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Yalkin, Cagri

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A Brand Culture Approach to Managing Nation-Brands

The objective of this note is to formulate conceptual links between nation brands, international relations, and politics through the development of research questions that are underpinned by a brand-culture approach. The focus is on the export of Turkey's soap operas to diverse locations around the globe, but in particular to the Middle East and the Balkans. The note calls for (1) Forging a dialogue across international relations, political science, media, and management studies through a brand-culture lens which allows for a historical understanding, (2) Focusing on historical and political discourses as resources in interpreting nation brands and cultural and creative goods, and, (3) Focusing on nation branding between countries in the Global South. Forging a dialogue across disciplines and focusing on how consumers make use of historical and political discourses informs both commercial and diplomatic co-creators of nation brands.

Keywords: brand culture, nation brands, Turkey, international relations, politics

Introduction

Both the trade of popular culture products and the management of nation brands within it, remain at the problematic epicentre of studies on cultural industry, nation branding, diplomacy, international relations, and geopolitics, all of which focus on themes of globalization, transnationalism, and imperial tensions. Drawing on an illustrative case study of an ever-expanding transnational trade of Turkish soap operas that are used as nation branding tools, this research note demonstrates the utility of a brand-culture approach, which allows for the recognition of historical and political contexts in managing nation brands. The brand-culture approach provides an interdisciplinary and comprehensive take on managing nation brands as it brings a contextual appreciation and recognizes the role of state and non-state actors that co-create the nation brand.

Nation brands are particular positionings of nations within the global framework (Anholt 2007, 2009). They are studied by management, international relations, politics, and diplomacy scholars (Dinnie 2015, Fisher-Onar 2009, 2011, Kerrigan et al. 2012, Marat 2009, Olins 2002, O'Shaughnessy and O'Shaughnessy 2000; Sevin and White 2011); the study of

nation brands is therefore interdisciplinary. Nation branding, the process through which countries tell their own stories to influence the attitude of international target markets (Sevin and White 2011), focuses on a country's image holistically in the international arena and it covers political, economic, and cultural dimensions (Quelch and Jocz 2004, Fan, 2006). It draws upon country-of-origin (COO henceforth) (see Dinnie 2015), place or destination branding (Konecnik and Go 2008, Kotler and Gertner 2004, Morgan et al. 2002, Qu et al. 2011), public diplomacy (van Ham 2001, Melissen 2005, Fan, 2008), geopolitics (Yanik 2009), commercial diplomacy (Sevin and Dinnie 2015), and national identity studies (Bond, et al. 2001, Smith, 1991, Yanik 2016). However, the dialogue between these areas is fragmented, and can benefit from a particular understanding of brands, such as that of brand-culture (Schroeder and Salzer-Mörling 2006, Schroeder et al. 2015), which allows for a melding of history, foreign policy, politics, and consumer co-creation.

Kemming and Sandikci's (2007) work juxtaposes politics and nation branding by examining how member states perceive Turkey's nation brand image in a European Union (EU) accession scenario, and Marat (2009) provides an overview of the images presented by Central Asian states in the post-Soviet era through an account of political and international relations (IR henceforth) discourses. Similarly, political science and IR scholars recognize the changing (brand-)identities of nations in relation to contemporary or historical political events and discourses (e.g. Marat 2009, Olins 2002, Ozdamar et al. 2014, Yanik 2011).

Media and tourism scholars also engage with IR and political science literature (Tomlinson 1999, Robinson and Smith 2006). Crawford (2010) demonstrates the importance of understanding international and national social and cultural contexts in evaluating specific tourism campaigns.

A stronger dialogue among these diverse disciplines through a brand-culture framework can help illuminate the links between history, IR, politics, media/popular culture, and the management of nation brands. Such dialogue can facilitate the recognition of how each aspect has the potential to be used as a resource by consumers and in turn can assist state and non-state actors in understanding the reasons behind and shortening the gap between nation brand identity and nation brand image. In this way, Schroeder and Salzer-Mörling's (2006) discussion on how brand identity is co-produced by various stakeholders is extended to nation-brands. As popular culture is one of the key communicators of a nation brand (see Anholt 2002), and within this category soap operas have been previously used to study nation branding in various disciplines (e.g. Al-Ghazzi and Kraidy 2013, Ryoo 2009), the focus on this note is on soap operas.

Nation brands within Brand Culture

Schroeder and Salzer-Mörling (2006, p.1) highlight the need to be aware of cultural processes such as historical and political contexts, and consumer response that affect the management of brands: "If brands exist as cultural, ideological, and political objects, then brand researchers require tools developed to understand culture, politics, and ideology, in conjunction with more typical branding concepts, such as equity, strategy, and value." This approach calls for and accommodates a dialogue between disciplines as diverse as management, politics, IR, and history.

Nations are consumable resources (Goodman 2007) and they re-brand themselves as political circumstances change (Olins 2002). As a brand-culture approach requires an understanding of the tensions, heritage, history, and mythology that build brand meaning

and value, it provides the necessary cultural, historical, and political analytical links necessary to understand nation branding in context. By adopting a brand-culture approach, Schroeder et al. (2015) provide a historical understanding of Chinese heritage brands and highlight how brand actors co-create, circulate, and reconfigure the meaning of these brands. By adopting the same approach, this note illustrates the importance of focusing on historical and political tensions for the co-creation of nation brands.

Nation brands are at the intersection of both commercial and political quests for leadership as the nation brand image plays a key role in IR (Anholt 2007, 2009). Studying nation brands within a framework that allows for both the commercial and political realms to contribute and acknowledge the effect of both its state and non-state co-creators is key. The image of a nation brand is developed by a country's products, national characteristics, economic and political background, history, and traditions (Ger 1991). Nation brands are inextricably tied to international trade and consumer preferences through COO, product country image, and cultural proximity. As Dinnie (2015) notes, studies on national identity are mostly studied by political science and IR scholars, while COO studies fall under marketing, management, and consumer behaviour. Papadopoulos and Heslop (2014) see marketing and IR as relevant to each other, however, providing specific research questions that tie in both are necessary. Studying nation brands and IR/political science within a brand-culture framework, which takes into account not only current and historical discourses but also how nation brands are co-created by various producers and consumers in relation to these discourses, helps both fields move beyond Nye's (2004) soft power thesis which treats popular culture as only resources in the production and consumption of foreign policy.

Turkey as a Nation brand

To some, Turkey symbolizes not a distant former imperial power, but a brand that balances modernity with tradition. Although Turkey's secular modernization project was largely focused on weakening the ties with the Ottoman past and facing westward (Ahmad 1993), the bridge-between-civilizations metaphor and the East-meets-West trope (Yanik 2011) that are widely used in positioning Turkey as a nation brand have been in use since the Ottoman era (Yanik 2016). The Justice and Development Party (JDP henceforth), known for its conservative and pro-Islamic orientation, has ruled Turkey since 2002. In the decade that followed, the book, *Strategic Depth* (Davutoglu 2001), written by the former Prime Minister of Turkey, Ahmet Davutoglu, has been adopted as the guiding principle of Turkish foreign policy. This book developed a doctrine that aimed to transcend the artificial breakdown of ties in the region and to culturally and commercially reunite the countries around Turkey. The proposed end result of this re-bridging of the ties would be better diplomatic and commercial relationships with the former Ottoman territories and the forging of Turkey as the regional leader.

Fisher-Onar (2011) noted that there are four distinct narratives used by Turkey's current ruling party to construct specific positioning for Turkey: democratization, (post-)Islamist, (neo)-Ottomanist (see Kraidy and al-Ghazzi 2013), and Turkey Inc. These four narratives aim to position Turkey as a (soft) power hub through which transactions across the region take place. Just as Hong Kong created a brand identity that included both local Chinese-ness and a Western edge through referring to its colonial past, and positioning itself as a hybrid in identity to avoid being perceived as just another Chinese city (Zhang et al. 2015), Turkey's brand identity has traditionally rested on the same principles (Rumelili 2003, Yanik 2011), despite the former Prime Minister Davutoglu's communication of his wish to reconstruct

Turkey as the core/centre rather than as a bridge/link between civilizations (Davutoglu 2001). During the JDP era, celebrity involvements ranging from U2's Bono and the then Minister of EU Affairs walking across the Bosphorus Bridge, to Formula 1 driver David Coulthard racing across the same bridge, have been employed in a cementing-the-bridge metaphor (Yanik 2016). First, this illustrates the inextricable link between state and non-state actors such as popular culture producers in managing the nation brand. Second, these applications of popular geopolitics, in the name of crafting a cosmopolitan brand identity, entrenched Turkey further as the East-meets-West and as the familiarly exotic (Yanik 2009), the reflection of which can be observed in a plethora of platforms, the most well known of which is Turkey's quest for EU membership (Kemming and Sandikci 2007).

Brand Culture and the Transnational Movement of Soap Operas

Prior to the most recent events such as the instability that followed the Syrian War and the attempted coup in 2016, Turkey's claim of being a rising regional power, the guiding principle of its foreign policy since 2002, has been reflected in its foreign trade with particularly the ex-Ottoman countries in Middle East, North Africa and the Balkans (TIM 2012). According to the Prime Ministry Office of Public Diplomacy, soap operas became one of the most highly exported products from Turkey, with exports growing from US\$1 million in 2007 to US\$200 million in 2014 (KDK 2014). For example, *The Magnificent Century*, which depicts the life of Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent through a harem-centric series of power-struggle events (with a focus on his favourite concubine of Ukrainian origin), was watched in 43 countries by 200 million viewers (Rohde 2012). Around 100 Turkish soap operas (TSOs henceforth) are exported to 75 countries and 400 million viewers in North Africa, the Balkans, the Middle East, Asia, and Latin America. This trade volume positions Turkey as the

second biggest exporter of a TV series after the United States of America (USA) (Karar 2015).

In Arabic-speaking countries TSOs made up 60 percent of the shares in foreign program broadcasts (Yanardağoğlu 2014).

Government-funded financial awards for producers and directors who have helped build Turkey's image were offered (Al-Ghazzi and Kraidy 2013). According to the Prime Ministry Office of Public Diplomacy, in 2013 Turkish TV exports grew by 20 percent in comparison to the 4.54 percent global growth rate. *Global Agency* distributes many of the most popular TSOs around the globe, and has penetrated the Latin American market, a region known for its own telenovela exports. TSOs have a relatively high production cost, more than double the amount per episode when compared to Latin American telenovelas (Kaplan 2016). This positions TSOs as high quality programs. While in 2004 an episode was sold for around US\$35-50, the most recent reports place this figure around US\$200,000 (KDK 2014).

TSOs induced tourism particularly from the Middle East and the Balkans (Balli et al. 2013) despite the then financial crisis (Layalina Review 2009) and generated a demand for learning Turkish (Williams 2013). When MBC aired the soap opera *Noor (Gümüş)*, it drew 105,000 visitors from the Arab countries in May 2010 alone, which was an increase of 33 percent compared to the previous year (Sobecki 2010). Consequently, travel agencies started organizing sightseeing tours that included the buildings where the TSOs were filmed (Layalina Review 2009). The Turkish tourism industry is counting on the power of TSOs to draw in tourists and make up for the decline in visitor numbers after the recent turmoil in Turkey including terror attacks and a coup d'état (Caglayan 2016).

The TSO consumers are comprised of audiences around the globe ranging from Yemeni to Honduran viewers. This represents a high number of diverse consumers and a high volume

of trade. The Middle East and North Africa represent six percent of the world's population, equal in size to the EU (IMF 2014), with 150 million middle class consumers (Mahajan 2013). The population in the Balkans is in excess of 70 million and Latin America represents more than 400 million consumers (World Population Review 2016). In Saudi Arabia alone, 85 million viewers tuned in for the finale of *Noor* (Salamandra 2012). While *The Valley of the Wolves*, a series focused on counter-Western/counter-hegemonic narratives featuring Middle Easterners as heroes (see Yanik 2009, Kraidy and al-Ghazzi 2013), has a distinct consumer base particularly in the Middle East, dramas such as *Aşk-ı Memnu* (Forbidden Love) and conspiracy-drama *Ezel* appeal to a wider audience.

TSO producers are motivated to contribute to Turkey's nation brand identity, as confirmed by Ay Yapım's CEO. These works are supported by the state as Turkish politicians refer to TSOs as an exemplar of good relations: President Erdoğan pointed to the acceptance of TSOs as the sign of good relations between Turkey and Chile (Kaplan 2016), TSO stars joined the Turkish economic delegation's visit to Argentina (Hurriyet Daily News 2016) and Turkish Embassy events in the Middle East and Balkans (Hurriyet 2009).

Across disciplines, the reception of foreign popular culture has been treated as cultural imperialism (e.g. Tomlinson 1991), empowerment through active interpretation (Fiske 1987), or has focused on the use of goods, services, and ideas in a way that mixes the local culture with the hegemonic power (Hall 1980). Goods and ideas do not transform unchanged across geographies (Belk 2010) and studies on the reception soap operas have received have traditionally used hybridity and appropriation tropes. For example, Abu-Lughod (1995, 2008) examined how soap operas were configured within the developmentalist project in Egypt, Miller's (1995) study on the consumption of *The Young*

and the Restless in Trinidad uncovered how the soap opera transformed the nature of everyday gossip, and Liebes and Katz (1990) found that Israeli viewers used *Dallas* as a site to reflect on their identities. Crofts (1995) charts the institutional and cultural conditions that turned the Australian soap opera *Neighbours* into a post-colonial success in the United Kingdom (UK), illuminating how the contrasting images of Australia (clean and suburban) and in relation to those of the UK (as in *Eastenders*, through crowded pubs and dirty streets) appealed to consumers. Liebes and Katz (1990) found that Russian immigrants in Israel watched *Dallas* to ridicule American values. Thus, consumption of soap operas by transnational audiences verges on the domains of the nation brand identity and image, tourism, and product-country associations, COO, and soft power, rendering it as a useful context for studying nation branding.

Thus far, the emphasis has been on studying the media flow from the Global North to the Global South. Few studies explore the transnational movement of non-Western popular culture products (Iqani 2009; Lopez 1995; Schement and Rogers 1984; Straubhaar 1989). Kim (2012) focused on the role of the production and consumption of Korean soap operas on South Korean tourism. Ryoo's (2009) study focuses on how the Korean Wave, which included soap operas, helped reposition a nation brand that was considered part of the sub-periphery to a cultural mediator in the global cultural transformation. However, there are no studies that focus explicitly on the link between nation branding, transnational movements, and the consumption of soap operas.

The soap opera case lends itself to studying nation brands for three reasons. First, as Turkey seeks to build a case of exception for its own liminality to strengthen its nation brand (Yanik 2011), its popular culture offerings echo the same. The TSO is in hybrid form: it is based on

the North American soap opera logic, with elements of Latin American telenovelas, and is broadcasted in the home market in long slots that fits neither form. It features Turkish scripts and literature as storylines and once it reaches to its destination, it is broadcasted by being split in several sections, further hybridizing it. The themes revolve around love, hate, revenge, and suspense. The values and lifestyles featured are neither fully culturally proximal for everyone nor culturally distant, nor Eastern or Western. They feature an accessible modernity (Kraidy and al-Ghazzi 2013) and are “familiarily novel” (Vicdan and Firat 2013, p.13). Second, the soap opera also easily lends itself to studying historical and political relationships and tensions, especially pertaining to the aftermath of empires, as its examination in such contexts has generated important insights in other disciplines including cultural studies and communications (Allen 1995, Ashcroft et al. 2013). Third, aspects of TSO exports that are tangential to nation brands such as identity, positioning, destination image, and soft power have been studied in IR (e.g. Fisher-Onar), public diplomacy (Kaynak 2015), communications (Kraidy and Al-Ghazzi 2013), and tourism research (Balli et al. 2013).

Focusing on the same product category facilitates the interdisciplinary consolidation of research questions. The limitations of using soap operas as case studies are that they are widely accepted goods around the globe. This leaves more contested goods out of the picture. Also, COO might work positively for TSOs but it may not work for other pop culture products such as films and music, and may be altogether rejected for products such as technology-related goods that are incongruent with Turkey’s existing nation brand identity.

To familiarize the reader with the exported TSOs, Table 1 (below) features brief synopses for each of the top 10 traded TSOs:

<insert table 1 about here>

The two broad research directions below move from the broad to the specific. The first research direction calls for the recognition of different disciplines and their effect on each other in co-creating nation-brands. It flows from the brand-culture framework which allows for the recognition of historical and political contexts and the role of state and non-state actors. The specific research questions under Research Direction 1 flow from either gaps in the literature or they challenge the current assumptions of how different disciplines such as IR and popular culture production/consumption relate to each other in co-creating nation brands. The second research direction focuses on how consumers in the Global South interact with historical, political, and social discourses to co-create nation brands, and the implications of these for managing nation-brands. The specific research questions under Research Direction 2 flow from the brand-culture framework to draw out the gaps in literature that may arise due to the particular commercial, political, and socio-historical dynamics between countries in the Global South. Focusing on the Global South is intended to complement the literature that focuses on either the relationship between countries in the Global North, or between those in the North and the South.

Research Direction 1: Forge Deeper Dialogue Across Marketing, Media, IR, and Political Science to Inform Management of Nation Brands

O'Shaughnessy and O'Shaughnessy (2000) suggest that the nation brand should act as an umbrella brand and help in differentiating the country's products from its competitors'. As cultural and creative goods might serve as a proxy for the nation, managing nation brands across diverse markets poses an extra layer of challenge. Consequently, managers must focus on contextual and historical understandings (Bonsu 2009, Cayla and Arnould 2008,

Karababa 2012, Venkatesh 1995). To illustrate, we turn to today's nation-states that were in the Ottoman Empire.

These states have had troubled pasts with the Ottoman Empire (İnalçık and Quataert 1994, Stavrianos and Stoianovich 2000) and the term Ottoman legacy does not translate into a positive image in these countries (Yilmaz and Yosmaoglu 2008). Between Arabs and Turks, mutually held biases still continue, with the common belief on part of the Arabs that the Turks were occupying barbarians and the belief on the part of the Turks that the Arabs betrayed them by siding with the British during World War I (Haarman 1988). Another major tension arises from Turkey's good political relationships with the USA and Israel (see Bengio and Özcan 2001). Although this was somewhat minimized when the then Prime Minister Erdoğan accused Israel for the Gaza attacks in 2004 (Murison 2006) and strongly reacted in Davos against Israel in 2009 (BBC 2009), the relationship is far from being trouble free.

Similarly, the relationship between the Orthodox Balkan countries and Turkey existed within the hated neighbour truism (Miscovic 1999), owing to issues of ethno-religious tensions in the Ottoman times and more recent minority rights issues. Tensions mellowed somewhat after 2001 due to the publication of *Strategic Depth* and the Turkish Foreign Ministry's goal of "zero problems with Turkey's neighbours." Holt (2004) suggests that culture and history can provide the contextualizing dimension of how brands and consumers interact.

Consequently, marketing, IR, and foreign policy need to focus on the political discourse in circulation, which is likely to be interpreted through an understanding of historical relationships between nation-states.

Within the web of above-mentioned relationships between the former Ottoman territories and Turkey, there are nation brand formation efforts. According to Van Ham (2001), the

responsibility for contributing to the assessment and management of nation brands are delegated to politicians. Bolin and Stahberg echo this view, remarking that “the political approach to nation branding is made up of analyses based in international relations, public relations, and international communication, where the concept of public diplomacy is at times used interchangeably with nation branding” (2015, p.3066). While public diplomacy aims to “manage the international environment through engagement with a foreign public” (Cull 2009, p.12) through direct relations with people (Sharp 2007), these efforts are not isolated from the commercial realm. Building on Sevin and Dinnie’s (2015) proposition that both commercial and public diplomacy are linked inextricably with nation brands, we propose that the current understanding of history, political discourse, and IR (both of which are intertwined with foreign policy and diplomacy) have a bearing on how nation brands are co-created.

Global consumers receive information and representations from media such as film, television, and social media, which contradict with nation branding campaigns. One of the most prominent theories that bring together popular culture, nation branding, and foreign policy/public diplomacy is the soft power thesis (Nye 2004), which contends that audiences use popular culture products as resources in forming opinions about a nation. Soft power is “getting others to want the outcomes that you want – co-opt[ing] people rather than coerc[ing] them” (Nye 2004, p.6) through events and cultural trade. Trailing on the soft power hypothesis (Nye 2004, Sharp 2007), previous studies have treated Turkey’s efforts at repositioning the nation brand as a role model in the region through (but not limited to) TSOs as tools of soft power (Cevik 2014, Salamandra 2012, Yörük and Vatikiotis 2013). For example, central to Turkish state’s efforts and the soap opera industry’s joint efforts are the appearances made by TSO stars around the globe. The most famous TSO actors have joined

ambassadors at receptions at consulates. The founder of Ay Yapım, the production company that exports TSOs such as *Kuzey-Güney* and *Aşk-ı Memnu* to more than 70 countries, emphasized that to export TSOs was the grand aim of his career at TRT, Turkish Radio and Television, and that finally government support through such events was in place.⁵

Research Question 1: What is the Relationship Between Politics/IR Discourses and Popular Culture Consumption?

IR scholars view popular culture as political texts, thus as sites where politics takes place (Franklin 2005, Nexon and Neumann 2006). The focus is on how audiences make meaning of geopolitics as they consume popular culture (Dittmer 2008). Conversely, we call for focusing on how audiences make meaning of popular culture as they simultaneously consume competing geopolitical discourses through news and public diplomacy. Adopting the brand-culture approach and addressing the interaction between political and symbolic dimensions of popular culture flows will help better facilitate co-creation and management of cultural goods and nation brands.

For example, IR discourses around Turkey such as the 2009 crisis in Davos, its self-suggested role in the Arab Spring, the recent refugee crisis, its relations with the Kurdish population in the region and with the Islamic State are likely to be used in interpreting the nation brand's positioning through popular culture products. During the past decade, there were major shifts in relations between Turkey and the ex-Ottoman countries following the Arab Spring and the position adopted by Turkey in the series of events leading to the war in Syria. These created varying discourses in the news media, which in turn are likely to reflect on the reception of TSOs and on Turkey as a nation brand. Similar contextualization can be extended to other nation brands in order to identify the relevant discourses.

Recognizing IR as intertwined with political power, foreign trade, and inevitably with markets (e.g. Yalvaç 2014) creates new questions: For example, what is the interplay between popular culture as a force producing the identity of the people of Turkey, COO and the nation-state as an actor? An understanding of world politics and legitimation of policy require an understanding of popular culture (Debrix 2008). The context within which this dialectic takes place, that of the markets, and its marketing management aspects, need to be incorporated into this debate:

Research Question 2: How do audiences use IR and political discourses in the reception of popular culture products?

Recognizing that the soft power thesis (Nye 2004) may work in both directions, research must take into account the consumers' understandings and the use of current and historical political discourses. For example, it is important to explore how current affairs and wider discourses in foreign policy/IR and politics such as the Arab Spring and its aftermath, the Syrian War, and the recent coup attempt in Turkey help interpret and co-create the nation brand and what role these may play in developing the COO effect. When *The Valley of the Wolves* showed Turkish spies defeating Israeli counterparts, Israel sent a note of protest to the Turkish ambassador (McCarthy 2010). How does the circulation of this incident in the media affect the making of the nation brand? Not only personal experiences and education/knowledge but also consumption of products made in a specific country (e.g soap opera) and the depiction of country are used as resources in the formation of nation brands in the consumers' minds (Fan 2006). Media representation is more than the mere passive

consumption of news and may involve nuanced interpretations and understandings of IR and political discourses.

As Aichner (2014) notes, some COO strategies relying on media require a certain degree of knowledge from the consumer. What bearing do nuanced understandings of IR and political discourses have on COO? These questions can only be answered through historical and political contextualization, as “many of the determinants of origin image perceptions are grounded in cultural, social and political contexts” (Dinnie 2004, p.18). For example, despite the “role mode” positioning tried by Turkey (Ozdamar et al. 2014) and the popularity of *The Valley of the Wolves* (see Yanik 2009b), Turkey was not able to fully develop in its role as the spokesperson for the Middle East. The countries that declared independence from the Ottoman Empire after WWI are likely to interpret Turkey’s role in the Syrian War and the Gaza Conflict or its relationship with the EU and the USA differently than would, say, a country in South America:

Research Question 3: How does the interplay between IR/political discourses and the consumption of popular culture products figure in the co-creation of COO and nation brands?

Research Direction 2: Recognizing Specific Historical and Political Tensions in the Global South

Strategic Depth claims not to have any imperial agenda (Davutoglu 2001) despite counter evidence and analysis (Fisher-Onar 2009). The Ottoman Empire adopted its Western counterparts’ colonial mind-set during its later stages: “as [the] 19th century drew to a close, the Ottomans adopted a colonial stance towards the people of the periphery of their

Empire. Colonialism came to be seen as a modern way of living” (Deringil 2003, p.313). However, the Ottoman Empire has been and Turkey is in the semi-periphery, which acts as the periphery for the core and as the core to some countries in the periphery (Wallerstein 1976). The word colonizer is used for the countries in the global core/center (ibid). Hence, the term post-colonial does not technically apply to the post-Ottoman sphere. However, the relationship between nation-states that were in the former Ottoman Empire and Turkey may harbour tensions that echo post-colonial ones. The similarities and particularities of the Ottoman Empire in comparison to Western empires (Deringil 2003, İnalçik 1993, Karababa 2012) suggest the possibility of tensions comparable to those in post-colonial markets of Western empires. As outlined by Bryce (2013), the discursive implications of the Ottoman presence have not been previously scrutinized in literature on imperialism such as Said’s. How this figures in the co-creation of Turkey as a nation brand is important as literature over-emphasizes the aftermath of Western empires.

Similarly, the reception of popular culture has been mainly studied from the perspective of consumers in the ex-colonies of the Western empires (e.g. Abu-Lughod 1995, Denegri-Knott et al. 2012, Miller 1995, Varman and Belk 2012). Few studies also exist on the post-colonial experiences of Korea and Taiwan in relation to Japan (e.g. Iwabuchi 2001, Mato 2005; Shim 2006). Focusing on such tensions in a non-Western context illuminates the management of nation brands and cultural and creative trade among developing countries, partially answering Izberk-Bilgin’s (2010) call to study the market(ing)-based relationships between countries in the Global South. While it is not the aim of this note to extend and apply tropes of post-colonial theory to the Ottoman Empire, the aftermath of how the tensions arising

from the common tumultuous past reflects in today's market based relationships between countries warrants attention.

Research Question 4. How do tensions of an imperial aftermath in a non-Western context reflect on the co-creation of nation brands?

Ger (2013) notes that markets cannot be disembedded from the institutions, ideologies, and the discourses at a specific time and space. Apart from the relations between nation-states, these discourses are based on gender and religion. The contemporary marketplace harbours tensions related to gender (e.g. Chytkova 2011, Zayer et al. 2012). Women are subject to pressure both in the domestic sphere (the patriarchy of men) and in the public sphere (the patriarchy of the imperial power) (Holst-Petersen and Rutherford 1985). Soap opera consumption is predominantly seen as part of a woman's pastimes (Hobson 2003). The belittling of female soap opera viewers by men under the guise of concern for their welfare masks an anxiety over TSOs' potential power (Spence 1992). The popularity of male TSO actors among female viewers caused reactions from male viewers across the diverse markets (e.g. Salamandra 2012). The documentary *Kismet* follows the journey of TSOs across the Balkans and the Middle East and focused on the question "*Do Greek women have more in common with the East than the West?*" (Paschalidou 2013). *Kismet* suggests that female consumers find empowerment through TSOs, echoing Spence (1992):

Research Question 5: What is the relationship between gender and reception of popular culture in the co-creation of nation brands?

To the extent that it is comprised of cultural or normative patterns that define the expectations agents hold about each other's behaviour (Lopez and Scott 2000), religion is a structure that consumers navigate within. It plays a key role in imperial expansion (see Ashcroft et al. 2013). Religion in contemporary Turkish consumer culture has been studied (e.g. Sandikci 2011, Sandikci and Ger 2010), however, its role in the production and consumption of Turkey as a nation brand is unclear.

Abu-Odeh (1996) notes that the education for Muslim women aimed to prevent any tendency by Muslim women to become like Western women. The West was imagined as morally and sexually degenerate (Lee 2011), partly as a consequence of the 19th and 20th century modernization/Westernization processes undertaken by the Arab States. Despite the progressive items on the Turkish Civil Code, the gender cosmology in Turkey is deeply troubled (Lee 2011). Although discourses around sexuality, virginity, and women's place in society in general are commensurate between Turkey and the Arab states, because TSOs are from secular Turkey, they may be perceived as endorsing a Westernized lifestyle. Some clerics referred to TSOs as '*wicked and evil*' (Hammond 2009) and a *fatwa* was issued to behead the regional manager of MBC, the regional channel that was airing the TSOs, unless broadcasting was stopped.

On the other hand, in the Balkans, conversions of non-Muslims as a result of Ottoman victories resulted in ethno-religious animosities that still exist today (see Drakulic 2011): Many high court officials in the Ottoman court were children from aristocratic Christian families or were recruited and converted from low-born peasantry through the child tax levied on Balkan Christian communities (Mazower 2007).

Research Question 6: What is the relationship between religion and management of nation brands and popular culture products?

TSOs feature pre- and extra-marital sex, guns, recreational alcohol consumption, limited drug consumption, and treachery, but the values they disseminate do not diverge too far from the norm (see O'Neil 2013). However familiar the topics, TSOs caused anti-Turkish reactions. Kivanç Tatlıtuğ, the blond and blue-eyed lead actor who triggered the TSO craze when the failed *Noor* was broadcast in Saudi Arabia, was accused of wrecking marriages because he triggered the articulation of the Arab female gaze (Salamandra 2012). One show, *What is Fatmagül's Fault*, centred on the rape survivor Fatmagül, who fights the perpetrators of her attack back rather than silently conforming to societal expectations. This is seen as an inspiration for women's empowerment (Paschalidou 2013): interviewees see Fatmagül as the reason they were inspired and empowered to file for divorce. Similarly, the *1001 Nights* protagonist is viewed as a strong role model, even though she engages in sexual acts for the money needed to pay for her son's life-or-death operation.

Research on this topic is needed to examine Stern et al.'s (2005) view that soap operas unilaterally perpetuate the image of the vulnerable woman as a role model. Do TSOs open up other avenues for discussion and for setting expectations regarding the modified gender relations, or do they reinforce the image of vulnerable women as role models? While it is not suggested that all TSOs feature healthy role models, some such as *What is Fatmagül's Fault* and *Time Passes By* feature powerful yet traditional female role models and modern yet nostalgic family ties, which may resonate among viewers. These nuances illuminate the question of whether such perceptions contribute to Turkey's nation brand identity, forged by both state- and non-state actors, and nation brand image, as interpreted by consumers,

as the in-between/liminal force containing Eastern philosophy, conservativeness, and pro-Western values at the same time.

Research Question 7: How does religion interact with gender in the production and consumption of the nation brand?

The cultural imperialism thesis argues that TV products are imposed upon less powerful nations as ideological instruments (Sinclair 1990, p.40). However, Hall (1980) and Spence (1992) see the audience as active in picking elements from cultural offerings for local use, for getting back at the dominating centre, and for gratifying needs. Yanardağoğlu and Karam (2013) concluded that unlike Western soap operas, TSOs are not perceived as an attack on local culture in Palestine and Lebanon, despite tentative counter evidence (Yalkin and Mumcu 2011). How does the featuring of wine-consuming, pre- and extra-marital sex practicing female protagonists resonate with consumers in Muslim markets? What tensions and resistance do they trigger or what needs do such depictions gratify? How do these interact with political discourses to co-create the nation brand? While *The Magnificent Century* is a commercial success, its reception in the Balkans triggered memories of slavery and occupation, stirring resentment against perceived cultural imperialism (Yalkin, forthcoming). How does the image of a secular yet Muslim family life resonate with Christian audiences and how does it relate to Turkey's nation brand identity? Understanding such nuance is necessary for a contextualized brand-culture approach as studying market offerings (be it soap operas or nation brands) that clash with local values is important as market-related tensions are resolved through resistance strategies (Eckhardt and Mahi

2012). How possible tensions are resolved and the implications of these for managing nation brands need exploration:

Research Question 8: How do consumers resolve tensions or conflicts that emanate from cultural products?

Understanding the specific conflicts and tensions experienced by consumers, and studying what resistance tactics, if any, they engage in is necessary. Similarly, understanding the reactions of other co-creators such as the state and the commercial actors in receiving countries engage in is necessary. Finally, studying whether the positioning of the receiver country's nation brand is modified in the face of such popular culture imports will provide a more complete understanding.

CONCLUSION

This paper maps out research directions for rethinking the dialogue and the previously accepted relationships among different disciplines that study nation-brands, and for exploring the nation-branding practices of countries in the Global South. Through these research directions, it contributes to existing theory by illuminating how consumers make use of historical and political discourses and how this informs both commercial and diplomatic co-creators of nation brands. In this way, Schroeder and Salzer-Mörling's (2006) discussion on how brand identity is co-produced by various stakeholders is extended to nation-brands.

Drawing on the case study Turkish soap operas, this research note demonstrates the utility of the brand-culture approach, which allows for the role of historical and political contexts

and tensions in managing nation brands to emerge. The research directions identified build on Schroeder et al. (2015) and Crawford (2010) in demonstrating the usefulness of contextual approaches to co-creating brands. In doing so, this note challenges the assumption of Nye's (2004) soft power thesis, which is based on an unidirectional understanding of how popular culture products are used as resources in managing foreign policy and nation brands. A brand-culture approach suggests that IR and politics discourses, interpreted through shared histories between nation-states, may help consumers interpret both popular culture goods and nation brands. Discourses circulating in the news about soft power may also be consumed as interpretive resources – and not always positively, challenging the assumption of the soft power thesis. In addition, as TSOs echo the Turkey nation brand identity (in between, modern yet conservative), the interaction between the political and the commercial realms potentially entrenches Turkey into this liminal position, similar to how the COO trope entrenches the Global South in the underdeveloped category (Varman and Costa 2013).

Building on Yanik (2011), Dinnie (2015), and Kemming and Sandikci (2007), this note also forges communication across diverse disciplines and illuminates the importance of identifying specific historical and political particularities and tensions between semi-periphery and its own periphery to inform the co-creation of nation brands. Identification of the particularities that produce tensions such as gender-religion interactions or the role of pivotal events in current affairs can easily be extended to other players in the regional and global arena. Focusing on both state and non-state co-creators of nation brands is necessary for such contextualization. Finally, understanding the role cultural products play in the co-creation of nation brands in the Global South builds on Iqani (2015) in that it focuses on the

flow between countries in the Global South. This context illuminates the marketing based interactions between developing countries, answering Izberk-Bilgin's (2010) call.

This note applies the brand-culture framework to managing nation brands. It links history, politics, and IR, and questions how consumers may use discourses in these areas in conjunction with popular culture products to co-create nation-brands. Consequently, this understanding has the potential to help decrease the gap between nation brand identity, as put forth by commercial and state actors, and brand image, as perceived by consumers. As the brand-culture approach enables viewing brands within their complex cultural, historical and political realms, and merges the managerial with the cultural, it is applicable to and useful beyond the context of nation brands.

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Table 1. Synopses of TSOs

Name	Genre	Plot
Noor (Gümüş)	Drama	Noor is a needlework instructor from a poor provincial family under wealthy Fikri's patronage. Fikri betroths her to his grandson Muhannad.
1001 Nights (Binbir Gece)	Drama	Sehrazat agrees to sleep with her boss in exchange for the money needed to have her son's life-or-death operation, they fall in love.
Time Passes By (Öyle Bir Geçer Zaman Ki)	Drama	Captain Ali and wife Cemile have 4 children. Ali has an affair with Dutch woman Caroline which leads to the disintegration of the family.
Forbidden Love (Aşk-i Memnu)	Drama	Young woman has affair with her husband's nephew. When discovered by her husband, the heroine commits suicide.
Ezel	Drama/Suspense	Betrayed by his trusted friends and the woman he loved, Ömer Uçar returns as Ezel for vengeance.
Magnificent Century/Suleiman (Muhteşem Yüzyıl)	Historical drama	Life of Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent seen from a harem-centric series of power-struggle events, focusing his favorite concubine of Ukrainian origin.
Kuzey- Güney (North- South)	Drama/Suspense	Two brothers fall in love with the same girl, Kuzey is devastated when Güney gets together with her. Güney gets involved in a car accident, Kuzey takes the blame on himself. (Adaptation of Rich Man, Poor Man)

What is Fatmagul's Fault (Fatmagül'ün Suçu Ne)	Drama	Rape victim Fatmagül refuses to stay silent after perpetrators walk free.
Sıla (Sila)	Drama	Sila is forced to marry the boss of a tribe in order to repay her brother's debt. She fights the injustice but Boran is willing to kill her to comply with tradition.
Kurtar Vadisi (Valley of the Wovles)	Action-Drama-Conspiracy	Agent Polat Alemdar wages a vigilante struggle against four Turkish families that control the national economy and against a former CIA agent in Turkey.