Screen Sultans: The Neo-Ottomanist Rebranding of Turkey Through Television Dramas

- AND -

Opportunities and Barriers to Achieve Digital Inclusion for People with Disabilities: A Comparative Analysis

by

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Approval

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Abstract

**Essay 1:** This essay focuses on Turkey’s Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (Justice and Development Party - AKP) government’s strategic use of neo-Ottomanist nation-branding efforts as a soft power tool through the production and broadcasting of its transnational Turkish soap operas. This study examines these national rebranding efforts by analyzing a particular exemplar program entitled Hakan: The Protector (Hakan: Muhalif). Hakan is the first Turkish Netflix series that is designed to appeal global transnational audiences, including viewers in neighbouring Middle Eastern countries, nations formerly occupied by the Ottoman Empire, and the West. This paper attempts to showcase how, through the examination of the story of Hakan, Ottoman historical revival and Islamic traditions are invoked in a modern Turkish television production that depicts contemporary society and mimics socio-political changes currently taking place in the country under the rule of the AKP.

**Essay 2:** Questions related to use of technologies delve deeply into discourses and experiences surrounding disability and technology and highlight the ways in which default modes of engagement and access are not accessible for users with all abilities. This study involves a comparative analysis of diverse scholarly works on the digital inclusion for people with disabilities by highlighting the potential to connect across disciplines as queer, feminist and digital media studies to acknowledge forms of difference related to disabilities also as a basis for gender, race, and class inequalities embedded into the design and organizational practices. The right to access ICTs invokes civil and human rights issues such as freedom of expression, freedom to information, political participation, civic engagement and inclusive education. Therefore, access is at the core of the legal definition of the public space and, to a great extent, online communication does meet accessibility requirements for many disabled people. In the realm of digital public sphere, digital inclusion and accessibility are essential to enable an inclusive participation for all.
Keywords: Neo-Ottomanism; Neo-Ottomanist branding strategies; television series; television dramas; Netflix; Hakan: The Protector; Hakan: Muhabitz; cultural production; Turkey's popular culture; national identity, nation branding; soft power; foreign policy; digital inclusion; digitization; information communication technologies (ICTs); people with disabilities, participatory culture; digital divide; accessibility; web accessibility; ableism; intersectionality.
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## List of Acronyms

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<tr>
<td>AKP</td>
<td>Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (Justice and Development Party)</td>
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<tr>
<td>CRPD</td>
<td>Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities</td>
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Essay 1:
Screen Sultans: The Neo-Ottomanist Rebranding of Turkey Through Television Dramas
Introduction

The production of the Turkish popular cultural texts may offer an intriguing opportunity to investigate the complicated relationship between societal changes and the rhetorical characteristics of different cultural genres in contemporary Turkish culture and politics. The formation of everyday life in contemporary Turkish society can be particularly observed through an analysis of the TV productions; including television dramas, adaptations of fiction, reality shows, health programs, and magazine programs. These textual formations represent significant indicators of the ideological and cultural transformations underlying socio-political changes occurring for the past two decades in Turkey. Television series have substantial importance for the culture since people spend a significant amount of time consuming these TV productions, making them an important part of their lifestyles. To illustrate, The Turkish Statistical Institute reported in 2015 that 94.6 percent of Turks say watching television is their favourite activity (Armstrong, 2017). According to the Radio and Television Supreme Council, Turkish citizens on average watch 5.5 hours a day, making them the world’s biggest consumers of television shows (Armstrong, 2017). These numbers reflect Turkish audience’s high consumption of the media products, specifically TV series.

George Gerbner had spent decades measuring the impact of high exposure to the TV as its media effects. His cultivation theory is essential in terms of unpacking the effects of consistent exposure to “recurrent patterns of stories, images and messages” (Gerbner, 1998). Cultivation analysis concentrated on the symbolic role of the television in the cultural environment as a way of forming predispositions that shape the audience’s mindset (1998). Regular exposure to certain representations intervenes in our way of thinking through the symbolic manipulation of elements, such as audio-visuals, messages, and positioning. In effect, Gerbner sees the construction of TV content as the cultural arm of the structure of power, which can be seen a manifestation of “soft power” as well (Nye, 2008).

Relating to the power relations, Gerbner says that the historical nexus of state and church is replaced with a new symbiotic relationship of state and television (1998). Thereby, Gerbner’s analysis provides a critical approach towards media products by highlighting the dominance of the power relations in deciding and creating content for
television productions. There are a number of other processes that additionally serve to the construction of the symbolic marketplace, such as the privatization of television channels, integration of banking and advertising industries into global markets, the increase in domestic consumption (Ergin & Karakaya, 2017). Scholars also point to the pluralistic nature of the popular cultural spheres that can serve as a social venue for a variety of cultural voices that might allow the formation of a “participatory culture” (Jenkins, 2017).

This essay focuses on Turkey’s Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (AKP) – Justice and Development Party - government’s strategic use of neo-Ottomanist nation-branding efforts as a soft power tool through the production and broadcasting of its transnational Turkish soap operas. This study includes a brief historical and political background about Turkey in relation to the shifting attributes of Turkish national identity. Explaining concepts of Turkish nationalism, neo-Ottomanism and soft power, this essay will investigate how Turkey’s government utilizes a number of strategies of outreach through popular culture, rhetoric, and broadcasting to create a new Turkish national brand of neo-Ottoman cool, that is articulated as more “benign and powerful” (Kraidy & Al-Ghazzi, 2013, p2341).

After providing an ideological and conceptual background, this study will examine these national rebranding efforts by analyzing a particular exemplar program entitled Hakan: The Protector (Hakan: Muhafiz). Hakan is the first Turkish Netflix series that is designed to appeal global transnational audiences, including viewers in neighbouring Middle Eastern countries, nations formerly occupied by the Ottoman Empire, and in the West at large. as well as the viewers located in the areas previously occupied by the Ottoman Empire. In fact, Turkish TV series have been playing a major role in changing in Arab-Turkish relations through strategic public diplomacy (2013). According to Kraidy and Al-Ghazzi, in light of the Arab uprisings, the “Turkish government has succeeded in constructing a positive image of Turkey as a politically and economically rising power” (2013). They claim that this success depends on the AKP government’s multiple strategies of using popular culture, broadcasting, rhetoric, and economical branding techniques in a soft power push that aims to enhance Turkey’s regional geopolitical and economic influence (2013).
Shifti
g Discourse of Turkish National Identity

A nation’s culture is a “combination of its image, reputation and national brand that emerges from a combination of its history, traditions, values, society, arts, and contributions to global civilization” (Cevik, 2014). In terms of building a nation, the dramatization of nationhood is key to construct and impose a national identity and position. Furthermore, these dramatic depictions of nationhood are closely related to the ways of branding a nation. Nation branding can be described as the “phenomenon by which governments engage in self-conscious activities aimed at producing a certain image of the nation-state and therefore can expand a nation’s soft power” (Bolin & Ståhlberg, 2010). In fact, in the 1920s, the Turkish national identity that was designed for the Republic of Turkey used to be based on citizenship, linguistics, homeland, and history that were detached from Islamic religious attributes associated with the Ottoman Empire. During the establishment of the modern Turkish Republic in 1923, the founder, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, re-imagined a new Turkish identity along with republican ideals of nationalism, positivism, and secularism (Bozdağlioğlu, 2003). Kemalism is the founding ideology of the Turkish Republic and served as the primary framework for political conduct under the rule of CHP (Republican People’s Party) (Ongur, 2014). Named after Mustafa Kemal, it was formulated around six principles: republicanism, nationalism, secularism, statism, populism, and revolutionism (Bozdağlioğlu, 2003). This ideology adopted a secular and modernizing worldview, which carried a political program focused on building a Turkish nation-state.

According to this modernized Turkish national identity that Ataturk re-defined, the values of the previous regime, the Ottoman Empire, were perceived as “an obstacle to progress” (Ongur, 2014). Consequently; Ottoman education, Ottoman style dress codes, sports, medicine, Ottoman alphabetic and metric systems, legal and civil codes were deliberately erased and replaced with a reconfigured Turkish history and a new future envisioned along the lines of western civilizational tropes (Ongur, 2014). Ataturk changed the Arabic script that was being used in the Ottoman era and claimed “these incomprehensible signs that for centuries have held our minds in an iron vice” (Bozdağlioğlu, 2003). Ataturk justified these reforms by staunchly advocating that Turkey be closer to the “civilized west rather than the backward east” (Bozdağlioğlu, 2003). The ideology of Kemalism situated modernization and civilization within a Western model of
development along with a particularly strict interpretation of a secular state. Accordingly, given that both Turkey’s geopolitical and ideological orientation used to face westward, Turkish foreign policy has since been angled towards Europe and further away from Turkey’s other immediate neighbours.

This abolishment of the Ottoman Empire after the victory of War of Independence led by Atatürk, also eliminated the most sacred and powerful Islamic institutions in the country. With the support of the military establishment, Atatürk eradicated Islamic institutions, starting with the Islamic caliphate (Cinar, 2015). Hence, prior to the Kemalist Revolution, Turkey was considered to be the leader of the Muslim world because of the presence of the caliphate, who not only held great power over Turkish Muslims, but over the entire Islamic civilization (Walker, 2009). Atatürk offered a perspective that the history of the Turkish nation is not limited to Ottoman history, it actually precedes the Ottoman civilizations. Atatürk is committed to the view that the ancestors of Turks founded powerful states and owned far-reaching civilizations throughout the history (Bozdağlioğlu, 2003). Atatürk also highlighted that it is fundamental to search and study this history to get to know the roots of Turkey and to showcase the far-reaching influence of Turkey’s nation (Cinar, 2015).

Nationalism is an ideological instrument in the building of hegemony and one that is closely dependent on the power struggles. Different social forces attempt to embody nationalism and integrate it to their political projects (Saracoglu & Demirkol, 2015). Considering the origins of Turkish nationhood, the discourse surrounding the contemporary Turkish national identity has been going through fundamental changes. In 2002, the AKP party, under the leadership of Recep Tayyip Erdogan gained wide support with its attempt to revert from Kemalism to an Ottoman identity, which was represented as more inclusive and tolerant towards the conservative intelligentsia (Batuman, 2010). The most remarkable change in AKP’s conception of nationalism is the role attributed to Muslimness in determining the identity and the scope of the nation. In the AKP period, the weight of Muslimness as the concrete content of the national identity has dramatically increased, and the nature of its role has also undergone a substantial change. Under AKP’s nationalism, Sunni-Muslim values are no longer conceived solely as one of the prevailing cultural features of “Turkishness” itself, but have become the core element in the definition of what the “nation” is (Saracoglu & Demirkol, 2015). In other words, Islam is no longer a cultural component of Turkishness,
but has instead become an independent identity in itself, and is no longer necessarily derived from or instrumentalized for the idea of Turkishness (2015). Accordingly, Erdogan, currently the president of the country, has positioned himself as a "conservative democratic" in the Turkish political spectrum (Taspinar, 2008). As a result of its Islamic roots and outlook, AKP—now the ruling party in Turkey—has focused on the unifying character of the Ottoman Empire and the Muslim values inherited by the Turkish Republic. The AKP government has strong roots in political Islam, which can be seen as the explanation and justification for this identity-based approach to the construction of nation. Articulating a new vision for Turkey that is not dependent on the west, while actively pursuing ways to balance its relationships and alliances, the AKP’s strategy gained wide support from the public (Walker, 2009).

The AKP’s determined foreign policy orientation is a constitutive component of a nationalist project that has been constructed and carried out by the AKP over the last 17 years and it is intricately related to “the party’s quest to build a their conception of the nation” (Saracoglu & Demirkol, 2015). In this sense, the proposed new strategic outlook is not merely national but also regional, and it shifts Turkey’s self-perception as being on the periphery to the understanding that the country is in the very center of important historical developments (Walker, 2009). Ibrahim Kalın, former chief foreign policy advisor to Erdogan and current chief counselor to the president of the Turkish Republic since 2018, indicates that “these features of Turkey’s culture are conceived and introduced as historical assets in its drive to become a regional leader and a respectable state within existing global power relations” (Kraidy & Al-Ghazzi, 2013). The adoption of such a political strategy was unprecedented in Turkish Republic's history as the national values of the Turkish national identity were once strictly dependent on western democratic values, secularism, and a sharp detachment from the Ottoman Empire.

NeO-Ottomanism and Foreign Policy

The specificity of AKP’s nationalism can be examined in the party’s distinct formulation of the nation’s interests. As the nation’s identity is reconstructed with reference to the Ottoman past, the national interest is defined as becoming “a great nation” or creating a country as grand and powerful as the Ottoman Empire (Ongur 2014). This redefinition of national interest closely relates with the critique of the earlier conception of foreign policy that tended to isolate Turkey from the Middle East caused
by the disaffection towards Islam. Kemalist foreign policy, in this discourse, has been accused of adopting an unnecessarily passive stance against world affairs and failing to make use of the potential political influence through its history, geography, and culture (Cinar, 2015). This re-invented Turkish identity project is guided by the neo-Ottomanist political movement, which was initiated in the mid-1980s by the former Prime Minister Turgut Ozal’s neoliberal government (Taspinar, 2008). However, in the 80s, the concept of neo-Ottomanism remained primarily within the confines of foreign policy, and it has not been disseminated through cultural channels (Saracoglu & Demirkol, 2015). And “the practice of neo-Ottomanism in the current AKP era represents a more complex and socially effective process” (Ongur, 2014). A key notion within the neo-Ottoman discourse is “strategic depth” which can be simplified as a combination of historical resonance and geographic scale (Davutoglu, 2010). Foreign policy discourse in a country is generally considered to be an extension of the state’s official ideology, which can be interpreted as more stable and rigid compared to the party ideologies that are more populist, pragmatic, and flexible. The significant degree of consistency between the AKP’s understanding of nationalism and foreign policy discourse presented in the last decade suggests, “the party’s conception of nationalism is becoming the new official ideology of the Turkish state” (Saracoglu & Demirkol, 2015).

Ahmet Davutoğlu, former 42nd Minister of Foreign Affairs from AKP (and former Prime Minister), explained his country’s zero problems with neighbouring countries as foreign policy doctrine that is essential for Turkish strategic positioning. According to Davutoğlu (2010), entails his adoption of a new discourse and diplomatic style, which has resulted in the spread of Turkish soft power in the region. Turkish diplomats and politicians have adopted a new language in regional and international politics that prioritizes Turkey’s civil-economic power. Davutoglu’s statements below reveal how AKP officials perceive the historic mission of the Turkish state: “The other states say to us, ‘do not engage in adventures in foreign policy, do not follow an active politics,’ and we keep saying: ‘Turkey has always been a subject, can never be objectified,’ we have always been a subject, and no one can make this nation an object. We should do what our history necessitates. This nation has always been a subject of history and will continue to be” (2010). Davutoglu asserts that every country inevitably inherits from its geo-cultural and geopolitical features, which may transcend its existing legal borders. The states with imperial history often seek to go beyond their national borders and claim
activity in their historically determined spheres of influence. As such, Turkey, with its imperial history, operates a rational-strategic plan employing methods of infiltration into its own historically determined national interest that could be achieved the country successfully practices these strategies to maximize its influence in these regions (Saracoglu & Demirkol, 2015).

The relationship between the AKP’s domestic and neo-Ottomanist foreign policy projects at the international level is threefold. First of all, the AKP’s nationalist position has functioned as the major ideological framework and justification for its new foreign policy orientation (Kraidy & Al-Ghazzi, 2013). Secondly, this new foreign policy orientation and the accompanying discourse play a vital role in the formation and solidification of the AKP’s neo-Ottomanist hegemonic project. Thirdly, the future of neo-Ottomanism at the international level is not only contingent upon the course of inter-state relations and balances of power in global politics, but is also highly reliant on the success or failure of the nationalist project at the domestic level. The term neo-Ottomanism refers to a view that advocates the “Turkish pursuit of active and diversified foreign policy in the region based on the Ottoman historical heritage” (Suner, 2011). In this view, Turkey is positioned as a leader of the Muslim and Turkic worlds and a central power in Eurasia. Therefore, the foreign policy of the AKP government is often perceived as the realization of the neo-Ottoman doctrine, in the sense that it assumes the more assertive role of a regional player that mediates regional conflicts” (Suner, 2011). While the discourse of neo-Ottomanism sees the revival of the Ottoman past as a source of cultural enrichment and political empowerment, it also promises to revive a long-lost sense of magnificence in relation to Turkishness (Saracoglu & Demirkol, 2015; Cinar, 2015). This fantasy of magnificence is closely related to the "latent post-imperial consciousness," component of contemporary Turkish identity (Suner, 2011).

**Neo-Ottomanist Branding as “Soft Power”**

Ongur understands “the interest in nostalgia for the glorious Ottoman past as part of the national identity reconstruction in Turkey,” that re-imagines Turkishness as the continuation of an Ottoman-Islamic identity and restores the cultural connection that was supposedly lost during the foundation of the republic (2014). As a way to illustrate, government-supported services were organized to “supply free Ottoman Turkish courses for the public (through school curricula and beyond) "in terms of creating an
infrastructure for this revival of Ottoman identity" (Ongur, 2014). Additionally, Turkey shifted its foreign policy orientation from following western powers to turning to neighboring Middle Eastern countries. In parallel with these neo-Ottomanist strategies, President Erdogan has advocated a global approach, aiming to expand the country’s influence across the territories governed by Turkey’s predecessor state, through self-consciously invoking the fantasy of magnificence to make it appear attainable. Turkey’s accomplishments on the economic and international fronts have made Turkish citizens think that their aspirations to change might actually come true (Suner, 2011).

The multifaceted ways that this image was promoted served to construct a powerful national brand of neo-Ottoman cool, which was mentioned in the beginning of the essay by Kraidy and Al-Ghazzi (2013). The implementation of neo-Ottomanist strategies is essentially about projecting Turkey’s soft power as a bridge between east and west, a Muslim nation, a democratic political system, and a capitalistic economic force (Taşpinar, 2008). According to van Ham, “branding is an effort to use strategies developed in the commercial sector to manage, if not necessarily wield, the soft power of a geographical location” (van Ham, 2008). It is similar to public diplomacy, with the distinction that its strategies of image and symbols management and use of mass media are generally associated with promoting economic rather than foreign policy interests (Gilboa, 2008). A nation brand is also different from a national image due to the active role that policymakers and national elites play "in the shaping, changing and maintaining of their country's image" (Saunders, 2012).

In the case of Turkey, the AKP government has succeeded in enhancing its political and economic interests through popular culture and transnational broadcasting in addition to its political rhetoric, by strategically operating this attractive neo-Ottoman nation brand (Kraidy & Al-Ghazzi, 2013). Scholars have used concepts such as soft power, public diplomacy, and nation branding to capture different facets of the ways that states communicate with foreign publics, cultivate a favourable image of their country in other nation-states, and promote their political and economic interests abroad (Saunders, 2012; Li 2009). Scholarly literature exploring these issues often may be preoccupied with semantics and while lacking in theorizing distinctions between concepts such as propaganda, public diplomacy, soft power, hard power, and nation branding (Anholt, 2006; Li 2009; Melissen, 2005; Wilson, 2008). Propaganda and public diplomacy overlap in many ways, but the former has lost much of its analytic value.
because of its association with “pejorative connotations” (Cull, Culbert & Welch, 2003). Instead, public diplomacy began to be used in the 1960s to describe “the process by which international actors seek to accomplish the goals of their foreign policy by engaging with foreign publics” (Cull, 2008). Cultural production, exchange, and dissemination are understood to be key to public diplomacy (Cull, 2008). Similarly, Nye argued that “soft power is the ability to affect others to obtain the outcomes one wants through attraction rather than coercion or payment” (2008), the latter two being attributes of hard power. A country’s soft power rests on its cultural resources and political values, and on perceptions of its foreign policies as legitimate and having moral authority (Nye, 2008).

Neo-Ottomanism, then, should be considered as a natural component of Turkey’s growing economic and political influence in global affairs, predominantly the issues in neighbouring countries in Middle East. The AKP has implemented policies that have facilitated “the infusion of neo-Ottomanist ideals into various spheres of social and civic life in Turkey” (Ongur, 2014). As an illustration, the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople that occurred in 1453 has begun to be commemorated and celebrated every year (Batuman, 2010). In addition, construction of new Ottoman-style mosques and the renovation of old Ottoman buildings have dramatically increased in the past ten years (Batuman, 2010). Moreover, the entertainment industry constitutes a vibrant new sector for promoting the images of Istanbul and its Ottoman legacy, both inside and outside of Turkey. For example, in the local photography studios, people can have their pictures taken in Ottoman-period costumes, and enjoy the memorialized versions of themselves as sultans. Similarly, restaurants offer traditional dishes in their menus interspersed with the word “Ottoman” (Ergin & Karakaya, 2017). Relevantly, bookstores are often full of popular books and magazines presenting readers the story of the Ottomans, while Ottoman Turkish courses are growing more popular than ever. Five-star hotels and health clubs discovered a formerly disparaged Ottoman tradition and adapted it to modern consumption: the hamam, or known as traditional Turkish bath (Ergin & Karakaya, 2017).

Along with these popular forms of consuming the Ottoman past, the state is also promoting its own vision of the Ottoman past through events as the celebration of the conquest of Istanbul in 1453 at a panoramic museum, as well as by the dissemination of the vision of a multicultural, welcoming, and peaceful Ottoman past through public
speeches, textbooks, and publications (Ergin & Karakaya, 2017). Television series’
depictions of Ottoman themes reach millions of viewers, and are especially popular in
the former Ottoman territories of the Balkans and the Middle East. The capacity for
international communication is necessary to project power and influence through the
development of media capabilities. For instance TRT 1 is a channel that belongs to The
Turkish Radio and Television Corporation, also known as TRT, which is the national
public broadcaster of Turkey founded in 1964 (2010). Today, it is a group of channels
with programs not only in Arabic but also in English, Farsi, Kurdish, and various Turkic
dialects to enable reach to broader audiences regionally and worldwide (“TRT’s
Multilingual,” 2010).

The Rise of Ottoman-themed Turkish Dramas

Interestingly, in the 1970s and 80s, Turkish television was dominated by South
American series. In the 1990s, Mexican and Brazilian telenovelas became highly popular
among the Turkish TV consumers. Turkey had no private television industry until private
channels were legalized in the early 1990s. With the registration of these private
channels, “television production began to improve drastically with the implementation of
new technologies, advancements in film schools and liberalization of the mass media”
(Cevik, 2014). The television industry gained more prominence throughout this time and
started to receive huge investments. The initial expansion of Turkish dramas into foreign
markets began through an action-drama series called “Deli Yürek” (Crazy Heart) in the
early 2000s, which was exported to the Balkan states because, which was a step that
created further hopes for the Turkish film and television industry to become a global
within the cultural entertainment industry (Kraidy & Ghazzi, 2013).

Through large-budget productions narrating the stories of the most popular
sultans; such as Muhtesem Yuzyl (The Magnificent Century) a drama depicting the era
under Suleiman I), Bir Zamanlar Osmanlı: Kıyam (Once Upon a Time in the Ottoman
Empire: Rebellion) that is about the Tulip Era under Ahmed III, Osmanlı Tokadı
(Ottoman Slap) a fictional story about two janissaries during the era under Mehmed II,
and Harem, a comedy simulation of daily life in the Ottoman palace, the Ottoman past is
brought to life in audience’s homes (Cevik, 2014). Ottoman-inspired projections on the
big screen began in the mid-1990s with Istanbul Kanatlarımın Altında (Istanbul under My
Wings), a film about the first man who flew over the Bosphorus, and reached its peak in
2012 with Fetih 1453 (Conquest 1453), which grossed the highest box office sales in Turkish film history. It is highly noteworthy that these films and television series about the glorious Ottoman Empire come as a replacement of the previous popular historical theme “the War of Independence of the Turkish Republic led by Ataturk,” which reveals the reconstruction of the dramatization of Turkish nationhood according to various interests (Ongur, 2014).

The most notable example of Turkish TV series that are inspired from Ottoman Empire would be Muhteşem Yüzyıl (Magnificent Century) that is based on the life of Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent, who is the longest-reigning sultan of the Ottoman Empire from 1520 to 1566. The storyline has a strong emphasis on Sultan Suleyman’s concubine Roxelana and her journey in becoming the legal wife of the Sultan Suleyman through significantly dominating the harem. Roxela, later on named as Hürrem Sultan, challenges the norms of the society that she is situated in as she begins her adventure as a concubine only to become the queen through the ambitious pursuit of her dreams. The rise of interest in the formation of such series can be seen as a part of the Turkish trend called “Ottomania,” that is interpreted as the social phenomena that is manifested through “proliferation of Ottoman cookbooks, Ottoman-style bathroom consoles, wedding invitations with Ottoman calligraphy, and graduation gowns and flight-attendant uniform designs inspired by caftans and fezzes” (Batuman, 2010). Ottomania embraces popular culture with an emphasis on consumption of a wide spectrum of products, from bath packages to television series (Ergin & Karakaya, 2017).

After the series came to an end in 2014, the following series of Muhteşem Yüzyıl: Kösem Sultan (The Magnificent Century: Kosem Sultan) was released in Turkey in 2015. The series recounts the life of Mahpeyker Kösem Sultan, a slave girl who became one of the most powerful women in Ottoman history, after she was captured and sent to the harem of Sultan Ahmed I in 17th century. Even though the concept and the plot have been very similar to the original series of Magnificent Century and the production company, Tims Production, was the same. The sequel of the series could not achieve high rates as had been expected. Nonetheless, the series Muhteşem Yüzyıl: Kösem Sultan was broadcasted in Afghanistan, Libya, Morocco, Qatar, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, United Emirates and Yemen. The integration of Turkish series to Arab media dates back to 2007, when the drama series called Gümüş (Noor) was picked up by Saudi media mogul Sheik Waleed al-Ibrahim for his Pan-Arab cable network, Middle
Eastern Broadcasting Centre (MBC), which is a private satellite company based in Dubai (Kraidy & Ghazzi, 2013). Thereby, MBC has become the primary outlet carrying Turkish soap operas that promotes a moderately liberal lifestyle through a moderate Islamic perspective. The series achieved a huge success in the Arab world. "The final episode of Gümüş (Noor) reached an audience of 70 to 80 million Arab viewers" (Cevik, 2014).

Similarly, Turkey launched an Arabic-language satellite television channel, TRT-7-al-Turkiyya, transmitting on ARABSAT and NILESAT satellites in 2010. Turkish officials made an immense show via the new channel: The Crown Prince of Qatar, Tamim bin-Hamad al-Thani, and the head of the Islamic Conference, Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu, attended the launching ceremony (Nureddin, 2010). Then Turkish Prime Minister Erdoğan delivered the opening speech, underlining that the channel “was launched to become our common language, or common screen, our common passion” (Erdogan, 2010). Erdogan highlighted the cultural links by quoting a famous Arabic poem and mentioning iconic Arab artists as loved by Turks too, in what was described as a "manifesto in the love of Arabs" (Nureddin, 2010). Erdogan (2010), also declared during the launch of TRT-7-al-Turkiyya, that Turks and Arabs "share the same history, culture and civilization. They are like the fingers of a hand. They are as close as the flesh and the nail of a finger." The creation of the channel TRT-7-al-Turkiyya clearly showcases the Erdogan's government's ongoing attempts to implement outreach strategies towards the Arab audiences. The channel TRT-7-al-Turkiyya includes news programs that represent the Turkish point of view and the state officials' activities; broadcasts the popular Turkish television dramas; while also promoting Turkish businesses, tourism, and education. The Turkish government announced that it would also give prizes and financial awards to support producers and directors to create media products that help Turkey's image and market Turkish products abroad (Salha, 2010).
Case Study: Analysis of the series Hakan the Protector

Turkey’s first Netflix series, Hakan: Muhafız (Hakan: The Protector) introduces to the world the first Turkish superhero. Even though Turkey has produced fantasy series before, this was the first official endeavor to bring a superhero to the international screen. As stated before, this series mainly targets western audiences to resonate with the western audience, since Netflix is an American media-services provider headquartered in California. The company's primary business is to offer subscription-based streaming of a digital library consisting of films and television programs, including those produced in-house known as Netflix Originals (which Hakan: The Protector is a part of), debuting its first series Lilyhammer in 2012. As of April 2019, Netflix had over 148 million paid subscriptions worldwide, including 60 million in the United States, and over 154 million subscriptions total including free trials (Netflix, 2018). Members can watch as much as they want, anytime, anywhere, on nearly any internet-connected screen. Members can play, pause and resume watching, all without commercials or commitments. It is almost worldwide except for China, as well as Syria, North Korea, and Crimea. Therefore, Hakan: The Protector can be seen as a milestone for Turkey considering the potential reach of Netflix as an online platform. O3 Medya, the production company for this first Turkish Netflix series, was established in 2014 in partnership with Middle East Broadcasting Center (MBC), one of the biggest media groups of the Middle East and North Africa region. Through the launch of MBC Studios focus on MBC’s drive to increase premium film and television content production in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region and beyond (Vivarelli, 2018).

This brand-new subsidiary set to build on the expertise of the Group’s production assets: O3 Productions (MENA), Al Sadaf (Saudi Arabia), and O3 Medya (Turkey). Encouraged by the great interest in and the increasing demand for Turkish TV shows primarily in the Middle East, O3 Medya has commenced its operations in Turkey as a branch of O3 Production Services, the production company of MBC group broadcasting in 19 countries MBC Studios especially aim to leverage the significant trend for non-English language television content to travel to more global markets (Vivarelli, 2018). Correspondingly, O3 Medya articulates its mission on its official website as “to penetrate into the markets of other countries and to further enhance the quality and raise the bar
for the Turkish TV shows also in the digital media as it is the case with TV industry” (2019). Under the name of O3 Media, number one prime-time Turkish dramas were produced like Wounded Love, Evermore and the biggest historical drama in Turkey called Fatih the Conqueror (Vivarelli, 2018). Companies like Fox Networks Group, Endemol Shine and Eccho Rights, also play an important role in the global distribution of Turkish dramas. For instance, a Turkish series called Insider was distributed in the Middle East and a number of other territories, through the partnership with MBC (Fry, 2016).

Another example is the Sweden-based distributor Eccho Rights’ announcement of an exclusive deal that will see it bring a slate of shows from one of Turkey’s leading drama producers, Ay Yapim, which is behind Ezel, Fatmagul, Forbidden Love, Karadayı and more (Fry, 2016). Turkey has become one of the world’s most vibrant TV markets, with its local telenovela and drama productions driving the territory to become a top three international distributor. Shows that will appear on Netflix in Turkey include Leyla and Mecnun, Suskunlar (Game of Silence), Karadayı, Ezel, Kurt Seyit & Şura, The Revival: Ertuğrul and Filinta (Netflix, 2018). Commenting on the news, Netflix CEO Reed Hastings said: “Turkish people are great storytellers with their hugely popular and internationally recognized Turkish dramas, and Netflix aims to become one of the most vocal ambassadors. We’re delighted to offer a more localized Netflix in Turkey that will continue to grow Turkey and develop content in the international market” (2018).

The series Hakan: The Protector has originally premiered in December 2018, and Netflix decided to follow up with a second season after four months of its release. Signaling the seriousness of its ambition for the market, Netflix has also signed a deal with mobile provider Vodafone and is already working with Turkish TV manufacturer Vestel. The protagonist of the series, Hakan Demir (played by famous Turkish actor Cagatay Ulusoy), is an ordinary shopkeeper in Istanbul. When Hakan figures out about his special powers that are deeply connected to the Ottoman history, his life turns into a fascinating fable where he is assigned to overpower the only surviving “Immortal” who’s mission is to destroy Istanbul, and eventually the whole world. Netflix International Productions Vice President Kelly Luegenbiehl said they made a superhero series in a format that the subscribers had never seen before, and added that, it is very important to tell a story about Istanbul. Luegenbiehl elaborated on her statement by explaining: “Istanbul and Turkey can be seen in a way never seen before in this format. We worked
with an incredible team. We think that audiences all over the world will love this production. We believe that 137 million people in 190 countries will show very positive reactions when they watch this series” (Hurriyet Daily News, 2018).

Glorifying the Ottoman Conquest of Constantinople

According to Islamist discourse, if the source of true Turkish national identity is Ottoman-Islamic culture, then its true capital resides in Istanbul. In contrast to official national discourse, which constructs the national subject as secular and locates its center in Ankara, the alternative national identity evoked here is defined as culturally Islamic and Ottoman, and centered in the city of Istanbul (Cinar, 2015). The most significant symbol from the Ottoman era is the city of Istanbul itself since it’s the former capital of the Ottoman Empire that is conquered by Sultan Mehmed II in 1453. “To a great extent Istanbul’s cultural multiplicity—its historical, ethnic, cultural, and linguistic eclecticism—emanates from its exceptional geographical position (Koksal, 2011: Kocak, 2014). The city offers an incomparable physical site and economic situation, at the intersection of Europe and Asia (Kocak, 2014). While ancient roads and caravan routes connect “Istanbul to the trade centers of Europe and Asia, the waters of the Golden Horn, the Bosphorus and the Marmara Sea open a gateway to the ports of the Mediterranean and the Near East” (Pamir, 2015). It is the city where Europe and Asia face one another across the Bosphorus. The Golden Horn, which is an extension of the Sea of Marmara into the European side of Istanbul, is recognized as the historic core of the city. The Roman, the Byzantine and the Ottoman Imperial Palaces, as well as their major public buildings, are on the Historic Peninsula, which form the southern side of the Golden Horn. They are considered to be the distinguished landmarks of exotic Istanbul. Istanbul, by being a transition area, creates many different possibilities for filmic capacities and qualities.

Istanbul is a “globally iconic city due to its historic depth, geographic significance, thriving art and culture scenes and cosmopolitan mixture of people” owns a noteworthy potential for cinematic productions (Pamir, 2015). Istanbul is recognized as an iconic city internationally due to a number of factors. First and foremost, its settlement history dates back to 6000 BC. After its Greek colonization (400 BC), Istanbul became the capital for the Roman Empire (300 AD), the Eastern Roman Empire (600 AD), the Byzantine Empire (900 AD) and the Ottoman Empires (1453-1921), which attracted people from
many different countries and continents who came to live in the city. This historic and cultural depth and richness represents Istanbul as an important cosmopolitan center of the world. This very strategic choice of Istanbul as the setting of the Hakan: The Protector series is fundamental to the storyline in many ways. Examining the scenes demonstrating the city of Istanbul in the series, it can be seen that most of them take place in the historic peninsula, which is the most ancient and remarkable part of Istanbul that is a site for numerous historical monuments. These historical treasures include, Grand Bazaar, Hagia Sophia, the Blue Mosque, Yerebatan Cistern, the Archeology Museum, Topkapi Palace, and the Süleymaniye Mosque. In the opening scenes of the first episode of the series, we see the protagonist, Hakan, in his daily life, waking up and getting ready to go work at the Grand Bazaar, which has nearly 600 years of history. Hakan walks by the old backstreets, which seem to be timeworn, deconstructed, gloomy and traditional. The portrayal of the people living in this area shows them as largely working/middle class, like Hakan himself. Continuing on the images from Istanbul, we see the blue Bosphorus, the urban crowds, mosques, streets cats, the notorious Turkish tea in traditional cups and conventional street food like grilled corn, fruits, spices and roasted chestnuts.

Hagia Sophia is one of the most ancient monuments in Istanbul, and it is tremendously important to the series and world history. Hagia Sophia was built by Roman emperor Justinian in 532 AD as the Church of the Holy Wisdom, it served as the principal church of Eastern Christianity for 916 years (Eastmond, 2016). When Sultan Mehmet II of Ottoman Empire conquered the city in 1453, he ordered the church to be transformed into the mosque of Hagia Sophia as a symbol of the triumph of the Ottoman Turks and of the supremacy of Islam (Eastmond, 2016). Later on, in 1935, the founder of modern Turkey, Atatürk instructed Ayasofya to serve a museum, symbolizing the secular, modern republic he was building. "Atatürk made the Hagia Sophia a monument to what Turkey could become," says Antony Eastmond, who is a Professor of the History of Byzantine, and adds: "By turning it from a mosque into a museum, he made it a place for all people" (Eastmond, 2016). Therefore, this very monument has been a prominent site for religious power struggles. Correspondingly, Hagia Sophia symbolizes of the city's cosmopolitan past and has a central position in the series, since the main villain called Faysal Erdem, who is to be a very wealthy and powerful businessman, plans to coordinate the Hagia Sophia restoration. Faysal explains to news reporters: “Witnessing
1500 years of history, Hagia Sophia was built to show us that mysteries and miracles can be real, and to have us, the mortals experience and eternal moment” and says that it is an honor to help its restoration process. He adds: “There is a quote of Napoleon, ‘if the world was only one country, its capital would be Istanbul’ and I change it to, ‘if the world was a human their heart would surely be Hagia Sophia.’” This statement of Faysal is crucial for the unique position of Istanbul in the world, which is closely connected to the essential neo-Ottomanist attributes that AKP government actively fosters. Erdogan’s government also glorified Sultan Mehmet II, for instance; at the rally of anniversary of the fall of Constantinople in May 2014, Erdogan stated: "With Sultan Mehmed II’s conquest, the civilization arrived" (2014).

Nostalgic longing for Istanbul has been central in the Ottoman-Islamist thought, especially in the last decade. Supporting the celebration of Istanbul’s legacy of centrality and importance are social and cultural projects to restructure Istanbul’s city life implemented by AKP government for the past sixteen years (Ongur, 2014). From restaurants serving Ottoman era, Ottoman-themed TV series to elaborate celebrations of Ottoman conquests, Turkey has re-introduced substantial devotion to its imperial past. According to the news from Daily Sabah, the Netflix’s Communication Manager for Turkey, the Middle East and Africa, Artanç Savaş, underlined that Hakan: The Protector is a production that includes both the modern face and historical and cultural richness of Istanbul. He added that “the series has boosted tourists’ interest in Istanbul, indicating that they receive e-mails and messages from "The Protector" viewers from all over the world, he also noted that some global tourism companies have even contacted them to arrange tours with the theme of Istanbul” (2019). This very statement from Savaş reveals that the re-branding of Turkey in neo-Ottomanist aspirations have actually worked in the benefit of Turkey in terms of revitalizing cultural tourism in Turkey. On the one hand, Islamism in Turkey gets absorbed into capitalism as Muslims integrate into a commercialized and pleasure-oriented popular culture (Ergin & Karakaya, 2017). The re-centering of Turkey as a pivotal state and a great power that coincides with a reduced Western role is a foundation of the political, economic, and socio-cultural capital that fuels neo-Ottoman cool brand (Kraidy & Ghazzi, 2013).
Hakan and the “Immortals”, Between Mysticism and Nostalgia

Although one could argue that some images are “just how things are,” no sign merely reflects the notion of nostalgia. It is commonly employed in the depiction of Istanbul, either in the sense of ‘Byzantium nostalgia’ (Tunç, 2012) or nostalgia for the lost traditions and externalized Orient (Yörük and Vatikiotis, 2013). Svetlana Boym describes a “restorative mode of nostalgia” that evokes a “national past” and proposes a “re-build [of] the lost home” (2007, p14). Nostalgia always carries with it a politics of the future. The two dominant narrative plots of this restorative nostalgia are the restoration of origins and conspiracy theory. The conception of good and evil is central for most of the fictional narrations, especially the ones that concern adventures of a superhero (Boym, 2007, p14). In the case of the Hakan: The Protector, as the name suggests, the protagonist Hakan represents “the good one” who is responsible for the protection of Istanbul and its nearly 16 millions of inhabitants, while the evil are described as the “Immortals”.

Initially, Hakan is portrayed as an ordinary Turkish man who faces financial difficulties as he often talks to his friend Memo about ways of making money. He lost his family when he was very young and sells traditional Turkish rugs and antiques in a shop in Istanbul’s Grand Bazaar with his foster father. Although he goes through economic hurdles, he stops a little boy trying to steal a woman’s handbag and warns him that what he did was fundamentally wrong. Such scenes suggest that Hakan is an honest person, who reacts and attempts to correct a situation that is legal and morally unacceptable. In addition, in the first episode, Hakan learns about a job opportunity to work with Faysal Erdem, and thinks it is a great occasion since he wants to become wealthy like Faysal. In the end, Hakan gets to have an interview with Faysal’s assistant, Leyla Sancak (played by Ayca Aysin Turan), who later on becomes his love interest. During the interview, Leyla states that Hakan is in no way qualified for the position since he does not have any educational background. Hakan laughs and says to her: “You judge me, because I wasn’t born lucky like yourself” and adds: “You had wealthy and supportive parents, went to private schools, and maybe did your master’s abroad? Upon your graduation, your family who already had the connections arranged this position and you’ve found yourself here, am I right?” Additionally, he mentions that he has goals of opening their own antique shop with his friend. This attitude of Hakan reflects the
determined and confident nature of his personality while he again underlines that even though he is not in an advantageous position, he is still ambitious and driven.

The second episode of the series reveals the story behind Hakan’s super powers through flashback scenes from the Ottoman era. These scenes explain that after Sultan Mehmed II conquered Constantinople (the Byzantine’s name for Istanbul), he realized he had enemies in the city. There were seven “Immortals,” who devoted themselves to destroying Istanbul and the rest of the world and all natural disasters such as earthquakes were traced back to them. One night, Sultan Mehmed II had a dream where he identified the ways of killing the “Immortals” who are camouflaged in the form of humans. Three objects are presented in his dream; the “virtue ring” that glows when it touches an Immortal, a unique dagger that can kill Immortals and a shirt that serves as an armour in this deadly war. Continuing the flashbacks, we see men with long beards praying on the talismanic shirt that has the power to safeguard the Protector with the power of the holy prayers. Hence, the protector is the person that Sultan Mehmet delegated due to his skills, his power, and his pure heart back in 1450s and Hakan, of the same lineage, is the last protector. Thus, Hakan discovers that he is connected to an ancient secret order whose duty is to protect the city. Kemal and his daughter Zeynep, who are the members of the secret order of the Loyal Ones, help Hakan embrace his family's legacy as The Protector, a hero with the duty to kill the Immortal and prevent the destruction of the city. Loyal Ones are, as their name insinuates, the ones supporting and helping the protector fighting against the Immortals. Kemal is a pharmacist, and in his pharmacy, there’s a secret entry to a mysterious room where they keep all their stuff that are important for the Protector and the Loyal Ones. Hence, the whole drama is actually based on this mystical narrative that takes its origins from a fictional power struggle during the Sultan II era of Ottoman Empire.

**Embedded Sufi Theology and Ottoman History**

In the third episode of the series, talking about being the descendant of the Protector, Kemal tells Hakan that the strength of being the Protector has been imprinted in his genes across generations. This statement can be seen as analogous to the conceptualization of a nation. An allegory of sorts, collective knowledge, culture and memory that bring a nation together are being transferred over generations. Collective memory is central for countries that have an imperial history and legacy. The concept of
collective memory refers to “the intense memory of the transformative historical empire that informs national beliefs and ensures the continuation of the legacy” (Walker, 2009). Memory and history meet and intertwine in what some scholars refer to as historical consciousness (Crane 2000; Stewart 2013; Sutton 1998), and through the sites of historical consciousness the past is remembered and reconstructed. Hakan: the Protector reflects “the recollection of Ottoman symbols and figures, idealization of the past, and evocation of nostalgia” through the employment of a mystical series of events and Ottoman-centered representations that are also associated with contemporary Turkish culture (2008). To showcase this, the Protector fleshes out tradition, habits, local practices, and the intermingling of customs and practices from modern life combining characters from different income levels and cultures.

An example of this is featured in the first episode of the series. Hakan runs into a fortune-teller called Turkan on his way to work. Turkan stops him staring at him with a spiritual gaze, and tells that his life and destiny is fundamentally changing. Fortune telling is a very common practice that is ingrained in traditional Turkish culture and is based on superstition. Placing this scene in the beginning of the series foreshadows the supernatural chain of events that will take place in the following episodes while it also affirms the power of fortune telling that plays a significant role in contemporary Turkish cultural practices.

In the meantime, the antagonist Faysal Erdem is well known by the public due to his infamous wealth. Faysal Erdem’s financial capabilities assist in setting a representation of Istanbul as a modern city that is globally integrated to the capitalist structures through demonstrating the scenes of enormous offices, skyscrapers, luxurious hotels, and mansions. Additionally, there are depictions of a national football game in Istanbul with Turkish flags and a big crowd of enthusiastic fans cheering for their team, which can be seen as an important component of modern Turkish popular culture. Another cultural signifier can be seen through multiple referrals to Sinan the Architect, known as Mimar Sinan in Turkish, who served as chief Ottoman architect and civil engineer for sultans like Suleiman the Magnificent, Selim II, and Murad III. Sinan built at least 374 structures including 92 mosques; 52 small mosques (mescit); 55 schools of theology (medrese); 7 schools for Koran reciters (darüşkurra); 20 mausoleums (türbe); 17 public kitchens (imaret); 3 hospitals (darüşşifa); 6 aqueducts; 10 bridges; 20 caravanserais; 36 palaces and mansions; 8 vaults; and 48 baths (Kuiper, 2009). Sinan
held the position of chief architect of the palace, which meant being the overseer of all construction work of the Ottoman Empire, for nearly 50 years, working with a large team of assistants consisting of architects and master builders (Kuran, 1987). The first two of these works are in Istanbul: the Şehzade Mosque, which he calls a work of his apprenticeship period and the Süleymaniye Mosque, which is the work of his qualification stage (Kuran, 1987). Sinan was a very influential architect that had trained students that designed the Sultan Ahmed Mosque in Istanbul, Stari Mosque in Mostar, and assisted with the design of the Taj Mahal in the Mughal Empire (Kuran, 1987).

In the third episode, we learn that Zeynep, who is a Loyal One, is a teaching assistant and she is specialized in Ottoman armour and war weapons. This attribute connects to her knowledge on self-defence, martial arts, and Ottoman history as she helps Hakan with his physical training. During his training with the Loyal One, Kemal, Hakan asks the purpose of this session. Kemal responds by saying that the aim of this is to calm the storm inside him and he quotes from Mevlânâ Celâleddin Rumî, a thirteenth-century Islamic scholar and Persian poet, who is an essential religious figure in the Islamic-Sufi tradition: 'The rage is like the wind, it will eventually fade away, but the branches are already broken' (Saglam, 2017). Hakan recognizes this quote, and says that even though it is an interesting reference, he does not grasp the relationship between Sufism and this very training session where Kemal appears to provide spiritual guidance through meditation and awareness (Lawrence, 2014).

Although the public visibility of Sufi practices had been illegal and Sufism had lost its legitimacy in modern Turkey, the Turkish State established and recognized commemorations in honour of Mevlânâ approximately two decades after launching the secular reforms banning Sufism (Saglam, 2017). Today these ceremonies are held annually and attended regularly by the highest state authorities. The first commemoration was held in Konya in December 1942 on the occasion of the 670th anniversary of Mevlânâ’s death where Mevlânâ was presented as “the great thinker of Anatolia” (Saglam, 2017). Mevlânâ’s influence transcends national borders and ethnic divisions, his poetry not only influenced Persian literature, but Turkish, Ottoman Turkish, Azerbaijani, as well as the literature of some other Turkic, Iranian, and Indo-Aryan languages including Chagatai, Urdu and Pashto (Saglam. 2017; Yukleyen, 2008).
Sufism is the English term used to refer to mystical interpretations and practices of the Islamic religion and Rumi is regarded as the founder of the Mevlevi Order (Wilson, 2017). Even though Hakan does not recognize the relation, there is a close analogy with the formation of the group Loyal Ones and the followers of the Mevlevi order. The Mevlevi order was founded in 1273 by Rumi’s followers after his death, particularly by his successor Hüsamettin Çelebi who decided to pass on his master’s knowledge (Lawrence, 2014). The Mevlevi became a well-established Sufi order in the Ottoman Empire that spread into the Balkans, Syria and Egypt (Yukleyen, 2008). According to Sufis, the Prophet Mohammad continues to live as an active agent in every historical period and appears to his most devoted followers in their dreams, these followers are known as saints or Sufi masters. The Prophet lives also through the institutional trajectories, known as tariqas, or the brotherhoods (Hermansen, 2010). The culture of Sufism deals with the historical development of the tariqa, especially in terms of its dissemination in the Ottoman world. Le Gall describes the origins of the tariqa and the development of significant modes of transmission of the order (Yukleyen, 2008). To illustrate, Ubaydullah Ahrar was one of earliest teachers of Sufism, and had a "unique role" in training and sending out people authorized for the transmission of the tariqa in "a conscious missionary endeavour" (Silverstein, 2009, pg#). These teachers lay the foundations for the expansion and growth of the order by creating an interregional network of followers, which is a similar to the structure of Loyal Ones in the series.

Both of the groups, Loyal Ones and tariqa value social and religious activism as well as individual spiritual advancement through mystical experience (Hermansen, 2010). Additionally, both groups emphasise the teachings and collective activities, and both of them involves a hierarchical system that is based on seniority. In the second season of the series, we get introduced to Azra, the glorious Master, Senior Loyal One. A further common determinant for the Loyal Ones and tariqa is that both have certain rules and principles that all the members should follow in addition to the members’ devotion to their existential which is what unites members (Silverstein, 2009). The goal of the Loyal Ones is to help the Protector kill the Immortals in order to save Istanbul, and this mission is holy for them; therefore they agree to risk their lives for their cause. As explained throughout this essay, Loyal Ones and the Immortals are the protagonists and antagonists in terms of the duality of good and evil. In relation to the contemporary politics in Turkey, the positioning of the Immortals can be seen as similar to the Gülen
movement, a social movement based on moral values and the religious teachings of Fethullah Gülen, a Turkish Islamic preacher that has been living in the US since 1999 due to his exile.

Before explaining the similarities between these two groups, it is important to examine the Gülen movement, which is often is referred to by participants as the hizmet (Turkish: "Service") or as a Sufism-inspired cemaat ("congregation", "community", or "assembly"). After the failed coup attempt in 2016, the AKP government blamed the Gülen movement for the coup and state authorities arrested thousands of soldiers and judges. Over ten thousand education staffs were suspended and the licenses of over 20,000 teachers working at private institutions were withdrawn for their alleged affiliation to Gülen even though Fethullah Gülen condemned the coup and denied any involvement.

In fact the AKP and Gülen movement were allies in early 2000s. Although organized independently, both the AKP and the Gülen movement have primarily addressed the same base and acted as mediums of upward mobility for Sunni Anatolian conservatives. Historically, both Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Fethullah Gülen were influenced by traditions of Islamic activism in Turkey, albeit different schools of thought. Most of the AKP’s founding elite came from Necmettin Erbakan’s National Outlook Movement (Milli Görüş) that originated from the search for a religious revival through politics in this lineage. Fethullah Gülen refrained from partisan politics and employed a gradualist approach focusing on a bottom-up Islamization of society (Taspinar, 2016). The AKP and the Gülen movement combined their complementary forces as a means to overthrow the secular system of governance. While the AKP benefited from Gülen movement’s educated human capital in state bureaucracy, Gülen Movement found the opportunity to expand its reach further across social, economic, and bureaucratic networks. The alliance peaked during the constitutional referendum of 12 September 2010, which reformed the composition of the judicial bodies and ultimately broke the secularist grip on the judiciary (Taspinar, 2016). The alliance came to an end in 2013 when pro-Gülen judges levelled corruption charges against Erdogan. Shortly after the corruption crisis, the AKP labeled the Gülen movement a state within a state, a parallel structure, and a terrorist organization determined to overthrow the democratically-elected government of Turkey (Taspinar, 2016).
The president described the coup plotters as “unbelievers” and went even further by stating that the country would “cut the heads off” traitors bent on destabilising the nation (Shaheen, 2017). The immortals in Hakan: The Protector can be seen as similar to the members of the Gülen movement, as they are the ultimate enemy of the Protector whom he is dedicated to fighting and eradicating. Moreover, the Immortals represented in the series are wealthy and influential characters that have a powerful position due to their networks and connections. In addition, there is no way of physically identifying the immortals, similar to the members of the Gülen movement, as they have been dispersed around the bureaucratic, political, educational and military system that the AKP targeted once their interests conflicted. In this case, it is also possible to position the Loyal Ones as the AKP and its supporters in the context of the series.
Conclusion

Turkey’s contemporary strategic decisions are informed not only by its military and economic power, but also by its Ottoman legacy and the inherited perceptions of self. Imperial legacies are not just ancient history; rather, they are the ideas, interpretations, and motivations that infuse the landscape of international relations as well as strategies of nation branding. Throughout this paper, I argued that Turkish TV series are being used as a tool of state soft power through the integration of neo-Ottomanist values. Since the AKP’s power was consolidated with the rise of Erdogan’s popularity and supporters, AKP has been actively applying its perspectives strategically into various industries; most prominently in media and specifically the television industry. The recent boom in this industry through the exportation of Turkish television series and the technological advancements in production, the AKP government took an active role in rebranding Turkish nationalism in relation to its historic predecessor and source of ideological inspiration, the Ottoman Empire. Neo-Ottomanism seems to be used as a nostalgic tool to reverse the secularization and westernization of the Turkish Republic and adapt the country to Islamic and Middle Eastern values.

The depiction of Ottoman history on popular television shows is one of the major domains where branded representations are marketed and tailored to various audiences. Considering the number of series exported across the globe and their audience reach, they are “the most visible and significant cultural tools for promoting Turkey” (Tokyay, 2017). Hakan the Protector is a unique example to analyze the idealized image of Turkey as it is distributed, marketed, and watched on the global streaming service, Netflix. For this reason it is an exemplar of Turkey’s outreach to audiences worldwide and its exportation of a national brand. In the series, Turkey, specifically Istanbul, represents the “the imperial rule inherited from the former Roman and Byzantine Empires that made the Ottomans the center of Eastern and Western world interactions for over six hundred years” (Walker, 2009). This positioning is closely related to the AKP government’s several strategies of using popular culture and branding techniques as a soft power tool that aims to enhance Turkey’s regional geopolitical and economic influence. However, this revival of Ottoman culture can be misleading and unrealistic considering that the Ottoman Empire was founded in 1299 and dismantled in 1922. Even though there might be no need for complete detachment
from the imperial past, it is problematic to see Ottoman Empire as an example to follow for the Turkish Republic. The Turkish Republic was once founded on the abolishment of the monarchy and the introduction of democratic institutions, both of which were not hallmarks of the Ottoman era.

This paper attempted to showcase, through the examination of the story of Hakan, Ottoman historical revival and Islamic traditions are invoked in a modern Turkish television production that depicts contemporary society, is able to mimic or imply sociopolitical changes currently taking place in the country under the rule of the AKP. From immortal Gülenist infiltrators to Istanbul’s loyal protectors, the show is packed with suggestive messages that not only export a national image that mirrors today’s Turkey with its neo-Ottoman revival, it brings to the fore the social, political, and cultural terrains of confrontation that dominate public discourse today.
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Essay 2:
Opportunities and Barriers to Achieve Digital Inclusion for People with Disabilities: A Comparative Analysis
Acknowledgement

It is imperative to indicate that the research focus and foundation for this essay arose from my co-op position, working as a Communications Coordinator at the Disability Foundation, which is a not-for-profit organization that provides unique opportunities for people with physical disabilities to enhance their quality of life through a wide range of programs (2019). Under the umbrella of the Disability Foundation, there were six affiliated Societies and each are dedicated to support people with physical disabilities through creation of custom assistive devices, engagement in adaptive recreational activities, and facilitation of peer support to empower their individual journeys (2019).

I was tasked to coordinate production of promotional materials for online distribution including newsletters, brochures, websites and social media content. Through this co-op experience, I had the opportunity to closely interact with people with disabilities in online platforms as well as face-to-face contexts, and to gain an insight into the meaning of living in an inclusive society. As I became more involved in this cause through attending expositions, conducting interviews and planning a fundraising concert by the members of Vancouver Adapted Music Society (VAMS), I had a great chance to hear about candid stories and experiences from very influential and motivated individuals living with disabilities. To take an active role in making a difference for such a meaningful cause was genuinely rewarding, since it broadened my horizon through gaining a critical insight on the existing boundaries that stand in the way of an inclusive society. An inclusive society could be achievable through ensuring equal enjoyment of basic human rights by all, involving “the freedom of expression; freedom to information; political participation; civic engagement; inclusive education; the right to access the highest level of scientific and technological information; and participation in social and cultural opportunities” (Lazar & Stein, 2017).
Introduction

This essay analyzes how information communication technologies (ICTs) can have various effects for persons with disabilities in terms of the potential opportunities and barriers for digital inclusion. ICTs may be used to empower people with disabilities through digital capacities and enhance the quality of participation. However, there are systematic limitations embedded in the regulatory forces that prevent people with disabilities from taking equal advantage of these technologies. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) signifies the disabled community’s societal recognition of equal status through this international human rights treaty adopted by United Nations in 2006. As this treaty states: “disability is an evolving concept”, and it results because of the sum of attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinder individuals’ full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others” (2006). This statement has been crucial for the acknowledgment of the disability rights, especially through pointing to the social constructions that result in the “creation of a disability” (2006). This study conceives the social model of disability that claims that disability is socially constructed through discrimination, exclusion and marginalization (Oliver, 1990). Goggin and Newell, both invested in the disability and digital communication studies, argued that disability can be viewed as a constructed socio-political space, which is determined by dominant norms, the values found in technological systems, and their social context (2000).

Questions related to “use” of technologies delve deeply into discourses and experiences surrounding disability and technology and highlight the ways in which default modes of engagement and access are not accessible for users with all abilities (Ellcessor, 2016). This study involves a comparative analysis of diverse scholarly works on the digital inclusion for people with disabilities by highlighting the potential to connect across disciplines as queer, feminist and digital media studies to acknowledge the forms of difference related to disabilities also base for inequalities related to gender, race, and class embedded into the design and organization practices. The right to access ICTs invokes civil and human rights issues such as “freedom of expression; freedom to information; political participation; civic engagement; inclusive education; the right to access the highest level of scientific and technological information; and participation in social and cultural opportunities” (Lazar & Stein, 2017). Moreover, the articles 9 and 21
of the CRPD specifically address the right of accessibility to information and to the tools of the information society for people with disabilities. In this regard, the CRPD states that the measures shall be taken to ensure an equal access to ICTs (Brewer, 2017).

For instance, in 2013, the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act Alliance, a disability consumer advocacy group that works to support the implementation of accessibility standards, requested information about how the provincial government of Ontario, Canada, was implementing disability access laws (2017). Consequently, the provincial government passed a law requesting some private-sector business compliance with the accessibility standards. This law resulted by alleging the Ministry of Economic Development with the enforcement of these digital accessibility standards and the allocation of substantial finances for the implementation of the law. While this example represents a progress towards the digital inclusion, it also highlights the deficiencies in the governing systems that cause inaccessibility of information and resources. In order to eliminate the barriers, systems must accommodate the requirements and perspectives of people with all abilities from the very beginning of the development and implementation.
The expansion of information communication technologies (ICTs) and participatory culture

The advancing level of digitization and the widespread usage of ICTs may hold massive potential for social change. Digitization, the process of converting any form of information into a digital format, represents a dramatic moment of a technologically driven transformation (Jenkins, 2017). This ability to convert any form of information into a digital format enables text, images and sound to be easily combined in one allows for greater compatibility between different delivery platforms (Papacharissi, 2013). This “convergence” of new forms of communication, especially social networking sites (SNS), bridges the structural and functional characteristics of mass, interpersonal and peer communication (Jenkins, 2008). The primary purpose of these sites is to connect people, based on common trait, as “language or shared racial, sexual, religious or nationality-based identities, interests, political views, and activities” (2007). Furthermore, the mobile computing on social networks reached the peak after the release of the iPhone in 2007 that enabled such affordances.

Jenkins points out that the communication technology is not one-way anymore; because the consumers of information technologies are also the producers of their own online content, that is commonly called as the user generated content (UGC). This voluntary process of sharing information on the digital networks fosters the concept of participatory culture (Jenkins, 2017). Jenkins points out that the key elements of this participatory culture comprises reciprocal support for sharing, as the sense of belonging and community among members are encouraging factors that promotes the participating culture in the group (Jenkins & Boyd, 2017). Correspondingly, contemporary media scholars Ford and Green emphasize the potential of the participatory culture to lead the grassroots movements and to gain greater control over the means of production and circulation, which can foster digitally networked actions (2018). The participatory culture that emerges and flourishes within the digital platforms might open possibilities to serve as a digital public sphere.
Habermas defines public sphere as a social place where people get together with the aim to civically engage through the exchange of ideas about public issues. Habermas carefully delineated the public sphere as the realm of people’s participation in collective deliberation, rather than highlighting the physical setting where it occurs (1989). Therefore, digitally networked actions can be seen in a similar light with the collaborative engagements within public sphere. Correspondingly, ICTs might be seen as a provider of an enabling environment for discussions and formations of publics and counter-publics (McLean, 2014). Counter-publics are the public spaces that are divergent from “the norms and contexts of their cultural environment” (Warner, 2005). Fraser (2007) argues that these counter-publics are discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counter-discourses to assert their own interpretation of their identities and interests. Dahlberg also proposes that the ICTs provide platforms for marginalized groups in order to establish a counter to the status quo, which enables active engagement and deliberation (2007). Online actions take place in digital platforms are highly capable of spreading messages across far-reaching audiences and having an impact in the political processes through this interconnectivity.

Through the enhancement of network technology in the 1990s and 2000s appeared in conjunction with the growing disability rights activism (Goggin and Newell 2003) that built upon the social model of disability (Oliver 1983, 1990). Debates about the promises of the new era of ICTs offered a democratized alternative media that could counter the marginalization of people with disabilities in the mass media (Couldry 2000; Downing 2001). Online network served a transformative forum for online social groups as extended public spheres (Fraser 1993), and as a site for disability activism (Oliver 1990). Habermas underlined many times that the public sphere should be open and inclusive for everyone without excluding any gender and or social class (1989). Access is at the core of the legal definition of the public space and, to a great extent, online communication does meet accessibility requirements for many disabled people. If online spaces and spheres are abstracted as public spaces and public spheres, then the objective of regulation can be the upholding of the disabled people’s rights to access and participate in online communication. Hence, in the realm of digital public sphere, digital inclusion and accessibility are essential to enable an inclusive participation for all.
The concept of web accessibility and the potential of ICTs to empower people with disabilities

In Since 1997, the Web has been a focal point of accessibility and standardization efforts through work within the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C), Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI), and the Web community (Brewer, 2017). Brewer studies Web accessibility from her own perspective in the development of accessible information and communication technology (ICT) standards, that she adopted through working as the Director of the Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI) at the World Wide Consortium (W3C) (2017). The scope of work of WAI mainly entailed raising awareness for the urgent need for accessibility of the Web, development of guidelines and technical specifications, coordination with research organizations (Brewer, 2017). It provided a coordinated process of accessibility review of Web standards in areas like: graphics, media, mobile web, payments, security, digital publishing, geo-location, automotive navigation, and more (2017). Brewer underlines the necessity of providing accessibility support in mainstream technologies from the design stage onwards through the inclusion end users with diverse abilities (2017). This identification of potential accessibility barriers at early stages in the design process enables the issues to be solved in a timely manner.

ICTs have been seen in a positive light by numerous researchers in disability and media studies (Asuncion et al, 2019; Magnusson et al. 2004), especially with the medical of assistive technologies jointly evolving and becoming more capable to overcome physical barriers for people with disabilities. The technological adaptations that allow access to web content have not only involved innovations in hardware and software accessibility, but have also led the mobile devices to function as assistive devices. For instance, the method of transcoding helps accommodate the needs of the people with disabilities by the "simplification, indexing, and re-ordering the content" that contribute to the digital accessibility of the websites (Asakawa, et al., 2008). To demonstrate, transcoding solutions are experienced by users with visual limitations while they navigate in the site through using screen readers (Fernandes et al. 2006).

As the web becomes more complex, transcoding and similar methodologies offer tractable solutions to the emerging problems after going through websites and web applications accessible for people with disabilities (Borodin et al., 2010). Moreover, a
system called Structural-Semantics for Accessibility and Device Independence (SADIe) builds on the efforts in web development to separate content from presentation through operating a human analysis of the target website's structure, including the role and function of consisting elements and how those elements interact with one another. This operation allows users of the website who are utilizing screen readers to reorganize content on the page to provide faster access to specific content areas. This technological advancement in the field of robotics has provided techniques for censoring, positioning, mapping, and navigating which make it possible to develop devices to help people with physical, sensorial or cognitive restrictions. The current speech technology is capable of translating text-to-voice and voice-to-text through the enabling design of diverse mediation devices and services. To exemplify, it is possible for people with mobility limitations to carry out day-to-day business of an organization by using voice-recognition software. Similarly, persons with visual limitations can read printed documents by using audio and text-recognition capabilities of a smart phone. Apple products provide these kinds of adjustments through the built-in settings that entail features like voice-output, magnification, and nonvisual means of using a touchscreen (2016). The most popular devices utilized to overcome typing difficulties were primarily iPad 2 and iPhone 4S, with the iPad offers adaptations like eye-tracking and breath-input features.

The use of ICTs has also shown to improve health outcomes, such as reduced length and frequency of hospital stays, for elderly individuals with disabilities (Magnusson et al. 2004) through the new types of medical care and support (Nilsson et al. 2010) that further fostered improvement of quality of life for people with disabilities (Drainoni et al, 2004). There are a number of studies that have showcased various benefits of digital platforms for individuals with disabilities, especially in terms of establishing new meaningful connections and transcending the limitations of the offline world (Thackeray & Hunter, 2010; Dobransky & Hargittai, 2006). Especially social networking sites may serve as a useful resource for persons with disabilities experiencing social isolation (Albert, 2006). By participating in SNSs, persons with disabilities can expand their social circles through online networking, such as accessing various chat rooms and mailing lists that cater specifically to their needs and interests (Rice & Katz, 2001). Moreover, the abundant volume of information and online learning capacities may enable people with disabilities to educate themselves regarding their
curiosity (Dobransky & Hargittai, 2006). Through these aptitudes, they may have the opportunity to become advocates, communicate with decision makers, organize events, and raise awareness (Thackeray & Hunter, 2010).

Online communities including people with disabilities have been flourishing and dramatically increasing due to the capabilities of ICTs. Such communities utilize these sites to engage in medical discussions, peer support, recreational activities, advocacy and networking (Dobransky & Hargittai, 2006). Through the personal co-op experience that was previously mentioned, I also witnessed the empowering and connecting outcomes of the SNS. An organization named The South Fraser Active Living Club (SFALG) founded by four individuals with different levels of abilities have found each other on a Facebook group for people with physical disabilities. During an interview with one of the founders, I was informed that each one of them were looking for fun and accessible recreational activities in the city and they simply came up with the idea of uniting individuals with similar aspirations. Currently, this very group has many members; they organize weekly coffee talks as well as different accessible recreational activities while also collaborating with other societies. This certainly is a very positive outcome of being able to utilize SNS efficiently, and such benefits demonstrate the promise of online platforms and resources that serve to spread the disability culture.

Disability culture includes diverse identities and values that are primarily shaped by the shared experiences of people with disabilities, and that emerge in the social participation of people with disabilities (Siebers, 2008). Disability culture involves a shared history, social and political resistance to exclusion, and a celebration of diversity (Brown, 2002). Disability arts, literature, political activism, conferences, and university courses are all places where this culture can be articulated and asserted (Barnes & Mercer, 2010). With the rise of user-generated content and interactivity, people with disabilities have the opportunity to build their online community where their own needs and concerns are raised and shared (Ellis & Kent, 2011). As a result, digital networking sites might contribute to people with disabilities’ development of disability identity, self-esteem and social circle (Ellison et al., 2007).

Nip suggests a similar approach regarding the online experiences of queer individuals, as the oppression and marginalization fostered their need for sharing and identity building that contributes to the formation of online communities (2004).
Members of this collective develop a sense of belonging that results in the formation of a public or counter-public depending on the nature of discussions that take place (2004). An essential purpose of counter-publics is to introduce new and alternative discourses to the public, therefore the counter-publics require a public space where these discussions are can be openly challenged by the public (McLean, 2014). For instance, ICTs enable digital spaces for queer women to express themselves and to seek their identities through sharing stories of their lived experiences. This act of documenting alternative experiences in online platforms creates a counter-public through producing an alternative content that is also available for others to consume that also can foster the sense of empowerment and embodiment. Building of a shared narrative of communities can open possibilities of collective actions. ICTs capacities to archive the content can enable the historical telling and collection of narratives to be passed from generations of queer women to the next (2014). To illustrate, queer women within Africa who may find that their stories are underrepresented and such practices may allow knowledge sharing and knowledge production from within the community, which can make it possible for a civil action in the future.

**Digital divide and ableism setting barriers for persons with disabilities**

The increasing interest and attention being paid to the issues of access and the use of digital technologies reveal how social inequalities play out in contemporary societies (Hargittai & Hsieh, 2013). SNS have grown to be a vital resource to participate through multiple domains in today's world and, considerable amount of research has advocated against to the major inequality to access and consume digital services. The lack of access or skills for taking advantage of these technologies would have damaging effects on one's overall quality of life (DiMaggio, Hargittai, Celeste, & Shafer, 2004). The digital divide is mainly defined by the inequalities in access to and use of ICTs that affects individuals in certain social segments. The term digital divide is used to refer to inequalities in access to the ICTs in certain segments of the society due to socio-demographic, economic, and geographical factors. Early research on the digital divide mainly focused on physical access to ICTs while researchers concentrated on the uneven distribution in the access to ICTs between distinct groups through tracking user access to Internet found in homes, workplaces, schools and libraries (Kaye, 2000;
Dobransky and Hargittai, 2006). However, defining the concept of digital divide in terms of access is a problematic stance since the lack of it causes this segregation of certain users that are situated in a less favourable condition in the society (Warschauer, 2004). With the Internet connection rates reaching higher levels, the focus in digital divide research has shifted from the physical indicators of Internet access to the usage of Internet skills and literacy (Hargittai, 2002). Number of scholars revealed that the factors causing digital inequality include differences in the ability to use the ICTs independently as well as the availability of the tools for support and skills (Hargittai & Hsieh, 2013).

In a similar vein, Ellcessor highlights the intersections between issues of accessibility, social phenomena, and digital media technologies and formulates an “access kit” of five specific tools -regulation, use, form, content, and experience- to approach interactions across individuals, cultures, and technologies from diverse angles (2016). Digital media accessibility is subjected to numerous regulatory forces based on the interests of the governing bodies and the neoliberal contexts in which media industries and audiences contact (2016). A major defect of these enforced regulatory processes is their discriminatory technological approach that generates disability and causes limited participation through the construction of “preferred user positions” and “hegemonic arrangements of uses” (2016). Preferred user positions of ICTs determine normalized access conditions through systematically excluding people with disabilities from the technological design and implementation of a process. This form of oppression that is called “ableism”, that signifies this discriminatory approach that neglects people with disability through normalizing of able-bodiedness (Ho, 2008). In most cases, ableism manifests itself as a form of discrimination against accessible design and implementation, result in exclusion of the needs of potential users with diverse abilities. The theory of ableism pertaining to the web development reveal that web developers exert biased technological approach during the design and regulatory processes through the position and functionality of an able-bodied individual as the preferred user model (Kennedy 2012).

This process of normalization results in the marginalization of disabled groups that are positioned as deviant compared to the preferred societal norms. Although Apple (iOS) and Androids seem to provide assistance to their app developers regarding accessibility, neither of these systems requires apps to be accessible to enter in the marketplace. As a result, less than 15 percent of the users with disabilities expect to find
accessible apps, relying instead on recommendations, research, and testing out apps themselves (Ellcessor, 2016). Kennedy also claims that the rise of user-generated content (UGC) creates additional barriers to accessibility. The lack of accommodation of accessibility needs position individuals with disabilities as an under-served community in online platforms. Even though some digital platforms incorporated accessibility components in their recent releases like WordPress (Make WordPress Accessible, 2015) and Twitter (Twitter Bootstrap 2014) and Youtube, through providing automatic transcriptions for the videos uploaded by the general public, online barriers to accessibility still remain (Sydell, 2010). These produced frameworks still lack in accessibility in many areas due to the easy creation and distribution of inaccessible content on third party platforms, since these platforms are designed to facilitate easy upload of user generated content that does not urge users to include accessible feature. Consequently, it is also documented that students with disabilities using social media often encounter technical problems, disorganized layouts, privacy concerns, and a lack of accessibility (Asuncion et al., 2012).

**Intersectional Nature of the Digital Divide and Integration of Queer Theory to Disability Studies**

A range of theoretical perspectives in queer theory and intersectional feminism can be elaborated and adapted to the parallel experiences of exclusion of persons with disabilities. Hargitta and Hsieh (2016) argue that people with disabilities are systematically stigmatized with deleterious consequences in terms of health, financial circumstances, and other social indicators and determinants. Their further argument that the disability overlaps with other disadvantaged positions in society, which opens up productive theoretical and analytical insights including comparisons based on intersectionality and segregation. Intersectionality can be seen as a framework for conceptualizing a person, group of people, or social problem as affected by a number of discriminations and disadvantages through considering overlapping identities and experiences. Originated from Crenshaw’s feminist writings (1989), intersectionality refers to the integrated and mutually constitutive nature of identities. Crenshaw uses this concept to grasp the ways in which the interactions of gender and race restrain black women’s access to the US labour market, and how a lack of understanding of this intersection led to the marginalization of black women and their experiences (1989). The feminist deconstruction of the distinction between sex and gender, and the development
of the analytical category of the “other” were groundbreaking analytical tools that would impact both queer theory and disability studies (Wendell, 1996). For example, feminist strategy of separating sex from gender -biology from social reactions to biology- was a model for the emerging field of disability studies, that is mentioned in the beginning of the study as the social model of disability (Corker, 2000). Thereby, several researchers have adopted the conceptualization of intersectionality to examine the conjoint processes of marginalization and exclusion pertaining to social markers such as lower socio-economic status and disability.

Davaki et al (2013) also utilize intersectionality to demonstrate that the interaction of gender, disability, race and poverty restrict women’s access to education, resulting in later exclusion from employment. In the same way, employment rates among people with disabilities were lower than able-bodied people in eight developing countries (Davaki et al, 2013). Hence, this study reveals that poverty and disability have compounding effects due to processes of marginalization arising from both identities. Showcasing the overlapping impact of integrated identities, Naidu et al (2005) reveal how African-American women with disabilities experience the “triple jeopardy syndrome of oppression” based on the compounding effect of their gender, race and disability. As such, intersectional analyses expose the effect of the multiple and contradictory social positions that are constructed by power relations (Parker, 2014). Kennedy problematizes the makeup of the web design workforce as a predominant factor that enables digital equalities, noting that this workforce consists of predominantly white (85%) and male (82%) workers, and the scope of responsibilities of the work tend to prevent the women’s involvement, especially women with children (2012). Women have often struggled to achieve equal levels of participation to a number of barriers such as the domination of political party structures by men, gendered stereotypes, social expectations amongst voters about who should be involved in politics, and material inequalities which leave them disproportionately responsible for domestic labour (Kennedy, 2016).

Additionally, a number of studies further indicate that online abuse and attacks are disproportionately aimed at women, particularly at women of colour and/or those advocating for feminist changes (Banet-Weiser & Miltner 2016; Lewis et al. 2017) through making sexist comments (Jane 2014; Fox et al. 2015). Moreover, various studies reveal that women with disabilities that are also a part of other marginalized social groups that intersect with their gendered identities, found it even harder to achieve
the levels of participation and representation that they deserve due to the structural and
material inequalities as well as the violence (Evans 2017; Ward 2016). Hence, it is
important to note that the experience of exclusion among people with disabilities is not
uniform. Considering the variety of disabilities and distinct accessibility needs, some
people with disabilities are excluded more than others. The notion of identity holds a
critical importance for intersectionality since they are socially determinant,
interconnected and mediated by one another.

Both disability and queer studies problematize the normalization of certain
identities that causes marginalization, alienation and isolation of the one that does not
conform to the socially constructed norms. Along similar lines, queer theory also de-
stabilizes the identity categories by focusing on the historical, social, and cultural
constructions of desire and sexuality intersecting with other identity markers, such as
race, class, and gender. Teresa de Lauretis (1991) coined the term “queer theory” to
refer to a body of thought that celebrates “queerness” and difference, rather than seek
mainstream acceptance (Seidman, 1993; Yep, 2003). From the queer perspective,
sexual identities are fluid social constructions that intersect with multiple identity markers
as opposed to singular social positions. The aim of queer theory offers to render the
identity open and contestable rather than conceiving it as a category of knowledge and
politics (Yep et al, 2014). The reasoning behind this argumentation is that the identity
categories often closely relate to situational advantage, political gain, or some other
subjective motive. In this way, power relations play a significant role in defining and
mutually reinforcing identities (Yep et al, 2014).

The process of normalization is a primary instrument of power and control in
contemporary societies that produces and perpetuates hierarchical social order that
render certain identities as superior to others (Cohen, 2005; Gamson, 2003; Warner,
1999; Yep, 2003). From an interdisciplinary perspective, heteronormativity and ableism
may be seen as similar veins since both conceptions establish the enforced normalized
positions. At this stage, it is significant to note that the queer theory arose as a reaction
to the development of the AIDS as an epidemic, the shifts in sex education forming a
homophobic positioning of AIDS a disease related to the sexual identity (Jagose, 1996).
Heteronormativity refers to the enforcement of heterosexual orientation through
normalization of predicating the gender binary as the determinant of sexual identity,
expression and orientation as the default model through the standardized sexual and
marital relations between people of opposite sexes. Normalization is a symbolically, discursively, psychologically, and materially violent form of social regulation and control, as Warner states, normalization is “the site of violence” (1993). McRuer and Wilkerson argue that ideologies of normalization, perversion and victimization are central to the concepts of ableism and homophobia (2003). Homophobia can be directed to any person who is assumed to be a “sexual other” and it involves harassment, avoidance, verbal abuse, differential treatment and discriminatory behavior, and physical violence. Correspondingly, disabled people experience hate speech and hate crime in offline and online settings (Dodd 2016, 2017). According to recent studies, there is 53% increase in the disability hate crimes (O’Neill, 2017) and following surveys found that disability hate crimes more frequently occurred in online contexts (O’Neill, 2017).

These forms of discrimination can reflect on the digital platforms as online violence that is not limited to hate speech, harassment and bullying in digital spaces against the individuals who do not fit in the social norms. This act of online othering is intersectional, and is extremely difficult to due to its multifaceted of digital technologies on people’s everyday lives. The concept of online othering encapsulates the different power contestations and abusive behaviours being manifested in online spaces are being resisted and challenged by various social groups (Harmer & Lumsden, 2019). The act of online othering manifests itself in intersectional ways, with social characteristics such as class, gender, age, race, ethnicity, religion, nationality, disability and sexuality becoming increasingly entangled in various forms of online harassment and symbolic violence. To stand in the way of violence, there is a significant need to deconstruct and denaturalize these socially privileged categories of identity.

Online othering can be used as a tool to draw the boundaries in online spaces as a way to prevent violent and discriminatory actions. As discussed in the beginning of the essay, online platforms may serve as public spaces that enable counter-publics; therefore the impact of online spaces cannot be underestimated through the distinction of the offline and online or real and virtual. This binary approach to the public spaces is problematic, as ICTs are part and parcel of everyday life and therefore they have real consequences due to its interconnected and fluid nature (Harmer & Lumsden, 2019). As a way of envisioning differences in an inclusive way, queer theorists re-imagine identity as permanently open to its meaning and political use to encourage emergence of
cultures where multiple voices and interests are heard (Seidman, 1996; Kumashiro, 2001).

**Conclusion**

This study reviewed certain similarities between queer theory and disability studies as intellectual disciplines, by examining their liability to feminism and their opposition to hegemonic norms. Normalization is the process of constructing, establishing, and reproducing a taken-for-granted standards used to measure goodness, desirability, morality, rationality, superiority, and other dominant cultural values. The inability to customize the pre-determined default interfaces and the urgent need for alternative design approaches reveal that the alternate user positions and uses challenge the hegemony of the preferred infrastructure (Ellcessor, 2016). However, even though the hegemonic understandings of use and the user are powerful, they may be adaptable and open to potential challenges.

As previously emphasized, it is essential to acknowledge the interdisciplinary nature of the subject of digital inclusion while being mindful about including experiences of people with disabilities to adequately cover the issue of digital accessibility. Plural notions of the concept public sphere can be used to examine how the economic and political structures in which online communication takes place can obstruct disabled users’ rights to exercise the freedom of equality of participation (Arato and Cohen 1992; Fraser 1993; Downing 2001). It is imperative to denaturalize the normalized discourses, especially ableism in order to explore alternative user positions and negotiations through an intersectional lens that allows recognizing the multiple identities of an individual, in diverse experiences of disadvantage or advantage. In similar lines with the queer theory, Butler argues that difference is best conceptualized outside of categorical thinking and that greater attention is needed to forms of marginalization that cannot be captured by social identity categories alone (2007).

Numerous studies showcasing various benefits of ICTs for individuals with disabilities were reviewed, most of the studies seem to be focusing on the socializing and networking capabilities in terms of establishing new meaningful connections and transcending the limitations of the offline world (2010). Even though the concept of digital divide has helped to focus public attention on a critical social issue, there is a still
an urgent need for a more refined conceptual framework for the problem with an accordingly informed policy and research agenda. In terms of bridging the divide, there is a need for initiatives to provide equal access to ICTs as a means of promoting social inclusion. To enable the inclusion of people with disabilities during the regulatory processes, Ellcressor urges new models of production for interaction with media, which may offer cultural and civic engagement with society through media texts (2016).

Similarly, digital inclusion is a critical topic both in academic and public spheres that definitely deserves more attention. In order to achieve the digital inclusion, people with disabilities should be included in the ongoing ameliorative development, design, and application of the technologies. Acquiring a queer approach in technological design may open doors of possibilities for an inclusive design that encourages diversity across disciplines, may enable to accommodate diverse needs of alternate users through including multiple voices and interests (Kumashiro, 2001). In addition, the proliferation of online othering demonstrates how critical it is to addressing the role of power and privilege concerning the design of information and communication technologies. Critically analyzing non-binary concepts helps to expose the discursive practices which gendered identities are constituted through. Such an analysis can help gaining a critical understanding of these discursive practices that behind the normalized identities and determine the hierarchies (Kannabiran, 2012).

Also, through a particularly focusing on the processes that embody pathologic bodily differences, while also unsettling heteronormativity, point to “queering” through various cultural processes that enforce often contradictory notions of asexuality, vulnerability, perversion, and victimization. In many ways queer theory and the construction of the term “queer” are used as an inclusive signifier to dismantle sexual identities and categories, therefore it must truly be inclusive without operating delimiting mechanism in order for the theory to be true to its identified mission. Indeed, breaking down barriers is not only about changing attitudes or redesigning the established environment, it also involves addressing to the high rates of unemployment through providing real and valued employment opportunities for people with disabilities (Linton, 1998).
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