

CHAPTER 7

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION: TURKISH MELODRAMAS ON PERUVIAN TELEVISION

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ABSTRACT

The idea that guides this research is that Turkish melodramas participate in Latin American melodrama's cultural and symbolic field associated with shared identity matrices - urban and rural, tradition and modernity. This cultural and symbolic capital is expressed in the topics of love, feminine subjectivities, family, conflicts, and traditions. What topics do they offer us? What dialogues do they establish with our cultural matrices? What changes have they produced on Peruvian television? In Peru, melodrama appears as a narrative form that makes the social order transparent. A form of representation of life with its own characteristics: women as protagonists of their own history, women as competent subjects in the most extreme conditions, and female sisterhood. Some findings of this research show that Turkey's melodramas have displaced the Brazilian, Colombian and American industry -among others- as source of foreign titles in Peruvian television. The most important topics are love and family, while religion appears as a meeting point for two countries with deep Faith traditions. A shared characteristic of Turkish and Peruvian productions is the centrality of female subjectivities and emotions. Finally, Turkish stories mobilize the local industry and offer a new repertoire of images to the audiences.

Keywords: Peruvian telenovela, Turkish melodrama, gender studies, female subjectivities, cultural matrices

INTRODUCTION

Peruvian television has a substantial melodramatic presence. National miniseries and soap operas, as well as Mexican, Brazilian, Colombian and Argentine productions, have historically been part of Peruvian television programming. However, in 2014 Latina Television Network¹ decided to buy Turkish melodramas, which were successful on TV stations in neighboring South American countries. The Peruvian import was made from Chile, and *One thousand and one nights (Binbir Gece)* quickly captured the interest of the audience - directly competing with América Televisión² for the rating. The premiere of Turkish melodramas on broadcast stations in Peru has been constant since 2015 and has surpassed the importation of Latin American titles.

The idea that guides this research is that Turkish melodramas participate in the cultural and symbolic field of Latin American melodrama associated with shared identity matrices - urban and rural, tradition and modernity. This cultural and symbolic capital is expressed in the topics of love, feminine subjectivities, family, conflicts, and traditions. These images, stories, characters and topics brought on a stage effect around the processes of change that are taking place in the Peruvian audiovisual dynamic.

AIM AND METHODOLOGY

This research analyzes the phenomenon of Turkish melodramas on Peruvian television. What topics do they offer us? What dialogues do they establish with our cultural matrices? What changes have they produced on national television? Analyzing melodrama and its varieties is necessary because it allows us to get closer to meanings shared by societies, to the spaces where different cultural dynamics are located (Hall 1997)

A mixed exploratory methodology is used in this research, combining different methodological tools. We have only worked with Turkish titles premiered on Peruvian screens in the 2015-2019 period.

- a) Recovery of the total number of Turkish titles premiered on Peruvian screens based on production typologies -titles, TV stations and programming schedules.
- b) Qualitative analysis of the content of Turkish stories.

1 Latina is the second TV Network in the Peruvian market concerning audiences, ratings and production.

2 América Televisión is the most important TV Network in the Peruvian market, the driving force of Peruvian fiction production.

- c) Elaboration of an analysis matrix for the systematization of the topics present in all Turkish stories premiered in Peru.
- d) Development of a topics' word cloud.

This methodological exercise allowed us to generate and observe the issues in which the Turkish stories are concerned about and the relationships that may be established with the Peruvian audiovisual industry.

Turkish Melodramas Conquer The World

Different authors argue that the success and demand for Turkish productions began in 2008 with *Noor* (*Gummus*). When it was broadcasted by the Saudi multinational broadcast company MBC (Middle East Broadcasting Center), *Gummus* and Mehmet's romance became a hit without precedents. Various factors made possible the transnationalization of Turkish melodramas. Mutlu (2010) claims that with the Republic of Turkey's establishment, the country entered a rapid modernization process. Some of the reforms led society's polarization around some dichotomies: Modernity / Tradition, Own / Foreign, East / West. For Mutlu (2010), the Yeşilçam melodramas on Turkish television collect these tensions and are represented in the conflicts generated by the difference in social classes and the existing differences between modernity and the urban of "the rich" and, tradition and the rural "of the poor." Cities appear as transcendent places, witnesses of changes and transformations, where the leading couple experiences their love in a context of difference and tension. One rich, the other poor; one urban, the other rural; one modern, the other traditional. These are topics that we recognize as similar to those in Latin America.

In these stories, the happy endings embody the possibility of managing the anxieties produced by the country's polarization, building representations that show modernity as something desirable, as a process that today's Turkey has to undergo. These melodramas are characterized by the cooperation between the traditional rural world and the modern urban world, and this characteristic express very powerful cultural proximity in relation to Latin America and Peru.

Lejla Panjeta (2015) points out that the stories of Turkish melodramas take up the original matrix of the great classic stories of history, expressing in the contemporary world an update of the "to be continued" as the narrative technique par excellence. Turkish cultural products also have their own aesthetic, expressed in camera movements, close up, slow motion, the complexity of the characters, their soundtracks, and the sound overlap as constitutive elements of each story. However, these characteristics were already present in Brazilian productions of

the late 20th century, audiovisual products that revolutionized Latin American melodramatic production.

Cavusoglu, Horn, Jerome and Cavazos (2018) point out that Turkish stories' success can be interpreted from Porter's Diamond model³: the capacities and demands of the market, the market conditions, the backings and institutional supports, and, finally, industry strategies.

Concerning the capacities and demands of the market, Turkish melodramas are installed in the cultural practice of fiction consumption and the demand of the markets. "Turkish soap operas attract a wider audience in these regions compared to American series, as they present a synthesis of modern life and customs / religion: *a unique combination of the foreign and the familiar*" (Cavusoglu, et al. 2018, 48)

Regarding market conditions, the authors mentioned above point out that it is indisputable that conditions in Turkey were favorable for the establishment of the *telenovela* industry. There is a close relationship with the established film industry, which is recovering after years of stagnation in the first decade of the new millennium, and has continued to show strength, both in the domestic market and abroad. Regarding institutional supports and backing, the authors acknowledge that the Turkish state has been the main driving force, with changes in state policies that encourage the growth of the *telenovela* industry:

For the *telenovela* industry, low prices for intermediate goods were encouraged by government subsidies and control of the broadcasting industry. This has contributed to the low initial cost of Turkish soap operas in international markets. (...). In 1980, TRT began outsourcing its television program production, which set the stage for the emergence of the *telenovela* industry (...). Furthermore, after 2010, the film and television sector received growing support from the Ministry of Customs and Trade to promote exports in the sector (Cavusoglu, et al. 2018, 49).

Cavusoglu, Horn, Jerome and Cavazos (2018) add that most of these products were filmed in Istanbul, a place with a unique historical and geographical background -a point of intersection between Eastern and Western cultures, a meeting place of two worlds-, that makes it unique. Finally, the *telenovela* industry itself has generated its strategies to be competitive in the local and international markets. When Turkish television ceased to be a state monopoly in the early 1990s, the different networks began to compete for the excellence of their products and audiences.

3 Michael Porter developed in the 90s an analysis model that is part of economic theory. Its model looks at the competitive advantage of companies from four aspects: capacities and demands, market conditions, institutional supports and backings, and strategies developed by the industry itself.

Yesil (2015) points out that there are currently six Turkish companies consolidated in the production of fiction stories: Medyapim, Bocek Yapim, Mind-Made in Turkey Produksiyon, Pana Film, TIMS Production and Ay Yapim. And there are three major distribution companies for his fiction productions: Global Agency, ITV Inter Medya and Calinos Entertainment. These companies have made Turkey the second-largest exporter of television fiction stories in the world. Some companies have established alliances with Western companies, while others have become international distributors of audiovisual content, selling their productions directly to the United States, Europe and Latin America. ITV Inter Medya, founded in 1992, currently maintains its business interests in Latin America.

Turkish products are exported to about a hundred countries, surpassing Mexico and Brazil in the *telenovela* export market. In the Middle East and the Balkans, they have replaced Latin stories, and in Latin America -where there is a long tradition of melodramatic storytelling- Turkish melodramas have had a brilliant rise, in several cases surpassing the audience of national melodramas. Regarding this Turkish phenomenon, Yesil (2015) affirms that the significance of the transnationalization processes of Turkish dramas is closely related to the flows of the television medium themselves -the melodramatic cultural proximity of their stories, the know-how of the Turkish industry and the dynamics of the global television industry itself.

A Look at Melodrama in Peru

Jesús Martín-Barbero (1993) points out that melodrama in Latin America is a privileged space to observe the different times of modernity, because it is a narrative of exaggeration and paradox, that touches everyday life as long as it lives from the time of recurrence and anachronisms, configuring spaces of primordial identities (Martín- Barbero 1993). Melodrama in Latin America lives in the *telenovela*.

A cultural matrix that feeds popular recognition in mass culture, a key territory for studying the non-simultaneity of the contemporary as the key to the miscegenation of which we are made (...) melodrama works in these lands a deep vein of the collective imagination, and there is no access to memory or projection into the future that does not pass through the imagination (Martín- Barbero and Rey 1999, 125).

Nora Mazziotti (2006) points out that the *telenovela* is a collective vocabulary that we Latin Americans share, a glossary that we can activate, share, discuss and contributes to our cultural identity.

Television started in Peru in 1958, in a context of illusion for modernity. Since its inception, Peruvian television opted for the melodramatic matrix -that of impossible loves, secrets, identities, lost affiliations and the exaltation of happy endings. The first titles produced raised a high dose of social content, denouncing social problems. Quiroz and Cano (1987) acknowledge that this “answered to a reality that was changing some aspects of the social composition of cities like Lima. Migrations to cities of the coast are larger, turning the neighborhoods into a new factor in the political game” (Quiroz and Cano 1987, 206). The founding character of the Peruvian melodrama will be María Ramos, the main character in *Simplemente María* (1969), who offers us a female model with agency, a model that escapes the domestic sphere and the role of wife-mother to fulfill herself as a woman.

Simplemente María presented an unusual character, but much more positive: the hardworking, creative, independent woman, who rises socially because of her talent, not because of her ability to seduce the boss with eyelashes flapping (Reyes de la Maza 1999, 64).

In the Peruvian case, melodrama appears to us as a narrative form that makes the social order transparent. In it, the values, fears, concerns of social groups that share the melodramatic experience are condensed. It is, in essence, a form of representation of life itself with its own characteristics: the presence of the variable race, migration as a possibility of female fulfillment, women as competent subjects in the most extreme conditions, women as protagonists of their own history, confluent love and demand for other masculinities, presence of extended families and female sisterhood (Cassano 2019).

Impossible loves, lost children, confused parents, heroines and mothers with agency, powerful villains, family relationships, intrigues and secrets are the elements and resources that these stories present to articulate their own ways of telling. Stories that seduce and establish themselves as “what we want to imagine” (Absatz 1995, 44).

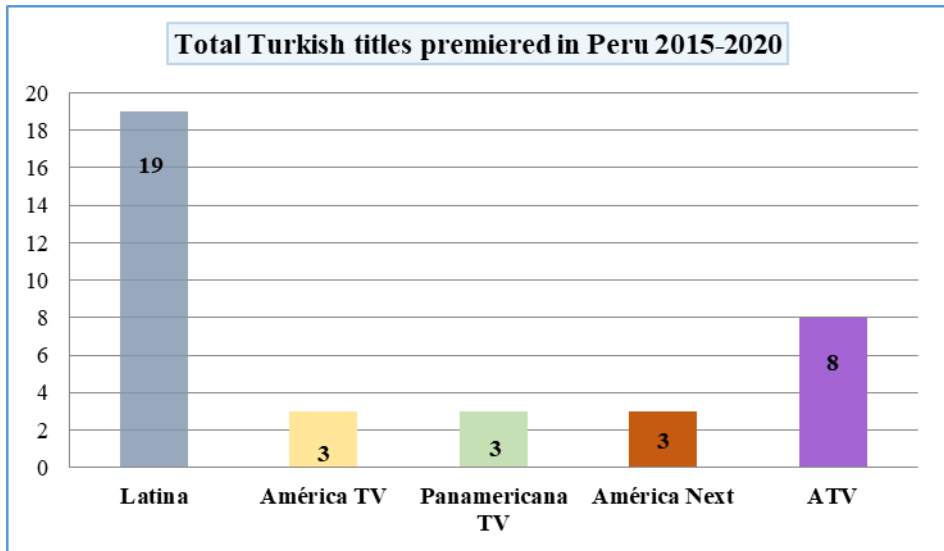
Turkish Fictions in Peru: First Findings and Links

To introduce Turkish stories to Peru, Latina mimicked the commercial strategy of Mega (Chile), highlighting the romance and the more traditional keys of the genre that these stories have. This:

... meant a shaking in the audience, in the programming of several networks, and in the production of Peruvian fiction, mainly from América Televisión, which is the driving force of Peruvian fiction production. Latina premiered the Turkish telenovela *Las Mil y Una Noches* (*Binbir Gece*) in prime time on February 9, and during the first week it broadcasted hour-and-a-half episodes without commercial breaks (Dettleff, Cassano and Vásquez 2016, 335).

By replicating Mega's commercial strategy Latina won a good part of the Peruvian audience, consolidating its block of Turkish telenovelas in the national prime time schedule (Dettleff, Cassano and Vásquez 2016). The success of these productions made the other TV networks buy Turkish content. Figure 1 allows us to observe how Turkish TV products had spread since then.

Figure 1. Turkish fiction by TV networks in the period 2015-2020⁴



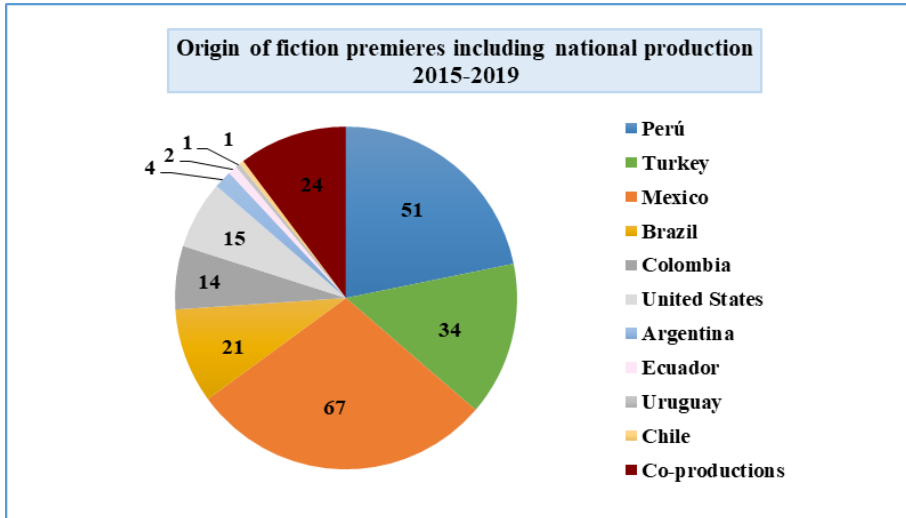
Source: Peruvian Audiovisual Observatory. Assembled by author.

In the period analyzed, the Turkish titles premiered in Peru are 36, with Latina and ATV being the networks with the most Turkish productions, broadcasting them in prime time, competing directly with local productions, but especially competing and surpassing the *rating* achieved by Mexican and Brazilian productions.

The success of the Turkish stories meant for the competing networks to reorder strategies and content, delaying or canceling several local projects, even though Peruvian stories were never surpassed in rating or share by the Turkish stories, showing how volatile Peruvian television industry is. Despite continuing their own projects, América Televisión -the leading TV network in local production- also broadcasted some Turkish titles: *Sila, captive of love (Sila)*, *La vida amarga (Acı Hayat)*, and *Recuerda cariño (Hatırla Sevgili)*.

⁴ In this figure the two titles premiered in 2020 are added, as it seems important to us to show the continuity of their presence and loyalty of the market.

Figure 2. Origin of fiction premiered in Peru 2015-2019



Source: Peruvian Audiovisual Observatory. Assembled by author.

For the 2015-2019 period, the Turkish fiction audiovisual industry became the second provider of fiction content on Peruvian screens, displacing Brazil, Colombia and the Latin United States. It also surpasses co-productions imported by commercial broadcasting networks. Mexico is the only country that maintains its dominant presence in the Peruvian market, a presence sustained by the cultural proximity and the historical proximity of shared fates. To highlight, *Sila, captive of love (Sila)*, *One thousand and one nights (Binbir Gece)*, *Fatmagul (Fatmagul)* and *Elif (Elif)* were on the top 10 most viewed titles on their premiere years on Peruvian screens, surpassing Brazilian and Mexican premieres. Although Brazilian stories⁶ haven't achieved the main spots of share in the last ten years, being surpassed by the most successful Turkish stories, meant a setback in the importation of Brazilian soap operas -especially from Globo TV⁷.

5 For the elaboration of this figure, the period 2015-2019 is considered because the complete data for 2020 is not available. The United States refers to Latin production. Co-productions are considered to be all those products made by more than one Latin American country.

6 Brazilian *telenovelas* have been present on Peruvian screens since the late 1970s. They have a captive middle-class audience.

7 For more detail, review the Peruvian chapters of the OBITEL 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019 Yearbooks. In: <https://investigacion.pucp.edu.pe/grupos/oap/publicaciones/?tipo=Libros>

Figure 3. Dominant topics of Turkish productions premiered in Peru 2015-2020



Source: Peruvian Audiovisual Observatory. Assembled by author

The topics with the highest presence are those related to love and family, tensions between social classes and power, the search for justice, marriage and motherhood as the consolidation of love. All of them are part of the Latin American melodramatic cultural field.

Other important topics are those related to heritage and religion that we can associate with tradition, the identity of the self, the past, but also with what constitutes our today. In Peru, the religious tradition is a constitutive space of local identities. The religion represented in Turkish stories may be different, but faith, morals and the divine are topics that summon us as a society, and they are important in Peruvian stories also. Yesil states:

For years we imported Brazilian soap operas. Now our writers prepare similar storylines, but located in the Turkish context. Different country, different city, different names, but similar storylines: Love, money, romance, and family relationships. (Yesil 2015, 45).

Turkish melodramas are oriented towards universal topics and are inscribed in the cultural matrices of the genre –love, passion, intrigue, class confrontation-, but geared towards a global world, making sure to wisely combine the universe of the local –tradition- with global dynamics –late modernity. They are particular, but minimizing the Turkish specificities; they are global without being absolutely culturally homogeneous; they are culturally close to Latin America.

A shared characteristic of Turkish and Peruvian productions is the centrality of female subjectivities and emotions, the story centered on female characters with agency. In Peruvian fiction, it had opted for female characters with agency, dedicated to their families but with their own desires.

In recent years we find Marian characters along with many female characters with the seal of rupture of María Ramos. Entrepreneurial women, young people with their own life projects, more empowered female models that distance themselves from the Marian image (...). This feminine model of empowerment shows the complexity of the generic construction itself since it makes visible the mandates, the ruptures, the affective and emotional overloads that women experience (Dettleff, Cassano and Vásquez 2015, 325).

By 2015, the topics of Peruvian productions continued to propose some interesting advances –oriented towards family values, racial discrimination, migration, women’s entrepreneurship, self-improvement and sisterhood-, reaching a good reception from the audience.

In this context, América Televisión resumed soap operas production - which had been put aside favoring miniseries -, recovering the maternal female figure. Among the titles we can identify: *Amor de madre* (2015), which tells the story of five women, their struggles, their children, their dreams; *Valiente amor* (2016), which portrays the story of a young orphan due to the confrontation between two families from different social classes; *Solo una Madre* (2017), which tells the story of a young mother whose newborn child is exchanged for another one; *Mujercitas* (2017), a free version of the classic story by Mary Louise Alcott; *Mi Esperanza* (2018) story that brings us closer to the love and sacrifices of mothers; *Ojitos hechiceros* (2018) telenovela that introduces a plot line about gender violence; *En el piel de Alicia* (2019), a story that focuses on making visible the problem of gender violence against women.

As we can see, the arrival of Turkish stories and their good reception boosted the local industry, producing a return to what was known, to the founding model of *Simplemente Maria*, to our own melodramatic cultural matrices. This is a bid to return to our essence, to our know-how of making soap operas. Peruvian productions preserve the traits of enterprising women,

but from the figure of the mother. In several of these titles, the mother is the protagonist of these stories, becoming an agent of transformation. If we look at the three most successful Turkish titles on Peruvian screens, we can recognize similar traits.

Title	Television Network	Broadcasted	Rating
Sila	América televisión	Prime time	27,2
One thousand and one nights (Binbir Gece)	Latina	Prime time	27,1
Fatmagul	Latina	Prime time	26,8

Source: Kantar IBOPE Media Perú. Assembled by author

Sila, Sherezade and Fatmagul represent women who make a journey towards their own autonomy, they find their own agency. They are characters that demand transformations in their environment; they represent feminities that demand other masculinities. And the Peruvian audiences of Turkish productions seem to recognize themselves in these stories, finding experiences that dialogue with their lives and daily experiences.

All this happens in a convulsed national context. In recent years, Peru has seen a growth of groups and movements claiming the struggle of women and LGTBIQ+ people. #NiUnaMenosPeru joins the projects for changes in national legislation to combat cases of violence against women. At the same time, the Ministry of Women and Vulnerable Populations works on public policies in favor of women and their rights to decide on their own bodies. All these spaces today face the onslaught of a conservative wave led by evangelical, Adventist and Christian churches, right-wing political parties with national reach and the international movement *Con mis hijos no te metas* -don't mess with my children-, who are seeking to undercut the recognition of citizen equality of men and women of different social, ethnic and gender classes.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In the Peruvian case, the arrival of Turkish stories into our audiovisual industry has generated at least three displacements in the local cultural dynamics:

- a) **Mobility of the local industry**, a return to our essence of domestic production with social issues that today summons us as a society.
- b) **Changes in the products, which are imported**. Turkish productions displace global products from the Latin United States due to their similarity in topics and to Brazilian products due to the scenarios, audiovisual aesthetics and topics. Globo TV ceases to be the leading exporter for Peru and is replaced by Record TV.

- c) **Globalization of cultural forms**, a new repertoire of images summons us as audiences, new geographical and tourist imaginations⁸ and proximity to other cultural industries such as music.

In this research, we find three discursive strategies in Turkish audiovisual production that make up a particular aesthetic wager: the use of close-ups centered on the hands and the touch of bodies as an element of action and the dramatic pause; the use of the *racconto* to locate the audience at a specific moment in history; and the use of the *voice-over* of the leading characters as an expression of shared thought, which expresses the character's desire. These aesthetic characteristics are key to thinking about the relationship with its audiences in Peru; one of the significant challenges of Brazilian productions for their vast consumption was the complexity of their plots. Turkish soap operas are also complex, but their aesthetic-narrative style may be facilitating the reading and interpretation of their contents.

We can read the Turkish stories in the light of the theoretical framework of melodrama as a cultural and symbolic field, since they show the tension between settings that coexist with the reality of Peru: tradition and late modernity; the rural world and the urban world; the myth of the past with the present and the possibility of the future. These Turkish stories recover everyday forms where recurrence, time of life, affection and family come together, and are probably directly dialoguing with polarities typical of our country. For example, in Peru, many of the tensions are manifested in the mishaps experienced by the coastal, more urban world, in relation to the Andean and Amazonian worlds, mainly rural.

Finally, the shared topics also reveal certain conservatism, of more traditional views of the romantic relationship –always heterosexual-, or of the idealization of female sacrifices in pursuit of achieving the goal of family happiness. Expressions that dispute with the modernity of female groups, LGTBIQ+ and minorities, laws in the quest of equal civil rights and more inclusive political projects that recognize changes in sexual and gender diversity.

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8 Istanbul has become a tourist destination for the Peruvian audience. <https://elcomercio.pe/opinion/rincon-del-autor/busca-onur-gustavo-rodriguez-358284-noticia/>

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