

# Turkish Studies Symposium 2012

## Sixth Annual Turkish Studies Symposium: Turkish Transnational Television – Reshaping of Diaspora Identities in Europe and the Rise of a Regional Cultural Hegemon

### **Symposium Poster**

*Organized by:*

**European Union Center**

*Co-sponsored by:*

**Russian, East European and Eurasian Center**

**Center for Global Studies**

**Center for South Asian & Middle Eastern Studies**

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*Symposium date and location:*

**April 27, 2012**

**2:00 pm – 5:00 pm**

**Music Room, Levis Faculty Center**

**919 West Illinois Street**

**Urbana, Illinois 61801**

**([map](#))**

*Contact:*

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## About the Symposium

In a pronounced shift in foreign policy, Turkey now is playing a more independent, active and important role in the Middle East and displaying its reaction more prominently to a lack of European Union progress in offering Turkey full membership in the community. Politics and culture go hand in hand.

The increasing influence Turkey is projecting through its foreign policy throughout the region has received significant attention in international media and academia. However, an equally important yet entirely new phenomenon—transnationalization of Turkish television—has not been fully addressed. More specifically, Turkish TV serials have emerged as significant instruments of foreign policy and cultural diplomacy. They also present a new way of creating connections to the Turkish diaspora in Europe and building a transnational Turkish public. These transformative developments warrant careful discussion.


Across Europe, the Middle East and Central Asia, Turkish and Arabic speaking populations are tuning in to the numerous satellite channels that broadcast Turkish and Arabic-dubbed TV series and soap operas. This half-day symposium aims to understand the complex connections between media use, cultural belonging and worldviews. It will address the implications of the transnationalization of Turkish

television for the immigrants' experiences and identities in Europe as well as the increased popularity of Turkish TV series in regions from the Middle East to the Balkans to Central Asia.

*Listen to the **Mare Nostrum** episode in which Sebnem Ozkan (EUC), Ercan Balci (Linguistics) and Mahir Saul (Anthropology) discuss the Turkish Studies Symposium, Turkish TV soap operas and pop culture from the region..*



# Schedule

2:00 PM	Welcoming remarks and introduction
2:15 PM <b>Panel I</b>	<p><b>OMAR AL-GHAZZI</b>, University of Pennsylvania – Annenberg School for Communication  <b>Title:</b>  <i>Neo-Ottoman Cool: The Rise of Turkey in Arab Media Space</i> (based on an article with Marwan M. Kraidy)</p> <p><b>Abstract:</b> This paper explores the spectacular rise of Turkey in Arab media space as one of the most intriguing facets of Turkey’s rising role in global affairs, and one of the most important recent developments in transnational political communication in the Middle East. Based on an extensive textual analysis of the recent coverage of Turkey in a variety of pan-Arab and national daily newspapers and magazines, we identify and analyze different themes in Arab public discourse about Turkey’s rise as a regional great power. First we discuss a long Turkish-Arab history of mutual stereotyping in books, film and television. Second we explain the emergence of Turkey as a key geopolitical and diplomatic player in the Middle East, heavily covered in Arab media. Third, we analyze the recent pan-Arab popularity of Turkish television drama and cinema. Finally, we discuss the launch of TRT7-al-Turkiyya, a Turkish Arabic language satellite television channel based in Istanbul and Beirut, signaling the official entrance of Turkey into the global battle for Arab public opinion. In combination, this essay concludes, Turkey’s new Arab-friendly foreign policy pronouncements, the rise of its “soft power” through popular culture, and the establishment of a government-operated Arabic language satellite television channel, promote Turkey to Arabs as a soft sell and contribute decisively to the construction of what we call Neo-Ottoman Cool. Against the backdrop of Turkey imperial Ottoman history with the Arabs, the rise of Turkey in Arab media space compels a rethinking not only of media and geopolitics in the Middle East, but also of our understandings of the links between media, history and political identity. Neo-Ottoman Cool, we argue, is grounded in a Turkish-inflected accessible modernity that is highly attractive to Arabs because it manages to combine a variety of hitherto separate and seemingly contradictory political, economic and socio-cultural elements in one seductive “package,” what one Arab columnist captured as “[A] European, Islamic, Secular, Capitalist Turkey.” The essay ends with a discussion of the challenges and opportunities that “soft power” affords Turkey in a changing world order.</p> <p><b>BEYAZIT AKMAN</b>, Illinois State University – Department of English  <b>Title:</b> <i>Self-Inflicted Orientalism in Turkish Historical Drama on TV and Cinema: The</i></p> 

*Voluntary Acceptation and Application of European Colonial Discourse in Contemporary Productions*

**Abstract:** Despite the exciting rise of Turkish productions of historical drama, most of these productions voluntarily accept the European heritage of Orientalist depictions of the Ottomans, Turks, and Islam in general. The portrayal of the Turkish/Islamic races as barbaric, primitive and vulgar; of the Turkish man as lustful and ignorant, of the Turkish woman as exotic and lascivious; and of the Ottoman harem as a hotbed of immoral and bizarre sexual encounters has long been a trademark of European colonial powers such as the British and the French. This Other-demonizing discourse served for centuries as a way to morally justify the subjugation of Middle Eastern peoples by reinforcing the artificial binary between the “sophisticated and democratic West” and “the ignorant and despotic East.” In this presentation, Akman will demonstrate that contemporary productions such as the Magnificent Century [Muhtesem Yuzyl in Turkish] are based on these stereotypical clichés and can therefore be culturally and socially harmful on a global scale.*Commentator:* **MAHIR SAUL**, Anthropology, University of Illinois

3:30 PM Coffee Break

**MYRIA GEORGIU**, London School of Economics — Department of Media and Communications

**Title:** *Watching soap opera in the diaspora: cultural proximity or critical proximity?*

**Abstract:** This paper focuses on the consumption of soap operas among women in the European Arab diaspora. Focus groups with Arab diasporic audiences revealed the significant role that soap operas play in sustaining a gendered critical and reflexive proximity to the Arab world. As a genre, both in terms of production and of consumption, soap opera represents a rich and contradictory ideological and moral space within media culture. The paper pays particular attention to the consumption of Turkish soap operas on Arabic satellite television. The popularity of Turkish serials among women in the European Arab diaspora intensified the ideological tensions and gender trouble around the television set. As will be argued, soap opera viewing provides female audiences in the diaspora with opportunities to reflect on their own gender identities as distant from hegemonic discourses of gender in their region of origin but as proximate to a moral set of values they associate with this same region. This was especially, but not exclusively, the case with young women born in the diaspora.



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**Title:** *Situating the imagination – Turkish soap operas and the lives of women in Peoria, Illinois and Doha, Qatar*

**Abstract:** Since 2008, Turkish soap operas have infiltrated television sets and computer

3:45 PM

Panel II

	<p>screens across the globe, captivating Arab-speaking audiences with their scenic landscapes, attractive casts in devoted romances, and tight-knit family units. They have also catalysed a steady influx of tourists into Turkey and have ruffled the robes of religious clerics in the Middle East. Amidst the backdrop of a globalised and migrating world, and through an ethnic and social mix of women in Peoria and Qatar sharing an interest in the shows, the objective of this study was to discover what roles the Turkish soap operas played in their lives. Through the methods of one-on-one interviewing and focus groups, data was gathered and then analysed thematically, by drawing on Appadurai's concept of 'imagination' and Ang's definition of 'subject positions'. Both theories were fused with Athique's culturally motivated 'situated imagination,' which subjugates the imagination to diverse strata of personal identity, indicating a link between women's backgrounds and their use of imagination to counter a sense of loss. This paper proposes that through their 'situated imagination' women in Peoria and Qatar are able to fulfil needs created by globalisation that affect their social, political and cultural identity, and thus look toward the Turkish soap operas to position themselves in all three areas.<i>Commentator:</i> <b>ERCAN BALCI</b>, Linguistics, University of Illinois</p>
<p>5:00 PM</p>	<p><b>Reception</b> Levis Faculty Center, Second Floor</p>

## Videos

**Self-Inflicted Orientalism in Turkish Historical Drama on TV and Cinema: The Voluntary Acceptation and Application of European Colonial Discourse in Contemporary Productions**

**Watching soap opera in the diaspora: cultural proximity or critical proximity?**

**Watching Soap Opera in the Diaspora: Cultural Proximity or Critical Proximity?**

**Situating the Imagination: Turkish Soap Operas and the Lives of Women in Peoria, Illinois and Doha, Qatar**

## Speaker Bios

**Beyazit Akman** has received his Ph.D. in English literature and culture at Illinois State University. He did his M.A. as a Fulbright Scholar from Turkey. In his doctorate scholarship he has focused on (mis)representations of Islam in the Western discourse from late Renaissance to the post-9/11 era. His publications include “Travel Knowledge and Orientalism,” “Shakespeare and the Turk,” “Defoe’s *Turkish Spy*,” and “Orientalism on Cigarette Packs” in peer-reviewed journals, and more than fifty book reviews and opinion columns in Turkish national dailies. He presented papers and organized panels at more than a dozen national and international conferences, including MLA, M/MLA and the ASECS. His 700-page historical novel, *The Conquest* (in Turkish) about Christian-Muslim relations during the Ottoman Empire has become a national bestseller, selling about 50 thousand copies and is being translated into other languages including English, Arabic, Greek, Croatian, Bulgarian, and Serbian. He turned down the offer from a 75-million-dollar production that would buy the movie/TV rights of his novel since he was not able to guarantee controlling the adaptation and scriptwriting process. He was invited as a speaker to international book fairs in Frankfurt and Istanbul. Most recently, he was awarded the prestigious Smithsonian Baird Society Fellowship in Washington, D.C. and he studied archival materials on the representation of the Ottomans and Islam in the Western discourse. At ISU, he designed and taught courses on British Literature and Islam, Orientalism, and Post-9/11 fiction. His dissertation “British Literature and the Turk Before 1800: Representations of the Ottomans and Islam from Late Renaissance to the Post-9/11 Era” challenges the binaries of representation of the Turkish identity as it was constructed and transformed through the ages and genres. He is currently working on *Global Literatures and Islam*, a collection of articles, forthcoming in late 2012 and on his second historical novel on the Ottoman Empire, due this year.

**Omar Al-Ghazzi** is a PhD candidate at the Annenberg School for Communication, University of Pennsylvania. His research focuses on the ways collective memory and popular imaginations of history, as presented and contested in popular culture and journalism, shape constructions of Arab political identities. A former Fulbright fellow, he has completed a Master’s degree in International Relations at the American University in Washington DC and a Bachelor’s degree in Communication Arts at the Lebanese American University in Beirut, Lebanon. Omar comes from a journalism and media analysis professional background and has previously worked for the BBC and *Al-Hayat* Arabic daily.

**Myria Georgiou** teaches at the Department of Media and Communications at the London School of Economics. Dr Georgiou's research focuses on the ways media shape discourses of identity and citizenship within transnational and urban contexts. Her book *Diaspora, Identity and the Media* (2006, Hampton Press) was an ethnographic exploration of the relationship between media consumption and identity in London and New York. She has recently completed research within the EU-funded project *Media & Citizenship* in three European capital cities – London, Madrid and Nicosia. The project examined the role of satellite television in Arabic audiences' sense of belonging. Her next book *Media and the City* is currently in preparation (forthcoming, Polity Press).

**Dima Issa** is a lecturer of Mass Communication at the University of Balamand in Lebanon. She graduated from the Lebanese American University with a BA in Communication Arts, emphasising in Journalism and Theatre. Today, she has an MSc from the London School of Economics in Global Media and Communications and an MA from the University of Southern California in Global Communications. Her research at both institutions focused on the roles of media in the construction of identity within transnational audiences. Dima's professional experience includes working for the Doha Asian Games 2006, as the Head of Publications and Website. In addition she worked as a Television Anchorwoman in Qatar for over five years and took on various projects in the capacity of a consultant. She has lived in Qatar, Canada, London, Los Angeles and Lebanon.