding the Ottoman sultanate" which "cost him his sister Beyhan's affection,"¹¹⁹ and many more's. Since Beyhan's screen time is very few, and the other sisters are standing in the same position in terms of contribution to the story, the analysis will be held for Fatma sultan only.

Fatma Sultan joins the series in the episode 106. From the very beginning of her character, she draws a flirtatious persona. Therefore it is not a surprise that she is introduced as the 'Sultan of entertainment and joy'. This endless game of flirtation matches with orientalist approach quite strongly since the orientalist mentality leans over temptingness of oriental women's exotic appeals—if there is such a thing—.

Through the character of Fatma Sultan, sexual side of a blue-blood resident of harem is represented, not only by hamam or seduction scenes but also ageless cliché of Eve's apple. While she was on her way to the Topkapı Palace, she stops her carrier and takes off to 'steal' an apple from a worker. Behind her chiffon face-veil she plays this flirtation game as the return of apples. End of the little game, she pays her debt by showing her face to this stranger, and turns to her carrier with a victory. Throughout this scene, Eve's apple finds its way to emphasise both the danger and seduction. (See: 3.1. 3.2.)

Figure 3.1. *Muhteşem Yüzyıl*, E106.



Figure 3.2. *Muhteşem Yüzyıl*, E106.



As an important part of oriental iconography, hamam scenes are also not forgotten for Fatma Sultan. When she arrives at the palace, she meets with Hürrem and Süleyman, as a welcoming ceremony. Then hamam becomes the first stop of hers, where she both rests and talks over her first impressions and plans in the harem. (See: 3.3.) A scene of erotically designed exhibition of the female body and plotting against other women is enough to say that Fatma Sultan is a walking display of orientalist mentality.

Figure 3.3. *Muhteşem Yüzyıl*, E106.



In addition to her oriental image, the power she holds over other people and mostly her husbands, is scary for men but a joyful relief for royal sister. In order to continue to presume this power she knows that she should continue to use her sexuality. Thus she enjoys to hold ropes within her hands, just like any 'dangerous' woman would do.

Figure 3.4. *Muhteşem Yüzyıl*, E126, Fatma Sultan with her husband.



Since *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* is a historical drama with conventions of soap-opera, but not a documentary, especially the female characters are mostly used for dramatization, instead of their own identities. As sultan's sisters, Hatice, Şah, Beyhan and Fatma are semi-free women to lead their lives. Beyhan Sultan, as a broken hearted widow, who lost her husband under the command of Süleyman, only seen as visiting actor throughout the series, but Hatice, Şah and Fatma are from main cast and they can be read as one character. Within this genre context, in later seasons Şah Sultan and Fatma Sultan comes to the harem in order to dethrone Hürrem. Since the main goal of the sisters' is stopping Hürrem from getting powerful, thus both genre and orientalist discourse work for their fictional personas: sneaky women who fight for power.

Along with the representation of Sultan Süleyman's very active sexual life, sultan's sisters are also seen in sex scenes where they are no where close to be passive. Instead they are holding tight the sanction power over their partners. With such a representation the series offers powerful women, who take this power from their blue blood, yet the power is only legitimate when it's unified with their sexuality. In other words, either a royal blood or not, without her sexuality a woman cannot fit in this picture..

3.1.1.2. Favourites

The representations for the favourites and all other concubines of Süleyman's harem are quite similar to each other. Since concubines are one of the most common subject of the oriental paintings, this group has an image that is both the most stylized and most cliched. In this part, I would like to focus on three important members of the harem: Hürrem Sultan, Firuze and Nurbanu.

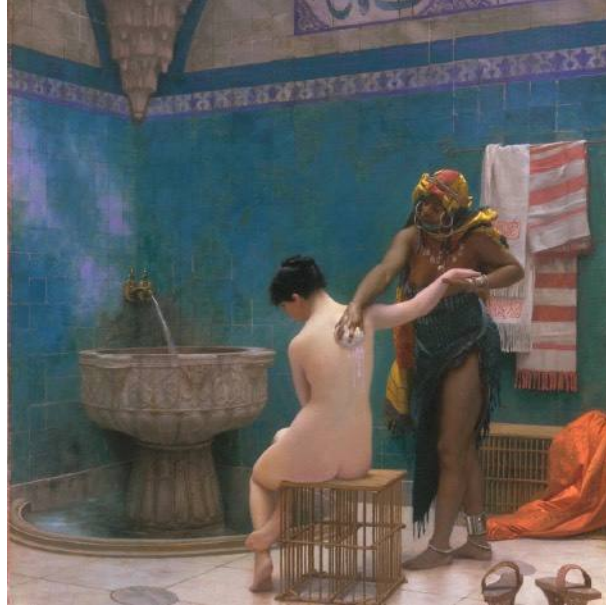
3.1.1.2.1. Hürrem Sultan

As it mentioned earlier, Hürrem has seen as a captive on her way to Istanbul. After her arrival the process of preparing starts with another common canon of orientalist iconography: *hamam*.

Figure 3.5. *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* E01.



Figure 3.6. *A Woman in the Hamam*, Artist unknown.

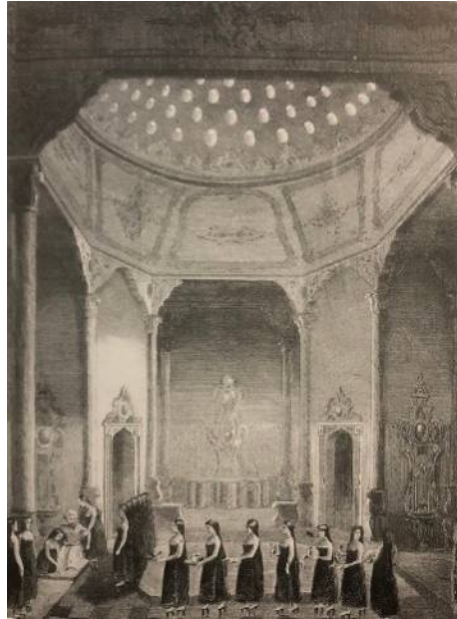


Throughout the four seasons of *Muhteşem Yüzyıl*, countless scenes take place in the hamam, and instead of using this particular part of the harem as a place to get clean, the series constantly recreates the old gravures of orientalist painters and put its female characters onto the display to create visual pleasure to the male gaze.

Figure 3.7. *Muhteşem Yüzyıl*, E01.



Figure 3.8. *Sultanın Hamamı*, Joseph Marie Jouannin-Gaver Jules Van, 1840.



As the main character of the series and also the big love interest of Sultan Süleyman himself, Hürrem occupies huge amount of screen time. Throughout her 'career' within the walls of harem the divine duty of her was seducing the sultan and giving him son(s). If there is something represented in orientalist iconography more than Turkish hamam, it is harem and seduction games in it. Thus, beginning from the first episode all the favourites and rest of the concubines are trying to seduce Sultan Süleyman and all the mise-en-scenes are built accordingly.

In the first episode Hürrem dances for Sultan Süleyman in order to seduce him. Dance of seduction is a very common theme for oriental imagery and is being used countlessly in *Muhteşem Yüzyıl*, too. This very exotic dance ends up with a purple handkerchief which Süleyman drops in front of Hürrem as an approval. (See: 3.9.) Pierce criticise this old and repeatedly told by Europeans story, since it does not fit into the complex and systematic rules of the imperial *harem*;

This may have happened on occasion, but the tale seems a poor fit with imperial etiquette and the well-crafted dignity of the sultan. It

missed the point that a potential concubine needed opportunity to display the fruits of her training as well as her allure. The Old Palace devised suitable opportunities accordingly.¹²⁰

It is clearly an oriental fantasy that rings all the given exotic symbols; belly dance, non-verbal communication, female attempt to seduce and the desire game. It is a product of fantasy because, like many monarch, a sultan should have produce dynastic continuity more than focusing on bodily pleasures, and harem was a unique institution to make sure the future generations of Ottoman family is being born. As Leslie Peirce reminds, "European fantasies about the libertine sensuality of Ottoman sultans were misplaced. The pressure to perform—to produce heirs to the throne—was inescapable."¹²¹ Thus what turned into an endless depictions of juicy male fantasies under the name of harem, was an act of continuity in dynasty.

Figure 3.9. *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* E01.



¹²⁰ Pierce, *Empress of the East*., 30.

¹²¹ Idib: 52.

Naturally Hürrem gets to be part of countless oriental image, not only by *Muhteşem Yüzyıl*'s approach to the character but also by the fact that the excitement over Hürrem made harem attractive part in the eyes of europeans in the first place. As Peirce reminds "news of Roxelana, [...] was obviously in demand"¹²² and:

[...]it was European observers and writers, not the Ottomans themselves, who helped to shape their contemporaries' ideas of Roxelana by reporting openly about life behind palace walls. Always an object of great curiosity, the sultan's 'seraglio' and its women sold books and generated translations of best sellers from one language to another. Later, in the seventeenth century, when Ottoman armies had proved stoppable and Europeans could feel superior, the theme of the sultan's lasciviousness and the decadence of empire grew popular.¹²³

Thus an image of Hürrem that rings all the given oriental iconography was inevitable for the series's visual realm. So the creative team of *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* almost recreated famous paintings of orientalist era. (See: 3.10, 3.11.)

Figure 3.10. *Muhteşem Yüzyıl*, E65.



¹²² Idib: 96.

¹²³ Idib: 40.

Figure 3.11. *The Harem Favourite*, M. Belloni, 19th century.



Hürrem Sultan is quite a unique figure in dynastic family of Ottoman Empire. Because, while a concubine having more than one son was very against the systemic rules of harem, Hürrem had four sons from Sultan Süleyman. Which was "breaking all tradition, she had remained in Suleyman's bed rather than retiring from it to raise her precious son."¹²⁴

Subjects of the Ottoman empire understood and honored the political logic of serial concubinage—rotation out of the sultan's bed of each new mother of a son. They grasped the point that a prince should not share his mother with another prince, that his mother was both his ally and the sultan's check on his son's loyalty. The contest among princes was expected to be eve, and each needed and deserved his mother's exclusive devotion and counsel.¹²⁵

Since Hürrem was the leading figure of this break from the tradition, she both subjected to public rumours and also became an open target to be accused for upcoming family dramas between the sons of Sultan Süleyman. This part of

¹²⁴ Idib: 94.

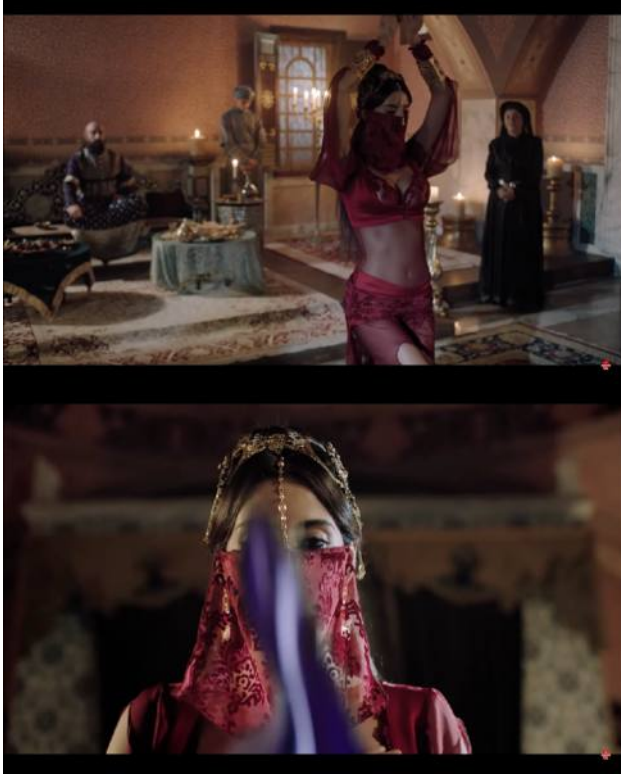
¹²⁵ Idib: 60.

Hürrem's story is what turn the reality of history, into a popular topic of a soap-opera, which *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* also gets advantages of for both keep picturing Hürrem in her sexualized self and also putting her middle of the chaos web.

3.1.1.2.2. Firuze Hatun

Similar to Hürrem, Firuze, whom Hatice and Şah sultans hoped that she would dethrone Hürrem, enters Sultan's radar by dancing. Different from Hürrem's dance, Firuze takes the stage alone and with a very arabesque style clothing. (See: 2.10) As an Iranian woman, unlike rest of the concubines who came to the palace as captives from either European or Caucasian lands and learn to play their sexuality cards in 'oriental' way, Firuze has born into it. Thus all the games of seduction, flirtatious behaviour are already installed within her feminine knowledge. Therefore, Firuze represents not only the harem image of orientalist iconography but also local women image: darkly drawn eyes, black hair, baggy trousers, chiffon detailed clothings and, of course, face veil.

Figure 3.12. *Muhteşem Yüzyıl*, E66.



3.1.1.2.3. Nurbanu Sultan

Nurbanu is not a member of Sultan Süleyman's harem but his third-born son Selim's. When Selim appointed to Manisa as governor, a harem had established for his sexual affairs. Nurbanu has chosen by Hürrem Sultan and sent to Manisa in order to work for Hürrem Sultan while serving to Selim. As a mother, Hürrem builds her own web of communication between her own harem and her son's harems.

Nurbanu joins as the daughter of a Venetian aristocratic family who ended up as a slave to to be sold the harem of Topkapı Palace. Since her anger and ambition were similar to Hürrem's she became a notable concubine. In order to seduce Selim, she plays the game of seduction that almost every women in the

harem had played at least once. With her chiffon face-veil, darkly drawn eyes and hands offering wine lead her to Selim's bed instantly. (See: 3.13.)

Figure 3.13. *Muhteşem Yüzyıl*, E106.



Not only during seducing scenes, she also subjected to the orientalist iconography through bathing scenes. As referring her Venetian heritage, the series represented her not in the harem but in a bathtub that all the scenery matches with oriental details; loose chiffon fabrics, smoky air and gloomy lightings.

Figure 3.14. *Muhteşem Yüzyıl*, E108.



In conclusion of this sub-part, the concubines play the seducing game at its top level in order to become favourite. Since harem—the institution where these women are kept in—is one of the most common sceneries of orientalist iconography, the concubines in it are also constantly represented within this iconography. Thus it wouldn't be likely to think of a television series which focuses on harem, to build a representation that is not rely on the orientalist envisagement and displaying its female characters according to this sexuality-driven ideology.

I believe before finishing this part, it is important to keep in mind that the period that *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* has settled in is the classical age, which is being represented by sexuality and nakedness—female nakedness—in almost every medium and in many countries. Many of the dynastic families of Western countries gets to be represented by the same nakedness, such as *The Tudors* (2007-2010), *The Borgias* (2011-2013). The reasons are simple: a) it's a short cut to show how powerful the divine ruler is and where he gets his power from his masculinity. b) since human sexuality is correlated with nature but not the mind and order, the image of civilized person, which has been created in modern age, is purified from this sexual persona, thus the image from the classical age should display some contrasts. In this context, *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* is not only recreating

oriental iconography but also reusing a template that correlates middle age to nearly-pornographic-sexuality.

It is true that it would be unfair to tell a story of Sultan Süleyman without Hürrem and hence harem, since she has left her mark in the history quite strongly. Her road from being a concubine to be lawful wife of the emperor is unique and moreover their almost monogamous marriage is very unseen in the history of Ottoman dynasty.

Together the royal couple overturned one assumption after another. Roxelana was the first Ottoman concubine ever to marry the sultan who was her master. She was also the first to cut an overtly conspicuous figure. It was Roxelana who transformed the imperial harem from a residence for women of the dynasty into an institution that wielded political [/] influence. Royal women following in her footsteps crafted powerful roles in Ottoman politics while serving as advisers to their sons and, in the seventeenth century, ruling as regents. When Roxelana died in 1558, she also left as a tangible part of her legacy numerous charitable foundations in the Ottoman capital of Istanbul and across the empire—another break with tradition.¹²⁶

She changed the ways of how the empire is being ruled. But what *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* or any other Hürrem Sultan-based product is not giving her the credit she deserves; instead the series uses her femininity and notorious persona in order to create sexual pleasure.

¹²⁶ Idib: 3-4.

3.1.2. *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* and Its Position Within Neo-Ottomanism

Since neo-Ottomanism is persistent on resurrecting the Ottoman heritage and a glorified past discourse for the empire, any piece of work that carries Ottoman identity cannot be think of without the ideology. As Lea Nocera writes, "Turkish government also takes every opportunity in attempting to benefit from media influence, especially popular culture channels, soap operas and TV in general."¹²⁷ Which means such an enormous production like *Muhteşem Yüzyıl*, obviously served for the ideology by reaching out over 150 million viewers around the globe in more than 70 countries.¹²⁸

It is true that *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* follows an orientalist approach more than it disseminates the neo-ottomanist discourse about the empire, but still it is a product of neo-ottomanism. In a way, it's an outcome—or a reaction—of years-long dissemination of the neo-Ottomanist discourse, from a more secular and sexist perspective. Even so, the series told the story of a glorified past and oriental desire that focuses on female body and image. This 'glorified' past representation and endless scenes of oriental desire turned *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* into an "instant block-buster, because it taps into the increased curiosity in the way the Ottomans were living."¹²⁹ This curiosity rosed from the neo-Ottomanist ideology that had not only targeted the Turkish citizens but also rest of the Middle East region.

As Kraidy and Al-Ghazzi has underlined, "Turkish popular culture travels well in the Middle East not because of language or because of a face-value cultural proximity" but because "some migrated words notwithstanding, and

¹²⁷ Lea Nocera, "Middle Eastern intrigue? Turkish soaps, the rediscovery of the Ottoman past and a new image for Turkey in the Middle East" in *The Turkish touch: Neo-ottoman hegemony and Turkish television in the Middle East*, (Arab Media Report 4, October 2014), 7.

¹²⁸ Deniz Özalpman and Katherine Sarikakis, "The politics of pleasure in global drama: A case study of TV series, The Magnificent Century (*Muhteşem Yüzyıl*)", in *Global Media and Communication* 14, no. 3 (2018): 5. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1742766518780168>

¹²⁹ Guillet, *Ottomania*, 45.

mutual perceptions are still often riddled with hostile stereotypes."¹³⁰ In other words, as orientalism diminished the reality of every cultures and nations in Middle East region onto a one solid stereotypic image. Therefore any piece of work that rearranges this oriental image within the local context, is capable of to speak to big part of the region. Whether it was a problematic empire or not, a stylized version of it, which represents the people of the empire as powerful and capable as European historical dramas, turns Ottoman Empire a popular figure, the way nostalgic feeling of neo-Ottomanism would hoped for.

Success of Turkish dramas made Turkish version of living visible around the world. And specially Ottoman Empire-themed dramas, as part of popularity of the 'things Ottoman', use the Westerner features of the medium to tell the story of local. *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* was the first big-budget Ottoman-themed series to be sold countless countries and received an enormous viewing rates. It was a soft beginning which opened up the road for rest of the Ottoman Empire series and made possible to observe how the perception of sultanate and empire has change and adapt together with the country's ideology of neo-Ottomanism.

3.2. ORIENTALIST REPRESENTATION OF SULTANS: *MUHTEŞEM YÜZYIL: KÖSEM*

When *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* finished its run after four seasons and 138 episodes, the popularity of the show both in local and global, were already reached to an enormous level. Without a long interruption production company continued to its way with *Muhteşem Yüzyıl: Kösem* which was signalled in the final episode of *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* by introducing a few of the characters that belongs to the next generations that *Muhteşem Yüzyıl: Kösem* would tell the

¹³⁰ Marwan M. Kraidy and Omar Al-Ghazzi, "Neo-Ottoman Cool: Turkish Popular Culture in the Arab Public Sphere" in *Popular Communication: The International Journal of Media and Culture* 11 (2013): 25.

stories of. Even though there is a continuity, it didn't designed as a sequel. Instead a saga has been created that includes these two series which focuses on powerful dynastic women of Ottoman Empire.

Unlike *Muhteşem Yüzyıl*, *Muhteşem Yüzyıl: Kösem* focuses on an era that is known as "Sultanate of Women" since a version of regency system had been established and the male rulers were semi left behind on the process of ruling—either because they were incapable of or specifically kept away. Because of the nature of the period that the series had settled in, the storyline sails within the walls of harem, and tells a story about women and machinations of the palace. This was—and still is—a controversial period to represent in a television series, since the generic comment, "the sexist vilification of these royal women as usurpers of political power,"¹³¹ had filled up historical studies for years. Even though *Muhteşem Yüzyıl: Kösem* managed to built a semi-just representation for the women of House of Ottoman, it is still a very sexist story, because of the attempt to accuse those women for all the dramatic conflicts.

As it was mentioned earlier, neo-Ottomanist ideology became much more dominant and visible in the mid-2010s. When *Muhteşem Yüzyıl: Kösem*, a female oriented Ottoman series, started to be broadcast the Ottoman past was already began to be associated with much more masculine figures than it used to be. Thus, with competitors such as *Diriliş Ertuğrul* (2014-2019) which focuses on masculine authority and power during the early years of Ottoman State, *Muhteşem Yüzyıl: Kösem* had left behind in ratings. As Orhan Tekelioğlu underlined, both of the series are telling the story of a period from the history, yet what they tell only get a meaning from the context of contemporary political-cultural discourse. Thus one needs to ask, which series is more closer to the hegemonic discourse, in order

¹³¹ Günhan Börekçi, "A Queen-Mother at Work: On Handan Sultan and Her Regency During the Early Reign of Ahmed I," *The Journal of Southeastern European Studies* 34, (2020): 50. DOI: 10.26650/gaad.20213403

to find the reason of higher ratings of *Diriliş Ertuğrul*.¹³² Against the hegemonic masculine discourse of the time, *Muhteşem Yüzyıl: Kösem* has chosen female power over masculine one.

Muhteşem Yüzyıl: Kösem was based on more secular representations, similar to *Muhteşem Yüzyıl*. This secularity, as Tekelioğlu defines, makes *Muhteşem Yüzyıl: Kösem* the anomalous example of neo-Ottoman era.¹³³ The series was a popular and good-priced product to sell in the international market, so it continued to its run in local channels even after its low rating results.¹³⁴ But this situation changed the target audience from local to global. Since the target audience had changed, the responsibilities changed accordingly, and therefore the series became more free from the political characteristic of neo-Ottomanism. In other words, the more targeted audience has shifted from local to global, the bolder non-conservative representation gets.

Throughout its two seasons and 60 episodes, *Muhteşem Yüzyıl: Kösem* covers up 56 years, from the accession of Mehmed III in 1595 to the death of Kösem Sultan in 1651. Those years include; four generations of Valide sultans [queen mothers], three generations of favourites, seven sultans on the throne from four generations of the Ottoman dynastic family.

In order to analyse the depiction of these characters, female characters divided according to their relations to the throne and four characters have been chosen among them: Safiye Sultan, Valide Kösem Sultan, Sanavber Hatun and Aunts—Fahriye and Gevherhan Sultans—. The character relation chart and family tree for *Muhteşem Yüzyıl: Kösem* have been added below.

¹³² Orhan Tekelioğlu, *Televizyon Halleri: Dizi Dizi Türkiye*, (Istanbul: Habitus, 2017), 70.

¹³³ Idib: 71.

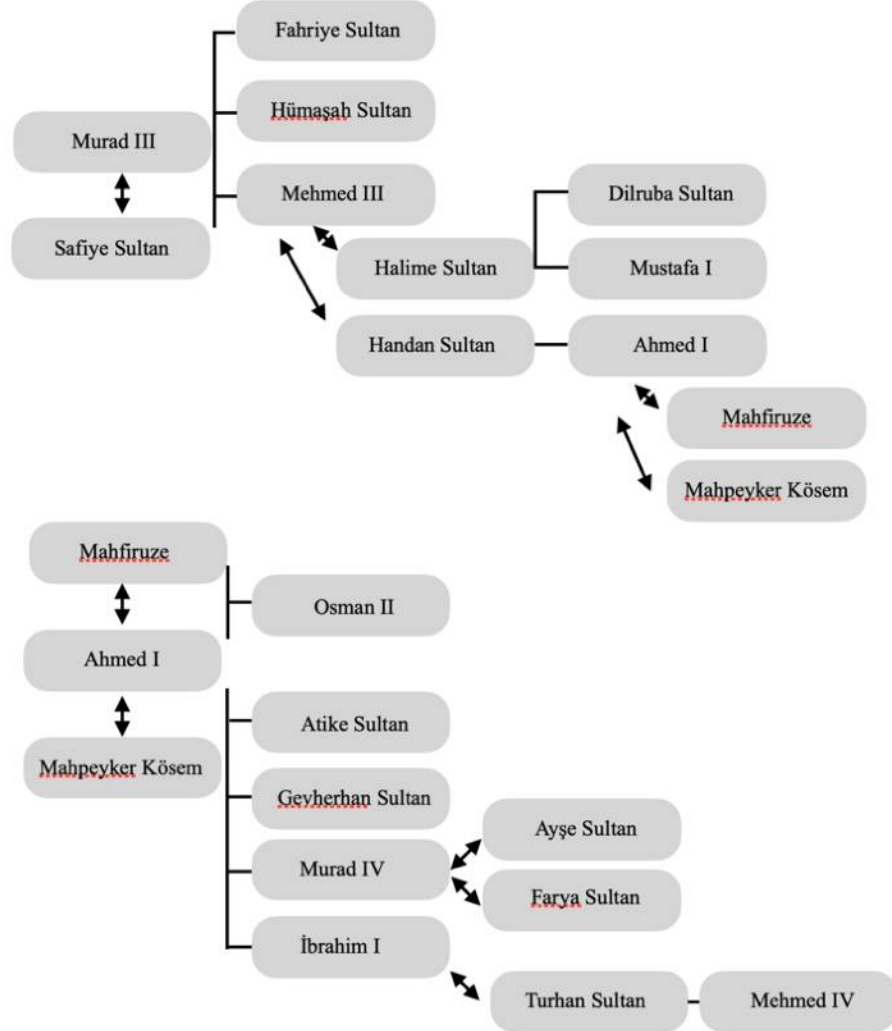
¹³⁴ Idib: 73.

Table. 3.3. Characters' Relation Chart.

Mothers	Aunts	Favourites	Sisters
Safiye Sultan	Fahriye Sultan	Mahpeyker Kösem Sultan	Dilruba Sultan
Handan Sultan	Hümaşah Sultan	Mahfiruze	Atike Sultan
Halime Sultan		Ayşe Sultan	Gevherhan Sultan
Mahpeyker Kösem Sultan*		Farya Sultan	
		Sanavber Hatun	
		Turhan Sultan	

*The character of Mahpeyker Kösem Sultan, starts as a concubine of Ahmet I, and becomes queen mother for Osman II, Murad IV and İbrahim I, and finishes as the grandmother of Mehmed IV.

Table. 3.4. Family Tree



3.2.1. *Muhteşem Yüzyıl: Kösem* and Orientalism

By following the story of *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* from where it was left, *Muhteşem Yüzyıl: Kösem* also settled in classical age of Ottoman Empire, which is commonly associated with the images of harem in terms of representation. But *Muhteşem Yüzyıl: Kösem* goes further and chooses Sultanate of Women period

which, by the nature, leaves no choice but establishing the story within the walls of harem. In addition to this, as it was mentioned above, low ratings of the series in local channels, pushed the series to mostly targeting the foreign audience. Therefore, in order to address to this audience, orientalism and almost every single detail of orientalist iconography became parts of the realm that *Muhteşem Yüzyıl: Kösem* had established.

The series is using the already-established set of *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* and redecorates it with more glamour and more orientalist features. The first episode opens with the five-year-old Ahmed—soon to be Ahmed I—and mourning concubines in the harem. The audience identifies with him since POV shot has been used, and begins to learn the on-going situation, which is the assassinations of his uncles and cousins due to his father Mehmed III's accession to the throne.

Starting from this very first interior image, a harem that is equipped with inlaid gold objects, flyaway fabrics and chiffons, deluxe furnitures, shadowy and blurry figures, becomes a persistent character of the show. (See: 3.15., 3.16., 3.17.) And this character, as the scenery fills up almost every moment of the series.

Figure 3.15. *Muhteşem Yüzyıl: Kösem*, E01



Figure 3.16. *Muhteşem Yüzyıl: Kösem*, E01



Figure 3.17. *Muhteşem Yüzyıl: Kösem*, E01



In addition to these inseparable details that orientalist imagination had created, *Muhteşem Yüzyıl: Kösem* recreates orientalist gravures, several times. (See: 3.18.) Even though this shot below does not exactly copy the gravure, the position of women and the action in focus is the same. This orientalist approach continued to be embraced in depicting the female characters.

Figure 3.18. *Harem*, Aubry de La Matraye, 1723.

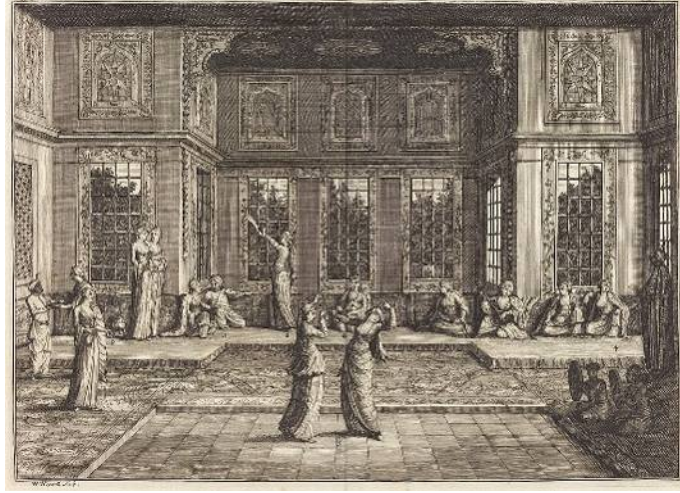


Figure 3.19. *Muhteşem Yüzyıl: Kösem*, E01.



3.2.1.1. Valide Sultans

3.2.1.1.1. Valide Safiye Sultan

The role of queen mother became more important during the seventeenth century of Ottoman Empire. As Peirce writes, "Over time, this role as avatar of sultanic authority enabled queen mothers to assume the regency of minor or

disabled sons, a frequent occurrence in the seventeenth century."¹³⁵ As following the hierarchy, the first member of the harem to be introduced is Valide Safiye Sultan, the proud queen mother of Mehmed but also sorrowful mother of dead. She positions in the centre of the frame with her dignified posture, and low-angle makes her bigger. (See: 3.20.)

Figure 3.20. *Muhteşem Yüzyıl: Kösem*, E01.



Safiye Sultan is a figure that styled similarly to the figures in European series and film examples like *The Tudors* or *The Other Boleyn Girl* (2008). From her dresses to her crowns, she recreates this Westerner style (see: 3.21.)—yet her image and the mise-en-scenes that she is part of, create an orientalist figure from her. Her depiction resembles a mixture of Orientalist iconography and the iconography of European monarchy in the classical age.

¹³⁵ Peirce, *The Empress of the East*., 312.

Figure 3.21. *Muhteşem Yüzyıl: Kösem*, E01, Safiye Sultan.



Unlike rest of the queen mothers of the series, she mostly sits in throne-like armchairs. She sees herself rightful to advise the sultan and to protect her position as head of harem, even after her son died. While her behaviour is building an enviable example for the next generations of women, she is also marking the beginning of the anomaly in the succession and ruling systems. Therefore her visual appearance symbolises this hybrid persona of hers; dressing and acting like a crowned European queen while performing the Orient's slackness and splendour—which was drawn by orientalism. (See: 3.22.)

Figure 3.22. *Muhteşem Yüzyıl: Kösem*, E01, Safiye Sultan.



During the process of Sultan Ahmed's preparation for his coronation ceremony, all the work is being performed by female staff and Safiye Sultan, which is very unlikely for reality. It's an obvious attempt to feminise both the labor force and story itself. By such a scene, the power of equipping the sultan for the throne is given to the women of the family on the one hand, one of the false beliefs of oriental envisagement over harem that all the work is being done by concubines, is being recreated on the other. (See: 3.23.) In other words, through Safiye Sultan, *Muhteşem Yüzyıl: Kösem* is not only inheriting the orientalist iconography and reshapes it but also embraces the ideology's tendency to manipulate history. By this approach, the series builds up an Ottoman-themed soap-opera that is similar to foreign dynastic series that named above.

Figure 3.23. *Muhteşem Yüzyıl: Kösem*, E01.



3.2.1.1.2. Valide Mahpeyker Kösem Sultan

Similar to Hürrem Sultan from *Muhteşem Yüzyıl*, her storyline starts when she was named Anastasia and kidnapped from her family. Instead of a neutral mise-en-scene, we meet her in quite a sexual one; while she was squeezing grapes for making wine and singing. This is a scene of not only another moment of feminizing the labour force, but also extremely sexualizing it. (See: 3.24) Thus, in Anastasia/Kösem's part, her body starts to be sexualized in an exhibitionist manner before she becomes a concubine.

Figure 3.24. *Muhteşem Yüzyıl: Kösem*, E01.



As the main subject of Sultan Ahmed's desire, Mahpeyker Kösem, gets the power and title before she is entitled to and becomes the leading figure of the story. The storyline which is given to her character is, in a way, a fairytale within the Ottoman realm. She is almost everything orientalist literature had created; westerner inside, oriental outside. Following to her fast rise she changes from diadems to tiaras quite fast.

Figure 3.25. *Muhteşem Yüzyıl: Kösem*, E01, she wears a small piece of hair jewellery just before the change of her name from Anastasia to Mahpeyker.



Figure 3.26. *Muhteşem Yüzyıl: Kösem*, E16, she wears a plain tiara.



Figure 3.27. *Muhteşem Yüzyıl: Kösem*, E45, she wears bold and bigger tiaras during mid-periods of her reign.



Figure 3.28. *Muhteşem Yüzyıl: Kösem*, E57, she wears bigger crowns during the late period of her reign.



In the episode 20, Mahpeyker Kösem Sultan moves into the Valide Sultan's private room as the head of harem. Both the title and the room was vacant since the suicide of Valide Handan Sultan in the episode 19. Unlike Handan and Halime sultans, the shots of Kösem's, match with Safiye Sultan's shots. She is in the centre of the frame with a dignified posture and shot by low-angle. (See: 3.29)

Figure 3.29. *Muhteşem Yüzyıl: Kösem*, E20.



Throughout the two seasons of the series, audience watches forty-eight years of Mahpeyker Kösem Sultan. During those years, she becomes the favourite

and then legal wife of Sultan Ahmed, gave birth to four sons and three daughters¹³⁶ from him, changes the succession custom and establishes a visible regency system. Since, during this period, the sultans on the throne were very young and under educated to rule properly, Kösem positioned herself as the regent queen. By this title she joined the governmental meetings, formed governments, directed the state in the name of her sons. She was the head of the state.¹³⁷

She did all of these either to get the power into her own hands or, as Tezcan underlined, to protect her children and to survive with them. As a mother of four sons, she might have taken Ahmed's decision to let Mustafa live, as a hope for her own children. But Ahmed's decision was exceptional and "Osman could be expected to act differently. Thus it was in Kösem's interests to turn a situation created by the exigencies of Ahmed I's accession at a young age into an institutional constant of Ottoman dynastic succession."¹³⁸ Therefore Kösem became a figure to fight for to change succession system. In the realm of the series, she begins with aiming to protect her children by taking the role of regent, but in the end she couldn't give up the endless power that she tasted once.

Either way, she fought her fight and became a controversial figure who mostly accused to be the reason of downfall of the Empire.¹³⁹ The series positions Kösem with her flaws and humanizes her, instead of judging and accusing her. Since her storyline is exceptional for Ottoman history, her death also turns into an exception. After she insisted on continuing to her duty as regent queen mother when her grandson Mehmed IV ascended to the throne, a rebellion—which supported by Turhan Sultan, mother of Mehmed IV—is initiated by the soldiers.

¹³⁶ Baki Tezcan, "The Debut of Kösem Sultan's Political Career", in *Turcica* 40, (2008): 348. DOI: 10.2143/TURC.40.0.2037143

¹³⁷ Halil İnalçık, "Kösem Sultan'ın Ölümü: Yükseliş ve Düşüş Dönemi (1648-1651)," *NTV Tarih* 43, (August 2012): 62.

¹³⁸ İdib: 355.

¹³⁹ Ahmet Şimşirgil, *Valide Sultanlar ve Harem: Osmanlı'nın Sır Dünyası*, (İstanbul: Timaş, 2019), 227.

She dies during the raid in the palace. Leslie Peirce reminds the fact that "the greatest tension within the dynasty now [17th century] existed among rival mothers" and she continues by defining Kösem's death as "the bloodiest contest between competing mothers."¹⁴⁰ In the series, her killing which resembles Marie Antoinette's execution also shot by recreating the original oriental gravures.

Figure 3.30. *Murder of Kösem Sultan*, Sir Paul Rycaut, 1694.



Figure 3.31. *Muhteşem Yüzyıl: Kösem*, E60, death of Kösem Sultan.



¹⁴⁰ Peirce, *The Imperial Harem*., 24.

3.2.1.2. Aunts and Sisters

The orientalist iconography continues to hold its domain through the aunts and sisters. Even though they are grouped separately in the analysis table above, according to their relation to the ruling sultan, as being blood-relative or more like blue-blood women of the Ottoman dynasty they don't end up with different representations. Thus in this block, Fahriye Sultan, Hümaşah Sultan, Dilruba Sultan, Atike Sultan and Gevherhan Sultan are analyzed together.

Since these women are born into the harem as blood relative members of the dynastic family, they have never experienced to be a concubine or a favourite who are obligated to give children to the dynastic family in order to have fundamental rights. Thus their storylines are not about survival for which they should fight by using their sexuality to tempt the ruler. Rather, they follow their own agendas. This situation makes them strong figures to use within the fictional realm but also makes them free from extreme sexualization. Through their existence, they fill the boxes of glamour, title, power, machinations and fame automatically. Thus they are very suitable to build up a fairytale around. Since orientalism's harem iconography is nothing but Ottoman-themed fairytales, the way these sultans are represented is displaying an orientalist approach.

Even though they are not subjected to extreme sexualization, they still cannot fall any further from long hamam scenes or dressing, undressing moments, and many more of orientalist imagination.

Figure 3.32. *Muhteşem Yüzyıl: Kösem*, E09, Fahriye Sultan.



Figure 3.33. *Muhteşem Yüzyıl: Kösem*, E45, Gevherhan Sultan.



Figure 3.34. *A Young Lady Having Her Hair Combed*, Osman Hamdi Bey, 1880.



3.2.1.3. Sanavber Hatun

As the concubines and favourites of the ruling sultan, those women's 'divine' mission is to please him and gave birth to a healthy heir to the empire. In the most vulgar and orientalist way, they were all sex slaves¹⁴¹ of the sultan and used for breeding. Even though they might have been loved and cherished, they were members of harem in order to serve for this mission only. But according to the harem customs after they gave birth to a child, their status changes into a little more respectful place. Thus the favourites, while they are in a sexual competition they are also dignified.

¹⁴¹ Idib: 5.

Sanavber Hatun stands in a different position from rest of the harem with her arabesque style—similar to *Muhteşem Yüzyıl*'s Firuze—. This difference doesn't leave her apart, instead, keeps her very much in the circle of orientalist imagery, while using her figure as the lost piece of orientalist iconography.

Figure 3.35. *Muhteşem Yüzyıl: Kösem*, E45, Sanavber Hatun.



From seduction dance to the red chiffon dress, and her darkly drawn eyeliners, character of Sanavber Hatun is filling the boxes of oriental harem iconography.

They were either newly arrived concubines or mother-of-a son, favourites of harem are represented similar to each other: overly sexualized, baggy dresses made of chiffon and embroidered fabric, diadems or tiaras according to their status. Since the head of harem was Kösem Sultan for the big part of the series,

favourites are not shown in low-angle shots but they get be positioned centre of the frame, specially while they are plotting.

3.2.2. *Muhteşem Yüzyıl: Kösem* and Its Position Within Neo-Ottomanism

The period of Safiye, Handan and more specifically Mahpeyker Kösem sultans' was already chaotic and stage to power wars between women in every level. But the series is not satisfied with this plot and chooses to depict the machination games as more personal. Instead of a harmonization between historical drama and Ottoman-themed soap-opera the shows follows up quite a modern fictional path that does not match with possibilities of the time. Since the series was targeting foreign audience, both the iconography and the storyline have established according to global features. As Tekelioğlu underlined; in terms of its music, directing, visual effects and costume design it is similar to the shows that are produced in the West, such as *The Tudors*.¹⁴²

In addition to the orientalist iconography which envisions a realm that is dominated by women, *Muhteşem Yüzyıl: Kösem* depicts strong women who are fighting for their own monarchies, instead of relying on masculine power. While doing so, they don't see any harm to use their femininity, sexuality and desires. They are equipped with plotting minds and countless capabilities. But along with the complex iconography and ideology of orientalism, the series embraces a sexist discourse. Instead of supporting these power-seeking women's goals, the narrative feeds the idea of women who seek for power bring her own disaster.

Even though the very reason that this show had been produced is the existence of popularity of neo-Ottomanist nostalgia, which was slowly changing the cultural environment for years, the show does not match the iconography of

¹⁴² Tekelioğlu, *Televizyon Halleri*., 71.

neo-Ottomanism based contents of its time. Therefore, *Muhteşem Yüzyıl: Kösem*, in terms of iconography and story, has a more secular narrative compared to the other shows which explicitly embrace a more masculine-based, conservative neo-Ottomanist discourse.

3.3. EXCLUDED REPRESENTATION OF THE WOMEN OF ABDÜLHAMID'S FAMILY: *PAYİTAHT ABDÜLHAMİD*

When *Muhteşem Yüzyıl: Kösem* was in the middle of its second season, *Payitaht: Abdülhamid* started its run in January 2017 in TRT. The fact that the series broadcast in TRT plays a crucial role, since it's the channel of the state-owned media corporation. Because of this relation, getting a neutral position according to the dominant politics was a struggle that TRT had throughout its history. Therefore "the reflection of historical figures and events in television dramas on TRT frequently sparked debate, especially in the 2000s."¹⁴³

By the rising neo-Ottomanism centred politics of governing party AKP, controversial figures of Ottoman past, mostly the figures of late Ottoman era, came into the light. Sultan Abdülhamid II, as one of those figures, first named as "*Ulu Hakan*"¹⁴⁴ within the political context of governing party which followed by the popularity of his images in daily objects and literature and more, and finally turned into a television series which focuses on him. Since, as Erdemir put it, "it is [the series] state propaganda designed to appeal to viewers' worst instincts and leave them with a revisionist, conspiratorial narrative of Turkish history,"¹⁴⁵ TRT became the ultimate channel to broadcast *Payitaht Abdülhamid*.

¹⁴³ Unur, *In the Midst*, 359.

¹⁴⁴ Almighty khan.

¹⁴⁵ Aykan Erdemir, "A Turkish TV blockbuster reveals Erdogan's conspiratorial, anti-Semitic worldview," *The Washington Post*, May 15, 2017, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/democracy-post/wp/2017/05/15/a-turkish-TV-blockbuster-reveals-erdogans-conspiratorial-anti-semitic-worldview/>

The series had been targeted countless times for its problematic representations of historical characters and events. On this subject matter, Onaran wrote that even though there are history advisors who took part within the production this information should not mislead you because the series doesn't have the urge to rely on any historical narrative of any period. Naturally, there is no obligation to use official proofs for each scene for films or TV series which fictionalize the historical people and events, and a series which is motivated by political history is no exception.¹⁴⁶ But instead the series is offered as a source to learn history, by many politicians, including president Erdoğan.¹⁴⁷ Of course "this revisionism would be less egregious if the show portrayed itself accurately—as historical fiction. Instead, a split-second screen at the start of each episode declares that the program is 'inspired by real historical events'."¹⁴⁸

But what does *Payitaht Abdülhamid* do is different than recreating the historical events by fictionalizing them. The series creates new events that are directly related to daily politics of Turkey to reinforce the contemporary binaries of good and evil¹⁴⁹ by using its—caricatured—characters. In addition to this characteristic of the series, it focuses on the life and reign of one of the most controversial leading figures of Ottoman Empire history, Abdülhamid Han. Therefore *Payitaht Abdülhamid* and every detail that it presents to the audience, become a topic to occupy discussions not only in television fandoms and television studies but also in history, politics, foreign relations and daily life of public.

¹⁴⁶ Burak Onaran, "Payitaht Abdülhamid Vesilesiyle: Tarih-Kurgu-Propaganda" in *Birikim* 336 (April 2017): 77.

¹⁴⁷ "Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan: Millete Can Borcumuz Var," *Yeni Şafak*, December, 21 2017, <https://www.yenisafak.com/gundem/cumhurbaskani-erdogan-millete-can-borcumuz-var-2940994>

¹⁴⁸ Erdemir, "A Turkish TV blockbuster", <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/democracy-post/wp/2017/05/15/a-turkish-TV-blockbuster-reveals-erdogans-conspiratorial-anti-semitic-worldview/>

¹⁴⁹ Onaran, *Payitaht*, 77.

Even though Sultan Abdülhamid II, ruled the empire for thirty-three years¹⁵⁰, *Payitaht Abdülhamid* focuses on the final thirteen years of this reign and the next nine years of his life, which he spent in exile after he dethroned by a military-supported uprising. First episode starts with the ceremony of his twentieth year on the throne in 1896. After five seasons and 154 episodes, the series ends in 1930, by Tahsin Paşa telling the memories of Abdülhamid's death which happened in 1918.

In the first two examples of the study, the focus was on historically famous women and their war to survive and keep the power. But in *Payitaht Abdülhamid*, except Seniha Sultan, the audience doesn't follow the storylines of neither well-known names nor power-hungry women. Yet palace machinations continue between the walls of harem as well as ministers.

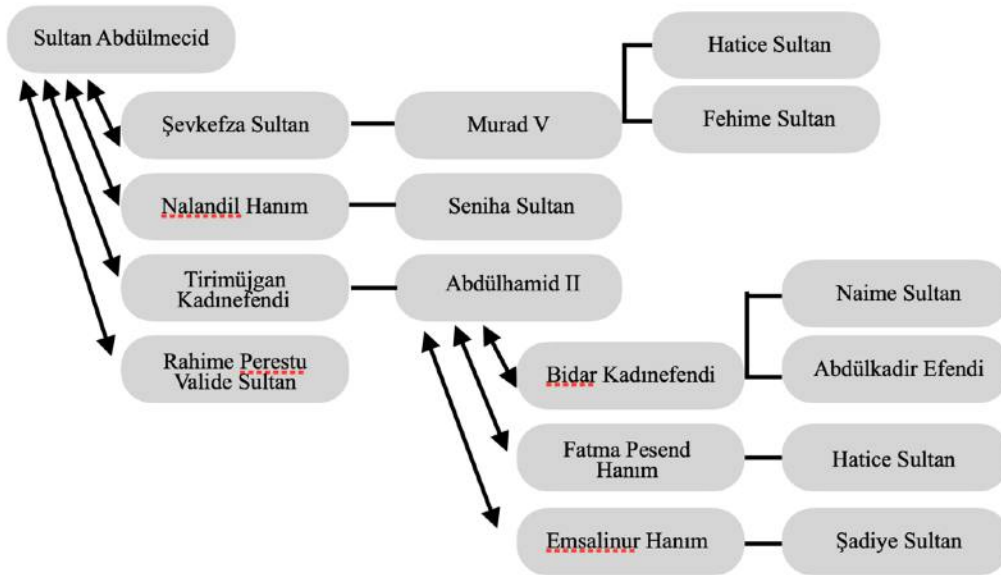
The period this study has focused on is the decade of 2010s, therefore, since *Payitaht Abdülhamid* started its run in early 2017 and ended in mid-2021, the episodes had been chosen from the first three seasons which covers the first 88 episodes that broadcast between 2017 and 2019. The four female characters to be analyzed had selected from these episodes according to the importance of their roles in the storyline. Those four characters are; Rahime Perestu Valide Sultan, Seniha Sultan, Bidar Kadınefendi and Naime Sultan. Character table and family tree have been added below.

¹⁵⁰ Cevdet Küçük, "Abdülhamid II" in *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi vol.1*, (İstanbul: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı Yayınları. 1988), 224.

Table. 3.5. Characters' Relation Chart.

Mother	Sister	Favourites	Daughters & Nieces
Rahime Perestu Valide Sultan	Seniha Sultan	Bidar Kadınefendi	Naime Sultan
			Şadiye Sultan
			Fehime Sultan
			Hatice Sultan

Table. 3.6. Family Tree



3.3.1. Payitaht: Abdülhamid and Orientalism

Even though it focuses on the dynastic family and high level officials led by Sultan Abdülhamid II, orientalist iconography hasn't been chosen to represent this story on the screen. Despite neither the mise-en-scene nor the representation

hold orientalist essence in the realm of *Payitaht: Abdülhamid*, there are replicas of famous orientalist paintings which hang on the walls of Sultan Abdülhamid's office. In the first episode, Fausto Zonaro's painting, *Conquest of Constantinople* (1908), which shows Fatih Sultan Mehmed when he conquered İstanbul, is seen hanging on the wall, not in its original version but a cropped version. (See: 3.36., 3.37.) Another example for replica painting is Zonaro's *Mehmed II* (1910) portrait, which is the remake of Gentile Bellini's *The Sultan Mehmed II* (1480). This original oriental painting is also redesigned in the series. (See: 3.38., 3.39.)

Figure 3.36. *Payitaht Abdülhamid*, E01, detail from Abdülhamid's office.



Figure 3.37. *Fatih Atını Denize Sürerken*, Fausto Zonaro, 1908.



Figure 3.38. *Payitaht Abdülhamid*, E01, detail from Abdülhamid's office.



Figure 3.39. *Fatih Sultan Mehmed*, Fausto Zonaro, 1907.



Fausto Zonaro was one of the artist-in-residence of the palace during the reign of Sultan Abdülhamid II. He was entitled as "*Ressam-ı Hazret-i Şehriyari*"¹⁵¹ and awarded with third degree Mecidiye medal.¹⁵² As the products of the period, seeing his paintings wouldn't be surprising if the rest of the setting was also matching with the reality of the period. In such a context, one asks the reason why those paintings were selected. The paintings that are chosen are associated with orientalist tradition yet they are a little un-popular examples of the orientalist iconography. Instead of focusing on the exotic depictions of harem or hamam with the female body in focus, the paintings are glorifying a victorious leader. It doesn't only glorify an important victory of Ottoman Empire but also emphasising masculine identity in the history of the empire, which is one of the most significant characteristics of neo-Ottomanism ideology.

Instead of the orientalist iconography of the palace life in Ottoman Empire which exhibits female body, *Payitaht Abdülhamid* builds a palace where female family members and staffs lead non-effective lives in it. While one of the several reasons to such a representation, was, as Necdet Sakaoğlu has put it, the ultimate correlation of harem with Topkapı Palace whereas other palaces and mansions that had been home to Ottoman sultans were correlated with architecture and art.¹⁵³ In other words, Yıldız Palace where *Payitaht Abdülhamid* sets its story, was already an environment that correlated with politics and state more than it is correlated with the life of dynastic family. Thus a setting that is free from orientalist iconography is coherent with the historical context. But what *Payitaht Abdülhamid* builds is not a place that focus on women less. It is the creation of a realm which is established with the exclusion of women from every corner.

¹⁵¹ Direct translation is: artist/painter of Majesty the Emperor.

¹⁵² Gülsen Sevinç Kaya, *Milli Saraylar Resim Müzesi*, (İstanbul: Milli Saraylar Başkanlığı, 2021), 44.

¹⁵³ Necdet Sakaoğlu, "İstanbul'da Harem: 1459-1924," in *Osmanlı İstanbul'unda Kadın*, ed. Ayla Duru Karadağ, (İstanbul: Kültür A.Ş., 2021), 505.

3.3.2. *Payitaht Abdülhamid* and Neo-Ottomanism

Whereas the first two series that are analyzed in this thesis approach the depiction of women with an orientalist urge, *Payitaht Abdülhamid* has a neo-ottomanist agenda which boldly shapes its depiction of women. The series does not approach the Ottoman Empire in a nostalgic sense. Instead it wholeheartedly embraces the neo-Ottomanist ideology which shapes every detail that is used to construct the representation of the characters and the historical period. In this way, *Payitaht Abdülhamid* envisions the Ottoman past from a neo-Ottomanist perspective which shapes the approach of this analysis.

As it mentioned above, neither Yıldız Palace nor *Payitaht Abdülhamid* has aharem section. But harem is part of the palace and the realm that the series had established. The harem that is represented in *Payitaht Abdülhamid* is more like an everyday domestic space rather than being an institutional section within the royal palace. From its size to the style of furnishing it creates the feeling of an everyday-living room of a commoner's house. The sections which serve to different people of harem for their different needs are far from being varied enough. Instead of being an important part of the palace, harem is shown in the series only consisting of a living room. The same space is also used as the dining room of the dynastic family, Bidar Kadınefendi's living room—doesn't include her bedding area—, Abdülkadir Efendi's room—Abdülhamid's son—, and a room to share for Hatice and Fehime sultans—Abdülhamid's nieces. From time to time other rooms are depicted but in total private rooms that are shown in the series are no more than five.

The harem setting is also lack of private space. Dressing, fitting rehearsals, fixings and dining take place in the same common living room-area. *Payitaht Abdülhamid* does not aim to represent an almost-mythical, unreachable ruler. But rather the series intends to celebrate Abdülhamid II as a 'divine' man who is

depicted as a humble person in order to create resemblance between this historical figure and the real life politicians of twenty-first century.¹⁵⁴ Therefore, the living area designed as an approachable setting for the targeted audience of the series.

As it mentioned in the earlier chapter, harem is the section of the palace where Sultan's family lives in. And since male members of the family attend to official works or secluded from public life after a certain age, mostly female members of the family occupy the rooms in harem. The situation is also valid for Sultan Abdülhamid's family in the way of it is represented in *Payitaht Abdülhamid*. Only some of his wives, daughters and nieces, and a few of his younger sons are the residents of harem in the series.

3.3.2.1. Rahime Perestu Valide Sultan

When Abdülhamid's mother, Tir-i Müjgan Kadınefendi, died in 1852¹⁵⁵, one of the favourites of Abdülhamid's father Sultan Abdülmecid, Rahime Perestu became the stepmom of Abdülhamid. After Abdülhamid ascended to the throne as Sultan Abdülhamid II, he declare Rahime Perestu Hanım, as Rahime Perestu Valide Sultan, queen mother, in 1876.¹⁵⁶ She is the last of mother queens in the Ottoman dynastic family, since the mothers of all the following sultans who ascended to the throne were already dead when their sons began to rule.¹⁵⁷

As the character of the series, Rahime Perestu doesn't live in the harem. She arrives at Yıldız Palace in the episode seven, in order to bring order to the harem. She introduces herself through her son's religious hierarchy by saying: "*Ben Valide sultanım. Hilafet incisinin sedefiyim ben.*"¹⁵⁸ Instead of emphasizing

¹⁵⁴ Serdar Korucu, "Payitaht: Bir 'Cumhurbaşkanı Abdülhamid' Portresi, *Toplumsal Tarih* 306, (June 2019): 59.

¹⁵⁵ Harun Açıba, *Kadın Efendiler: 1839-1924*, (İstanbul: Profil, 2007), 31.

¹⁵⁶ Idib: 46.

¹⁵⁷ Idib: 46.

¹⁵⁸ Offers Abdülhamid as the pearl of caliphate, and introduce her self as the mother-of-pearl, according to her context.

the power she holds as queen mother, she specifically relates her status to Abdülhamid's religious position. By such a statement she underlines the Islamic side of the emperor's identity.

She is first introduced in a slow motion shot depicting her as walking in the corridor of harem section and the camera tilts from her feet to head. Instead of a low-shot to make her bigger, a dramatic camera movement has chosen. (See: 3.40.) When she arrives at the harem, she joins the common living room area and sits on a throne-shaped chair that wasn't located in the room until she arrives. In such a way to underline the lack of private space for the members of harem as mentioned above, the offices of the higher ranking characters are also absent. (See: 3.41.)

Figure 3.40. *Payitaht Abdülhamid*, E07.

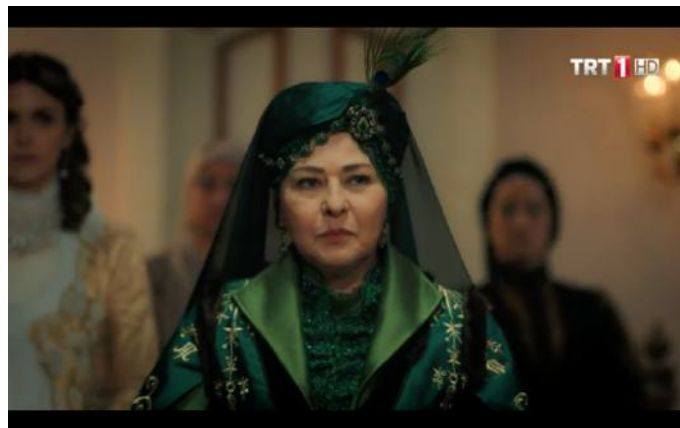


Figure 3.41. *Payitaht Abdülhamid*, E08.



All the queen mothers that are analysed other-case studies were holding their power through the status they had. Even though they landed the status because of their son's position, the status of queen mother was already including its own authority and power. But in *Payitaht Abdülhamid*, Rahime Perestu Sultan has a little bit of power and authority over the harem members and it comes from her older age and more importantly she is powerful because Abdülhamid ordered so. Instead of leading with the credit of her own identity, she has been entitled and equipped under Abdülhamid's allowance. In such representation, she owes all to him.

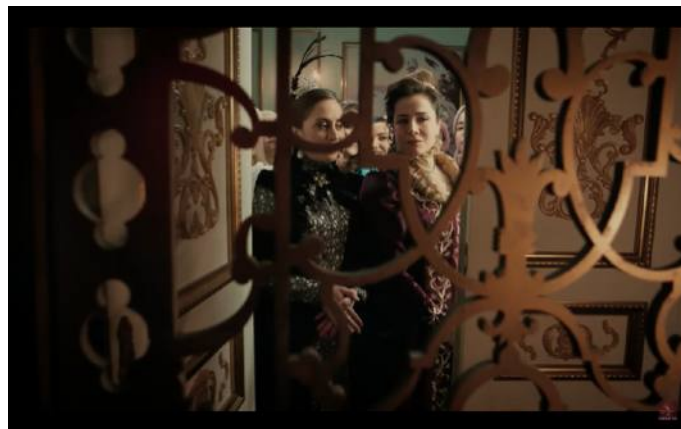
Like rest of the female cast, she covers her hair completely. Thus instead of wearing a tiara or a diadem she pins some jewellery on her headscarf. In the case of royal accessories, there is no visual evidence of hierarchy between women.

3.3.2.2. Seniha Sultan

In reality, Sultan Abdülhamid had several sisters but the series only depicts Seniha Sultan as a character. Since she was married to a critical figure of Abdülhamid's government, Damat Mahmud Paşa, and was the mother to Prince Sabahattin, another critical figure of the era, she needed to be in the series as a companion to these men. In other words, her existence serves for the storyline of *Payitaht Abdülhamid*, when it's only related to the men of her family.

When the first episode opens after the prologue and opening credits, Sultan Abdülhamid is seen while decorating his medals in his ceremonial uniform. When he finally arrives at the main saloon, a group of women are watching him and the ceremony behind a grill that protects them from the strangers' eyes but allows them to see the other side. Seniha Sultan, as the sister of the ruling sultan, takes the front line. This is a rare example in which she has the privilege to be prioritized due to her blue-blood, because in the rest of the series neither the setting nor the storylines mark a difference between her and other the women of the palace.

Figure 3.42. *Payitaht Abdülhamid*, E01, Seniha Sultan (left).



Her husband, Mahmud Paşa, is a traitor who supports European countries' big plans over the empire, and, as a good wife would do, Seniha Sultan, without exactly knowing what she is doing, helps her husband most of the time. She talks with her brother for her husband's sake and takes part in manipulation but she doesn't know whom or what she serves for in the bigger picture. Even though she acts as a powerful and smart figure against women of the palace, she is easily fooled by her husband and her son.

Instead of fighting for her own case, she fights for her husband without any benefits for herself. She does what she's been asked to do with a belief that she is working for the goodness of her family. Therefore, as the rest of the enemies, she is a member of the confederacy of unskilful evil people, who are always defeated by Abdülhamid's intelligence. Though of course since she doesn't aim to do evil and she is a blue-blood, she eventually turns into a good character who works for her royal family's welfare.

While she is in her mansion and in the harem section of Yıldız Palace, she styles her hair uncovered. (See: 3.43.) But whenever she is in the other sections of the palace, or hosting guests in the harem she covers her hair completely like queen mother and the rest of the female members. (See: 3.44.) Though the pattern for the usage of headscarf becomes irregular time to time, it generally follows this personal, semi-personal space differentiation.

Figure 3.43. *Payitaht Abdülhamid*, E01, Seniha Sultan at her home.



Figure 3.44. *Payitaht Abdülhamid*, E01, Seniha Sultan visiting her brother Sultan Abdülhamid on his office.



3.3.2.3. Bidar Kadınefendi

Along with the passing years the titles that are given to the Sultan's spouses, and favourites changed. Instead of '*haseki*'¹⁵⁹ the title '*ikbal*'¹⁶⁰ came to the usage. Also, since religious marriage became a custom within the harem, the first five favourites of the sultan get to be married with him, and then titled

¹⁵⁹ Something close to be meant 'appanage favourite'.

¹⁶⁰ *Prosperity*. It used in the meaning that a woman who had matched with the Sultan must be counted as reached the stage of prosperity.

"kadınefendi"¹⁶¹ to show their higher position within the harem hierarchy. In addition to their title *kadınefendi*, those women are also numbered according to the date of their marriage ceremonies. "A woman who became the sultan's *ikbal*—a favorite companion, perhaps concubine, of the sultan, who ranked below the senior concubines (*kadın*) and was in line for promotion to the rank of *kadın*."¹⁶² When a *kadınefendi* died or exiled, first *ikbal* would be promoted to the last—fifth or eighth—*kadınefendi* title.

Sultan Abdülhamid, who had thirteen officially recorded wives and more than fifteen children,¹⁶³ is represented in the series almost like a monogamous man. Only a little part of his family members are represented in *Payitaht: Abdülhamid*. Throughout the first three seasons, only two of his favourites take part in the series, Bidar Kadınefendi and Fatma Pesend Hanım. Since both characters are represented quite similarly, the analysis focuses on Bidar Kadınefendi only in this section.

When the first episode starts with the anniversary ceremony, Bidar Kadınefendi, as the mother of a daughter, Naime Sultan and a son, Şehzade Abdülkadir, and as the only wife of Abdülhamid in the palace by the time, stands in the front line behind the grill with Seniha Sultan. (See: 3.45.) In the absence of a queen mother or any other blue-blood member in the harem, she is, so-called, the head of the harem. Thus her position next to Seniha Sultan in the front line is understandable. But similar to the case of Seniha Sultan, this is also a rare example of Bidar Kadınefendi to be treated according to her position in the harem hierarchy.

¹⁶¹ *Female master*.

¹⁶² Peirce, *The Imperial Harem*., 142.

¹⁶³ Açıba, *Kadın Efendiler*: 117-118.

Figure 3.45. *Payitaht Abdülhamid*, E01, Bidar Kadınefendi (right).



The usage of headscarf follows the same pattern with Bidar Kadınefendi, as it was with Seniha Sultan. While she is in the harem or behind the grilled bar she wears only a chiffon shawl on the back of her hair. Whenever she steps out of harem section, she covers all of her hair. (See: 3.46., 3.47.)

Figure 3.46. *Payitaht Abdülhamid*, E01, Bidar Kadınefendi in the harem.



Figure 3.47. *Payitaht Abdülhamid*, E01, Bidar Kadınefendi visits her husband.



Once again, similar to Seniha Sultan she tries to help male members of her family without actually knowing the contents of the cases. When her brother, Mehmed Paşa, who is also a member of Sultan Abdülhamid's government, asked her help on Baghdad railway project she tries to speak with Sultan Abdülhamid during the breakfast on her brother's behalf. Instead, she answered by the sultan:

Sultan Abdülhamid: Rahmetli babam Abdülmecid, hanımları siyasete bulaştırdığı için acınacak duruma düştü. Benden babamın hatalarını tekrar etmemi beklemeyiniz.¹⁶⁴

Later in the episode, when Bidar Kadınefendi reveals to Abdülhamid that his sister Seniha Sultan is secretly visiting Çırağan Palace, he acts as if he knows the situation. And after leaving the room, he comments on this to his aide, Tahsin Paşa:

Sultan Abdülhamid: Ne zaman bir kadına ruhumla yaklaşsam önünde sonunda onun kafasındaki hesaba kitaba tosluyorum. Fıtrattan mıdır, karakterden midir?

Tahsin Paşa: Fıtrattandır, kadın fıtratındandır sultanım. İster

¹⁶⁴ *Payitaht Abdülhamid*, E01, timecode: 47:15-47:28
Translation: *My late father Abdülmecid found himself in a pitiful position because he let ladies into politics. Do not wait from me to do my father's mistake.*

sarayda olsun ister köyünde inek sağan kadın, akıllarındakini çözmeye tahsil gerekir. Ama ben o mektebi bitiren erkek daha görmedim sultanım.¹⁶⁵

As if it is not misogynistic enough to depict all female characters as if they are the same the series reinforces this misogynistic discourse by defining all women as unintelligent beings who do not have any agency but only serve to men. The dialogues also underline the existence of a so-called fixed feminine nature that makes women complicated and incapable in many things. Bidar Kadınefendi and her unsuccessfulness in being the head of family is just one of the examples that reinforce this discourse.

3.3.2.4. Naime Sultan

Since the series starts in the year 1896, when Abdülhamid was fifty-four years old, his image was perfectly fitting into a fatherly look. But the series chooses to represent this fatherly emotions through his keenness to his people, rather than through his own children (Naime, Şadiye) and nieces (Hatice and Fehime). Yet his little moments with few of his children are also used to emphasize him being an extremely compassionate fatherhood. Once again, the representations of Naime, Şadiye, Hatice and Fehime sultans are quite similar, the analysis focuses on Naime Sultan only.

Naime Sultan, as the only daughter of Bidar Kadınefendi and Sultan Abdülhamid, occupies a debatably active part in the series. She is introduced

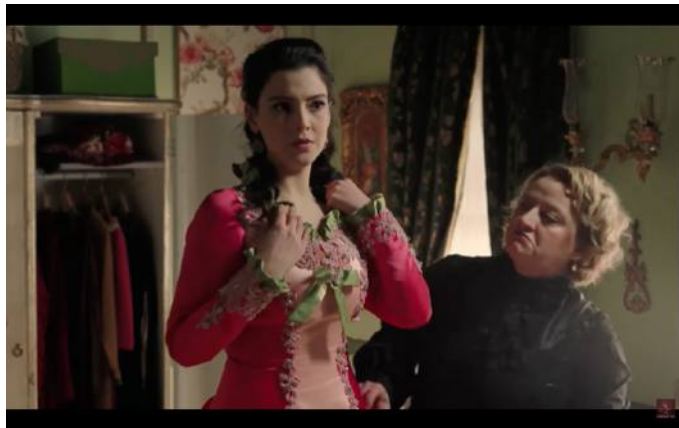
¹⁶⁵ *Payitaht Abdülhamid*, E01, timecode: 01:56:58-01:57:29.

Translation: -Whenever I approach to a woman with my sole I ended up hitting her plans behind her mind. Is it because of the nature or because of the characteristics? + It's because of the nature, the feminine nature, my sultan. Either she is at the palace or milking the cow back at her village, in order to understand women, one needs special education. But I haven't seen a man who graduated from that school.

along with her mother and her aunt, during the ceremony of the twentieth anniversary of her father, Sultan Abdülhamid, on the throne. As a member of younger generation, she stands behind her mother and her aunt. Once again, similar to her aunt and her mother, this is a rare example of her to be treated according to her position within the dynastic hierarchy.

Since she is a young women, her figure easily turns into a princess who waits for her prince charming. She spends her days talking with women of her family and enjoying new dresses. In the first episode, she is seen as trying a new dress that she found very low-cut décolletage, even though it only reveals her neck. (See: 3.48.)

Figure 3.48. *Payitaht Abdülhamid*, E01, Naime Sultan.



Since she is the member of the younger generation of the harem, her dresses are more colourful than her mother's and her aunt's. But the headscarf pattern shows no difference.

Figure 3.49. *Payitaht Abdülhamid*, E04, Naime Sultan (left) in a common space of harem.



Figure 3.50. *Payitaht Abdülhamid*, E04, Naime Sultan (right) in a men-free common space of the harem.



From her cloths to her behaviours, Naime Sultan draws the picture of a modest daughter who has a conservative life style. She doesn't express any opinion to disagree with her father. She generally listens and obeys. Her only agenda is to marry with the captain she hopeless loves, who directly works for her father.

Every female character that analyzed above, instead of adding characteristic variation to the story, repeats the similar one-dimensional characterization and gets represented through same features. For instance, all the women of harem are modest figures, from their clothes to their behaviours. Nearly

all of them are seen while performing religious practices such as joining group services, reading Quran or saying "*Bismillah*"¹⁶⁶ before they eat. They pray for long hours to welfare of Sultan Abdülhamid and the empire constantly.

Figure 3.51. *Payitaht Abdülhamid*, E18, From family to staff, women of harem prays to God during the welcoming ceremony of the soldiers.



Even though a life in harem was never permanent for anyone, it was still a space which was home to those women who lived there. But the women in *Payitaht Abdülhamid* are depicted like guests rather than being residents. They are guests who took refuge in Abdülhamid's house. Neither their clothes, nor the mise-en-scenes, not even the storylines establish their status in this space. They are rootless in a way.

In addition to problematic re-enactment of the history and propaganda-driven storyline, a bold sexism is on the table, through caricatured female figures who are deprived of personality and individuality. While women are free from being exhibited through their sexualities, the series leads the situation further and excludes women almost completely. Along with their body lines, women lost their capabilities too. *Payitaht Abdülhamid* gives the stage to Abdülhamid II, and only

¹⁶⁶ *In the name of God.*

him, without allowing a companion. The series also gives the abilities of understanding and knowing things to Abdülhamid II only, and becomes a bold example of mansplaining.

Since neo-Ottomanism is an actively used emotional motive in shaping the daily politics of the Republic of Turkey under AKP's rule, the way of these women are represented in the series, can be read as an attempt to create examples for women in daily life. The show's propaganda-based characteristic can be read as the proof of this attempt. While the process of female characters' establishment in the series was following and semi-copying the political female figures of AKP, in terms of head coverage styles and ways of talking; it was also aiming to draw templates for public to appropriate. Women of *Payitaht Abdülhamid*, more than being representations of the Ottoman past, are designed as nostalgic figures of today's imagination of Ottoman past.

CONCLUSION

In the previous chapters, this study investigated the depiction of women in Ottoman-themed television series in an attempt to understand the influence of neo-Ottomanist ideology in the representation of female characters. With this aim three television series from the decade of 2010 are analyzed: *Muhteşem Yüzyıl*, *Muhteşem Yüzyıl: Kösem* and *Payitaht Abdülhamid*.

While *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* and *Muhteşem Yüzyıl: Kösem* were relying on the nostalgic emotions of the Ottoman past, they drew quite orientalist iconographies. As the early examples of the decade and the productions which are targeting more secular audience in the local and the global, they position on the one end; and *Payitaht Abdülhamid*, as the final example of the decade and the production which is targeting an Islamist group of audience in local, positions on the other end. Yet both ends are not that different from each other when it comes to the representations of the female characters.

Throughout the decade the image of women derives from belonging to a secular imagination to a conservative and Islamist one. This is the active effect within the change of neo-Ottomanist imagination of dominant group. In the earlier steps of neo-Ottomanist nostalgic feelings in historical dramas were accepting the old orientalist iconography, where women in the centre of attraction and structures like harem and hamam are the field of story. Since this oriental iconography has established from the point of view of the West and draws an undercivilized East, women depiction come to the screen in a very sexist way throughout the first two examples of the decade. Both show suffered criticism for this sexist characteristic from different groups of people.

While *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* was more acceptable position for its secular and sexist women depiction, *Muhteşem Yüzyıl: Kösem*, as being broadcasted in a time of active change from orientalist iconography to a more local creation, witnessed more resistance from the audience.

Payitaht Abdülhamid on the other hand offered a totally new iconography that there is almost has nothing in common with the oriental one. From its approach to the male centre story-line to its act of exclusion of women from the daily life of palace, *Payitaht Abdülhamid* picked up a different path. The social events and political discourses from the time period of *Payitaht Abdülhamid* broadcasted directly effected this path. Since the mood of neo-Ottomanist nostalgia has been changed from its persona of the earlier decades, so did the chosen iconography of the show. Therefore *Payitaht Abdülhamid* builds an environment where Sultan Abdülhamid is extremely glorified and women of the story excluded from eyes of sexual desire along with strong personas and sharp minds. The newly created iconography of *Payitaht Abdülhamid* served to a different version of Ottoman-themed historical dramas.

In some perspectives the exclusion of women from the eyes of sexual desire is a rescue act. Also it is a must for being able to target different audience and television channels. But what happened through the change in the neo-Ottomanistic feeling is not only an attempt to diversifying the representations but also recreating the image of yesterday with the aim to change today's. In other words, in order to justify itself, the ideology goes back and reshapes women of yesterday's. Thereby a root gets to be established for this newly envisaged image of women, under the contemporary neo-Ottomanist construction.

Throughout this ten years period, different mentalities and approaches which shaped the Ottoman-themed television series, explained in the previous

three chapters of this study and in earlier this part. But to sum up in few sentences I could say that, while the early examples of the decade were following the orientalist iconography, which created centuries ago, final example followed a different iconography that shaped by contemporary relations with the Ottoman past of today's Turkey. These different iconographies created different depictions for female characters, even though the genre itself stayed same. In either way of building iconographies, historical drama genre conventions are repeated. In these repetitions, although all the versions of female representations are associated with different images, sexism remains the same in these Ottoman-themed historical dramas: women are neither a hero nor a friend, but either a villain or a victim. Personalities that had been stolen from the women of yesterday, today and tomorrow.

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