

What Do Soap Operas Tell About Family Relationships?

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KEYWORDS Family. Relationships. Turkish TV Serials. Needs. Aramizda Kalsin

ABSTRACT Focusing on a popular Turkish soap opera “Aramizda Kalsin” broadcasted at the prime-time on a national Turkish TV channel, this paper seeks to investigate the influence of family relationships on the audience. This research is designed as a case study of the Turkish Cypriots young adults who are tertiary students. In the research, qualitative methodology is used. Data collection has been realized through observation, field notes and semi-structured interviews and analyzed thematically. Participants’ responses indicate differences of audience attitudes towards watching television. Family relationships in the serial are reacted positively; however, cultural issues in marriage and divorce are found problematic. Almost all participants consider that the family relations, marriage and divorce represent the values of the Turkish society. Since people learn about different families through the television serials, this paper proves the significance of presenting good examples in the TV series.

INTRODUCTION

“[D]izzying developments in the transportation and communication facilities changed the world into a global village made different societies closer each other ever than before” (Arbatli and Kurar 2015:32). Turkish television serials which started to be produced in the last quarter of the 20th century started to flourish at the outset of the new millennium. What is more, in addition to their national popularity, they started to gain international popularity. The variety of TV serials has impact on TV watching times and influence on audience (Goktepe 2015). Most studies aim to understand all aspects of the rich and complex world of television series (Innocenti et al. 2015). Indeed, recently the television has become the ultimate story teller for the Turkish and Turkish Cypriot people. While telling the stories, the television informs people on issues such as cultural values, popular culture etc. Docker (1987) maintains that “By presenting the happenings on the screen as reality, control is exerted over the masses by the dominant values of society” (as cited in Moodley 1998: 4). With this framework, this paper seeks to look at what Turkish Cypriots learn from television serials in general and TV serial: Aramizda Kalsin in particular.

Learning is a life-long process. Schools are institutions which provide formal learning envi-

ronments. After schooling, learning takes upon a rather personal form. Learning during the formal education is conscious; learning after formal education is mostly uncommon.

The media stand as the ultimate information provider after schooling. Learning from the television serials takes places in a relaxed atmosphere and thus taken upon the form of unconscious learning. Al-Sayed (2010:7) explains this as: “[T]he media-television in particular-have been criticized for cultivating a set of values and beliefs.”

Television provides the audience a variety of programs from which the audience makes choices according to their interests. TV serials, in a way, produce the necessary ground for popular culture. Fiske (1989) explains that popular culture is not consumption but popular culture is culture. It provides active process of circulating and generating meanings in social system. Also, Fiske (1989) points out that popular culture is product of people and it is not product of the cultural industry.

Currently, people have lots of opportunities to follow TV serials. For instance, the invention of various new media technologies, viewers now can have access to hundreds of television channels (Squires 2009). TV serials mostly present family lives. Based on this, this paper seeks to explore Turkish Cypriots’ view in relation to family relationships presented in the popular Turkish TV serial Aramizda Kalsin.

Purpose of the Paper

This paper aims at focusing on a soap opera to investigate the importance of television for learning family relationships. The significance of this paper is that it seeks to reveal participants' views with respect to family relationships in the prime-time TV serial: "Aramizda Kalsin". This serial is preferred because a wide range of people follow it and it represents Turkish cultural values, popular culture etc. The ultimate aim of this paper is to investigate; how family communication is represented in "Aramizda Kalsin". In relation to this aim, this paper seeks to focus on Turkish Cypriot's views. Thus, this paper seeks to explore a groups of participants' views about the representation of family in the popular television serial Aramizda Kalsin in Spring 2014. Hence, the research objectives are to explore:

- ♦ how family relationships are represented in TV Serial Aramizda Kalsin;
- ♦ how cultural values about family are represented in TV serial Aramizda Kalsin;
- ♦ what the reasons for watching TV serials are;
- ♦ what the reasons for watching Aramizda Kalsin are;
- ♦ how mother communicates with her children;
- ♦ how father communicates with his children;
- ♦ what relatives roles are in the family;
- ♦ how wife and husband relationships work;
- ♦ how cultural differences cause problems in marriage;
- ♦ how divorce is represented.

Television started in Cyprus earlier than Turkey. Before the Republic of Cyprus in 1960, Cyprus Broadcasting Corporation was founded and broadcasted mainly in English and Greek. Turkish was given as the third language in news bulletin and a Turkish feature film was broadcasted once in the last Friday night of every month. This changed after 1974 and Turkish Radio Televiosn corporation started to broadcast to the North of the island. After this, television programmes started to be broadcasted in Turkish, the mother tongue of the citizens. This increased the interest in the television. Especially after the production of Turkish television serials, television started to occupy even a more significant place in the lives of the Turkish Cypriots.

Indeed, television serials are one of the most watched production formats because television

has an influence on individuals by the values in order to offer to individuals observing the increase in the production of Turkish TV serials has increased in Turkey on the front rank in the world in terms of attracting international audience through TV serials. Also, majority of people regularly watch TV series due to their various contents and the way they handle social issues (Simsek et al. 2006).

The investigation and research on the mass media generally focus on consumer and media. When looking at the Turkish television channels, competition is available in recent years, especially in TV serials. Constantly new TV serials are produced. In the last few years, sitcoms have taken over. In other words, TV serials are among the most popular media and for the commercial interest of TV channels. TV serials are produced to entertain the audience and advertisements. Broadcasted the intervals in the serials and strategies such as product placement are used in order to attract audience's attention and thus produce income for the TV channels. In addition to entertaining the audience, the TV serials also stand as agenda setters.

"Did you watch such and such program last night?" This is how people start to communicate in daily life. Most people witness this situation. Watching television is enjoyable as well as going cinema; at the same time, watching television is cheaper than and is an easier activity such as listening to radio. Each year, billions of dollars and work load have been created through television technology and programming (Mani 2005).

According to Kocak (2009), young people follow television series, they (young audience) think that television does not reflect on daily life, because these series are not related to reality of events and people. Additionally, television has influence on culture in respect to changes, nonetheless, television reflects culture more.

As seen as above, recent studies are mentioned about TV serials which were conducted about Turkish TV serials. With respect to those issues, the researchers think that, particular points or particular parts are always focused on TV serials or any program of TV. In this paper, representation of family and representation of family relationship are challenged with respect to the prime-time TV serial: Aramizda Kalsin. This serial is a kind of soap opera.

The basic assumptions of this paper are;

- ♦ Representation of family relationship in the television serials provide a ground of discussion for family relationships.
- ♦ Television serials act as cultural indicators.

This paper refers to three mass communication theories: Cultivation Theory, Uses and Gratification Theory and Social Learning Theory.

Cultivation Theory

Gerbner (1998) claims that humans are the only species who live by the stories they tell. Thus, we can say that we live with stories. Also, Gerbner (1998:176) continues to mention about stories as; stories “do not come from their families, schools, churches, neighborhoods, and often not even from their native countries, or, in fact, from anyone with anything relevant to tell. They come from a small group of distant conglomerates with something to sell”. In the past, until the industrial revolution, stories were told face to face. After industrial revolution, printing press took the role over and stories were printed in books by printing press such as books. Gerbner (1998) points out that media is cultural arm and media controlled by the private establishment. He also elaborates on (1998) system of story-telling in television. According to Gebner (1998), a centralized system of story-telling is television. News, drama, commercials, and other programs bring coherent system of images and coherent system of messages into every home.

Additionally, Gerbner (1998) claims that common source of socialization is television and television also provides everyday information to houses as well as entertainment.

Thus, television is the main point of this paper and stories cover enormous place for the TV serials. These points are essential meaning for the analysis of collected data. Therefore, some points of cultivation theory will be used to find out level of influence of audience. Initially, Gerbner (1998) starts with cultivation analysis that is message system analysis to identify television content. Images, values and portrayals include most types of programs for viewers.

Gerbner (1998:181) points out that: Television viewing is assessed by multiple indicators according to amount of time watching television on everyday. The amount of viewing is referred with relative terms in three ways. These are; “light,” “medium,” and “heavy” viewing

Uses and Gratification Theory

Uses and Gratification Theory reveals the reasons of why the audience gives importance to the media. Cummings (2008) explains Uses and Gratification Theory as reason of using media and what sort of benefit people gain.

Also, this theory focuses on:

1. origins of social and psychological;
2. needs which generate;
3. expectations ;
4. the mass media or other sources which lead to;
5. different design patterns of media exposure (or engagement in other activities) resulting in;
6. need of gratifications;
7. other consequences of using media (Katz et al. 1974).

In addition to this, McQuail puts forth motivation of using mass media in respect to uses and gratification:

- ♦ to obtain information and advice,
- ♦ to reduce personal insecurity,
- ♦ to learn information about the society and the world,
- ♦ to find support their values,
- ♦ to add meaning to one’s own life,
- ♦ to empathize with the problems of others,
- ♦ to obtain a basis for social contact,
- ♦ to provide backups for social contacts,
- ♦ to feel connected with others,
- ♦ to escape from escape from problems and trouble,
- ♦ to provide input an imaginary world,
- ♦ to fill time (Spending Time),
- ♦ to experience emotional relaxation,
- ♦ to give structure to your daily routine.

Uses and Gratification Theory supports that audience is actively selective instead of being a passive receiver. Turkish audience investigates one of the TV channels or programs to satisfy any need and when program finishes, Turkish audience change the channel (Kocak 2009).

Social Learning Theory

The effect of television on audience is best explained by Bandura and his colleagues Ross and Ross (1961) in their Social Learning Theory. Haider (2005) points out that people do not only learn anything in classroom, people can learn something by observing. Social Learning Theo-

ry is based on theory of human behavior. However Bandura and people claimed that reason of mass communication to express media effect (Haider 2005). Film and televised modeling help children and adults learn attitudes, emotional responses and new styles (Bandura 1977: 39, cited in Haider 2005).

METHODOLOGY

Research Methodology

This paper is conducted as a piece of qualitative research. Deep and rich data are aided to indicate role of TV serials in people's lives.

Research Design

The Case Study design is preferred. The case is a group of participants from the Psychological Counselling and Guidance Department of Education Faculty of the Eastern Mediterranean University, Famagusta, and North Cyprus.

Population and Sample

The population of the research is the tertiary students in the Eastern Mediterranean University. From this sample, purposive sampling strategy was used. 20 Turkish Cypriot students who study Psychological Counseling and Guidance at the Faculty of Education in the EMU in Spring 2014 were chosen. All participants are familiar with family issues at least at beginner level.

Data Collection

Data collect were gathered by field notes, observation and semi-structured interviews. Initially, the researcher observed tertiary students in university cafeterias and carefully listened to their conversations and asked their favorite TV serials' name. Aramizda Kalsin is one TV serials which is popular among tertiary students. The researchers became participant observers and took field notes. Then, the researcher visited tertiary students to get their permission to attend the research to prevent ethical problems. Informed consent form was distributed to the participants and they were informed about all essential details about the research. A semi-structured interview checklist is prepared and conducted with university students and involves

questions on demographic information of the participants; television viewing habits of the participants; and their reactions to the TV serial. Participants were free to leave the research. Participation was on voluntary basis.

TV serial "Aramizda Kalsin" was on the air in September 19, 2013 and continues to today on Star TV. The general theme is family relations in a Turkish family. The main character of the serial is a woman with two children. She is divorced and had to return her family's home. There, she met a man and fell in love. The story develops on this plot.

Data Analysis

The data are analyzed thematically. Themes are gained shape with research objectives. The semi-structure questions are based on six points; reasons of watching TV serials, reasons of watching Aramizda Kalsin; how mother communicates with her children; how father communicates with his children; how relatives play function in family, how wife and husband relationships work; how cultural differences cause problems in marriage and how divorce is represented. These themes are determined while analyzing the data. Interview data were transcribed and coded line by line. These codes constituted the themes.

Validity and Reliability

Qualitative research methodology is used and methodological data triangulation is employed. For the reliability, both researchers coded and analyzed the data separately in order to achieve inter-rater reliability. This paper is based on constructivist research paradigm which is based on the assumption that knowledge is socially constructed and it may be changed depending on the circumstances (Golafshani 2003; Crotty 1998).

RESULTS

Participants mention that they would like to spend good time and relax in their privacy and be entertained at home. According to their preferences, people watch TV serials according to their own interests. Participants claim that "Aramizda Kalsin" is one of TV serials that involve fun and the audience gets anxious as the story progresses together with the characters of the serial. Through the characters, cultural signs,

popular culture’s differences among people’s life conditions can be understood.

Table 1 indicates participants’ ages. Age of participants range from 21 to 27. Before obtaining participants views, participants’ level of watching television was asked in respect to Cultivation Theory. Participants were asked how much television they watched daily. Then, the participants were divided into three groups as Heavy/Middle/Light Viewer as mentioned in “Cultivation Theory”. Those participants who watched 4 hours or more are classified as ‘heavy viewers’; those who watch television 2-3 hours are considered as “middle viewers”; and those who watch not more than 1 hour in a day are classified as “light viewers”. Yet, “Gerbner’s analysis only focuses on the light and heavy exposure to television” (Harrison 2014: 1). For instance, “heavy viewers watch more of everything” (Gerbner et al. 1976: 5). When looking through this aspect, period or duration of watching television can be an important variable about views of audience on serials.

Table 2 indicates that for how long participants spend in front of TV (their level of watching TV). This is part of Cultivation Theory. Female participants are in level between light viewers

and heavy viewers: “middle”. It shows that when frequency of males’ are taken into consideration, they can be classified as light viewers: this means that male participants watch television less than female participants. Semi-structured interviews’ analysis were done thematically.

RQ1• What are audience’s reasons for watching television?: The first question asked why participants watch television. Participants watch TV to maintain particular needs as suggested in Uses and Gratification Theory. Generally, female participants watch TV for a variety of needs. For example, 4 of them watch TV to get information.

Male participants’ answers are similar to females: getting information, spending time, feeling fine are common points. One of the male participants points out watching TV to escape from the realities of real life. This is one of the points suggested in the Uses and Gratifications Theory.

RQ2• What the reasons of audience for watching Aramizda Kalsin?: With respect to question “Reasons for Watching Aramizda Kalsin”; male participants point out: learning, spending time, daily activities, habits, needs, enjoyment and feeling well. These codes are classified under two themes. To feel well and to learn. Female participants mentioned their views about why

Table 1: Age of the participants

<i>Female participants</i>	<i>Female participants’ age</i>	<i>Male participants</i>	<i>Male participants’ age</i>
W.P1	22	M.P1	23
W.P2	24	M.P2	24
W.P3	25	M.P3	25
W.P4	23	M.P4	22
W.P5	24	M.P5	28
W.P6	23	M.P6	27
W.P7	27	M.P7	24
W.P8	22	M.P8	23
W.P9	24	M.P9	22
W.P10	21	M.P10	22

Table 2: Duration of TV watching

<i>Female participants</i>	<i>Heavy/Middle/Light viewer</i>	<i>Male participants</i>	<i>Heavy/Middle/Light viewer</i>
W.P1	L (1 hour)	M.P1	L (1 hour in a day)
W.P2	M (2 hours in a day)	M.P2	L (4 hours in a week)
W.P3	M (2-3 hours in a day)	M.P3	M (2 hours in a day)
W.P4	L (1hour)	M.P4	H (5 hours in a day)
W.P5	M (2 hours in a day)	M.P5	H (5+ hours in a day)
W.P6	M (3 hours in a day)	M.P6	L (30 minutes in a day)
W.P7	M (2 hours in a day)	M.P7	L (2 hours in a week)
W.P8	L-M (1-2 hours in a day)	M.P8	M (2-3 hours in a day)
W.P9	H (5 hours in a day)	M.P9	L (3 hours in a week)
W.P10	M (2 hours in a day)	M.P10	L (1 hour in a day)

they follow and some of answers match with McQuail's points. Female participants mentioned their views about why they follow *Aramizda Kalsin*: spending time, daily activities, habits, needs, enjoyment, feeling well, liking main characters and comedies. When these codes are combined, a theme appears: meditation/need to feel well. People have numbers of needs and look for ways of maintaining these needs. One of these needs is feeling well. Watching this TV serial makes the audience feel well.

RQ3 • How do participants see way of mother communicates with her children?: Female participants were asked about the way mothers communicate with their children. Data reveals that female participants share positive views about mothers and their communications with their own children. Initial codes for this question revealed the following codes: good to each other, friendly, sufficient, lovely, understanding and attached. Some of the male participants share positive views about mothers and how they communicate with their own children: good to each other, not real, sufficient, natural, unconditional support, fair, funny, understanding and lovely. A male participant disagrees with this. Generally, male and female participants' views are not far to each other. Only a male participant focuses on spontaneity of characters. Additionally, justice and unconditional support are mentioned. These points are always looked for in every relationship.

RQ4 • How do participants see way of father communicates with his children?: Female participants' views in relation to 'how the father communicates with his children' is positive. Bahattin, one of the main characters and 'father figure' in the serial, is approved by almost all participants. Female participants consider this character as: sufficiently emotional, real father, unconditional positive regards, helpful, emotional, as self-sacrificing, lovely and understanding. Male participants are also positive (altruistic, behaving well and love and helpful) about father's communications with his children. Female participants' answers touch on details more than male's answers.

RQ5 • What are relatives roles in the family?: "Function of relatives in the family" had been questioned. Cultural and social values also are questioned with this theme. Female participants focus on functions of relatives. Female's views are: supportive, connected, helpful-supportive,

supportive emotionally and connected and essential. Male participants focus on functions of relatives: supportive, collaborative, solution based, emotional support, essential and Turkish family. Almost all mentioned similar things in a positive way.

RQ6 • How do wife and husband relationships work?: "How wife and husband relationships work are questioned" and female participants' views were revealed. They mention positive things about this issue. Female participants point out that it is: lovely, respectful, connected, love and respect, no excuse, sensitive, unselfish and support. Also, male participants' views were revealed on same issue. They mention positive things about this issue. In relation to the first place, how wife and husband relationships work (male's views), these codes are revealed: fun, to be good with each other, fun and joy, lovely, not real and respect-common sense-good to each other. Almost all mentioned similar things in a positive way.

RQ7 • How do cultural differences cause problems in marriage?: Whether "Cultural differences cause problems in marriage" is questioned. Female participants consider cultural differences as the main cause of problems in marriage. Disagreement, problems caused by disagreement, inequality, lots of question marks and being unhappy are the codes appeared. Also, male participants has similar views such as disagreement, financial problem, equality, meaningless and pain-difficulties. With respect to cultural differences, participants (male and female) claim similar things but these things are not positive neither about culture nor marriage. Hence, cultural issues can always be considered problematic for every relationship.

RQ8 • how is divorce represented?: "Representation of divorced" is questioned and female participants' answers are illustrated. Female participants claim that divorce causes problems and not easy to cope with. Pain, difficulties, painful-loss, emotional and psychological problems, family support, unreal are used in classification. Male participants also claimed that divorce causes problems and not easy to cope with it. Painful for children, difficulties, problems, part of life, importance of support of family, role of culture and unreal are the codes used for classification. Male and female participants also have similar ideas about the divorce case in the serial. Divorce is an unexpected situation for people and is generally considered as a problem.

Shortly, these codes reveal themes that are needs and television, family relationship; culture and marriage and divorce in TV serial: *Aramizda Kalsin*. Reasons for watching television show differences. These differences indicate individual differences even in watching television. Family relationships are found as positive; however, cultural issues in marriage and divorce are found problematic with respect to this particular TV serial: *Aramizda Kalsin*. In real life, Turkish family seems powerful family and TV serial: *Aramizda Kalsin* is a good example of a powerful Turkish family. Additionally, cultural differences in marriage and divorce are generally found problematic issues and these situations cause problems and difficulties. Almost all participants also share similar views about those issues. Thus, TV serial: *Aramizda Kalsin* can be considered as a good cultural indicator.

DISCUSSION

This paper sought to explore the role of family through the popular Turkish television serial: *Aramizda Kalsin*. The findings indicate that the participants watch TV serials to gratify their needs. With respect to TV serial: *Aramizda Kalsin*, family relationships, family issues are questioned. The responses of the participants reveal the significant place of television in our lives. Generally relationships are considered as good, sufficient to each other. These are: mother's way of communication, father's way of communication, family relationships and relatives. However, some issues are found as problematic. These are cultural differences for marriage and representation of divorce. Each issue also is questioned separately by male and female participants to show differences. The findings point out that there is a no big difference between female and male participants' views.

In line with the underlying assumptions of the research, watching the serial created conscious with respect to representation of family and representations of family relationship in TV serials. Television serials are cultural indicators. Participants' views particularly help us see that these assumptions can valid. The family atmosphere is truly influenced by transmitted values from the media (Aierbe et al. 2010; Musitu et al. 2001, cited in Aierbe and Medrano 2013). The studies which have been rarely conducted cultural impacts. These kinds of studies should be

conducted on contents of TV serials and characteristics, contributions as well as turistic life of the regions (Ozkan 2013). As a result, today media and especially television cannot be considered separately from the concept of culture and it is a producer of culture (Arbatli and Kurar 2015).

The family is the vital institution in the society and people start learning in the family. Learning is not limited with school and family. If people are voluntary and willing, they can learn from every source. TV serials are popular among people living in North Cyprus. In this research, the importance of TV serials and their role in learning is discussed with particular reference to the television serial "*Aramizda Kalsin*". Television is a teacher but no one is sure, if television is a good or bad teacher because implication of TV is uncontrollable and change from one individual to another (Auter et al. 2009).

People use media to maintain their needs. Uses and Gratification Theory explains well why people look for gratification; it is based on some motivations. As already known, learning is a lifelong process and people keep learning from different sources. Media act as a teacher and television can also be considered as the prominent source of lifelong learning. It is easier for people to learn when they are in comfortable places such as their homes. In the 2000's, TV serials are popular around the Middle East in addition to Turkey (Sogutlu and Sogutlu 2014). In other words, Turkish TV serials are popular and popularity of Turkish TV serials increase day by day. Turkish TV serials are watched in 72 countries (Yanardagolu and Karam 2013). One of example of popularity of Turkish TV serials is that the broadcasting of some serials continue for 8 years. Turkish TV serials have been broadcasted in prime time during 2000's (Bal 2013). Rapid development of technology and using the Internet technology have become the indispensable needs of human lives (Sari and Aydin 2014:136). Popularity of Turkish TV serials are increasing because TV serials are following via the Internet platforms (Ozel 2009). For instance, this popularity is enriching by social media by TV channel with hashtags (Dagtas and Yildiz 2015). Smart phone application is an alternative for audience because audience can assess serials more than traditional ways (Cummins and King 2014). The most innovative features of the Internet aids audience to deal with every problem with respect to fol-

lowing TV serials such as language problems. Blogs and similar helping sites help audience to find any subtitle for foreign language TV serials (Martina and Palmieri 2015).

CONCLUSION

In short, family is an important institution in the society and this importance cannot be ignored. Values appear in families in the societies; therefore, TV serials are part of this process, because TV serials involve family characters and issues. Social values are constructed in the families; thus, popular TV serials have an impact on them. Also, the plots of local TV series in the 1980's and 1990's mainly upheld 'nationalistic and conservative' undertones, promoted 'family values' which refrained from questioning the status quo, in line with the political climate.

Television serials can be accepted as a reflection of our lives and representation of family relationships. Interpretation and influence of representation is important for audience with respect to cultural indicators, needs gratifications and learning socially. At the beginning of the present paper, story-telling was mentioned, thus, TV serials are a kind of story-tellers. People learn from stories. Additionally, influences of such programming be investigated in context to influence of individuals. We are learning and enjoying from TV serials about family and relationships within the family.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For further research, family and television studies should be conducted within detail to inform audience well about television. Especially, research should be conducted on television serials and family relationships to indicate importance of family in the society in the light of television serials because audience can learn a great deal from television serials. Through the representation of family in television serials, society can be mirrored on how they look like in television serials. What is more, researchers should emphasize how TV serials carry cultural values about representation of family relationships. Last but not the least, representation of families, family relationships and family problems (such as divorce, marriage, conflict) should be examined in detail to enlighten the society.

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