

**REPUBLIC OF TÜRKİYE
ANKARA UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION STUDIES**

**CULTURAL PRIMACY AND SELF-ORIENTALISM IN NETFLIX TURKEY
ORIGINAL PRODUCTIONS: THE TRANSFORMATION OF LOCAL
NARRATIVES WITHIN GLOBAL MEDIA DYNAMICS**

Master Thesis

Dilara AKGÜN

Ankara, 2025

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TO THE DIRECTORATE OF GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES,

I hereby declare that all the information in my master's thesis I prepared under under the advisory of **Prof. Burcu SÜMER** with the title “**Cultural Primacy and Self-Orientalism in Netflix Turkey Original Productions: The Transformation of Local Narratives within Global Media Dynamics (Ankara.2025)**”, was collected and presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical conduct; all materials in this thesis which I obtained from other sources have been fully cited and referenced; that I acted in accordance with the rules of scientific research and ethical conduct during the course of the study; and in any contrary case of above statements, I will accept any form of legal consequences.

26.09.2025

Dilara AKGÜN

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INTRODUCTION

The globalization of media has transformed not only how content travels but how cultures are made visible, stylized, and perceived. As digital infrastructures dissolve traditional broadcasting boundaries, streaming platforms like Netflix have emerged as central players in shaping the global circulation of narratives. Unlike conventional media systems that served national audiences, Netflix operates through a transnational interface that seeks to scale local stories for international markets. Within this system, local productions are increasingly expected to serve dual purposes: expressing cultural specificity while remaining straightforward and appealing to global audience. This dual ‘duty’, to be both local and globally legible has profound implications for how national identity, cultural heritage, and historical narratives are represented in its content.

Netflix’s expansion into Turkey in the late 2010’s marked a significant shift in the country’s media landscape. As one of the earliest non-Western countries to receive significant investment in scripted originals, Turkey became a strategic testing ground for the platform’s localization efforts. It is evident that rising popularity of Turkish TV series, and generally so-called soap operas in the international market has undeniable effect on Turkey’s becoming strategic testing ground for Netflix.

The first three original Turkish series - *The Protector* (*Hakan: Muhafiz*, 2018), *The Gift* (*Atiye*, 2019), and *Sahmaran* (2023) - represent not only content offerings but also platform curated cultural statements. Despite differences in plot and tone, these series share a common narrative and aesthetic foundation built around mysticism, mythology, spiritualism, and symbolic geography. This consistency points to more than creative coincidence and it reflects how the platform curates local identity within its global strategy.

These productions offer a valuable lens for examining how local culture is made visible through streaming infrastructures. The goal is not simply to describe content, but to interrogate the representational patterns and industrial dynamics that underlie their construction.

This thesis argues that Netflix's early Turkish originals are shaped by self-Orientalism driven by platform logics. While Edward Said critiqued how the West constructed the East as exotic and inferior, self-Orientalism here refers to how non-Western creators internalize and reproduce similar narrative tropes, not merely as imitation, but as a strategic alignment with global platform storytelling norms. These choices are often made to secure visibility and relevance within transnational content markets. In global streaming ecosystems, such representations are not just symbolic but function as adaptive responses to infrastructural and economic imperatives.

The concept of self-orientalism is particularly powerful in this context because it captures a paradox: that local narratives may gain global traction precisely by emphasizing the very tropes historically used to marginalize them. These tropes are not simply narrative devices; they are visibility strategies aligned with platform algorithms and catalog structures. They package cultural depth in forms that feel familiar to global audiences, even when they strip complexity from local lived realities.

While some academic studies have addressed self-Orientalist themes in Netflix Turkey's early originals, these works often focus on either textual analysis or audience reception, without connecting these insights to the broader industrial logic of platform capitalism. This thesis departs from those approaches by examining how platform infrastructure, global commissioning strategies, and symbolic representation intersect. It situates aesthetic and narrative decisions within a broader theoretical framework that includes platform capitalism (Jin), cultural primacy (Chalaby), platform flow (Lobato), and industry lore (Lotz), alongside postcolonial theory.

The idea that streaming platforms are not neutral distributors is crucial for this investigation. Netflix, in particular, functions as an infrastructural actor that not only commissions but also classifies, promotes, and globally circulates content. It is a vertically integrated entity that compresses production, recommendation, and reception into a single algorithmic pipeline. Within this structure, symbolic elements such as ancient cities, mythical lineages and mysterious powers become content assets that can be deployed across multiple cultural markets, creating aesthetic bridges between the local and the transnational.

This thesis focuses on the launch-phase strategy of Netflix in Turkey, analyzing its early scripted originals not simply as standalone cultural texts but as platform-shaped expressions of local culture. The analysis investigates how these texts visually and narratively represent those local cultures and to what extent these representations are aligned with long-standing Orientalist logics, even when produced domestically.

The foundation of this thesis rests on an expanded interpretation of self-Orientalism, not merely as a representational trope but as a mediated and infrastructurally shaped outcome. To understand its operation within Netflix's Turkish originals, the study draws on three theoretical clusters: postcolonial representation theory, platform capitalism and infrastructural visibility, and industrial-cultural logic frameworks such as cultural primacy and industry lore.

The first is grounded in Edward Said's (1978) concept of Orientalism, which explains how the West historically constructed the East as exotic, backward, and irrational opposite to its own claimed rationality and modernity. Said distinguishes between manifest Orientalism, which appears as overt stereotyping, and latent Orientalism, which functions through deeper symbolic and aesthetic patterns. These latent forms, including mystical spiritualism, mythic temporality, and symbolic

geographies persist in contemporary media, especially when they are reabsorbed into global entertainment under the guise of diversity or cultural authenticity.

Self-Orientalism arises when these tropes are not externally imposed but internally adopted by local creators, often consciously, to meet global market expectations. Al-'Azm (1981) referred to this as “ontological Orientalism reversed.” Rey Chow (1995) elaborated the process as “the Oriental’s Orientalism,” stressing its performative, strategic, and often aspirational dimensions. Ji Yeon Lee (2005), in her work on East Asian cinema, added an industrial layer to this reading, showing how self-Orientalist representation can emerge as a response to global distribution structures and visibility hierarchies. In Lee’s framing, self-Orientalism is not only aesthetic but economic and strategic, structured by power asymmetries in global cultural flows.

This leads into the second conceptual cluster: platform capitalism. Dal Yong Jin (2015, 2023) argues that streaming platforms such as Netflix are not just digital intermediaries but complex cultural and economic systems. They extract value not only from subscriptions or data but also from the way they structure and control content production and circulation. Jin’s related concept of platform imperialism further explains how a small number of U.S. based tech platforms dominate the digital media landscape globally, setting aesthetic standards, curating access to audiences, and determining which stories gain traction. This structural dominance mirrors earlier critiques of cultural imperialism but focuses on infrastructural power, interface governance, and algorithmic recommendation systems.

Ramon Lobato (2018) builds on this by introducing the concept of platform flow, contrasting it with Raymond Williams’ original notion of television flow. While television flow referred to the linear sequence of content delivered via national channels, platform flow is non-linear, catalog-based, and algorithmically optimized, creating a new regime of visibility. On Netflix, what gets seen depends less on national

broadcasting policies and more on content metadata, genre tagging, and how thumbnails are displayed across regions. This has crucial implications for cultural representation: narratives that blend local specificity with global genre familiarity (e.g., mystic thrillers, mythological dramas) are favored because they perform well across multiple markets.

The third cluster comprises cultural primacy and industry lore. Jean Chalaby (2006, 2016) introduces the concept of cultural primacy to explain how Anglo-American narrative formats retain symbolic and economic dominance, even within an increasingly diverse content landscape. The assumption that Anglo-Saxon storytelling with its pacing, character arcs and dramatic beats is universally exportable creates pressure on local creators to emulate these models. Havens (2013: 4) complements this with the notion of industry lore. It acts as a tool used by media professionals to carry and reshape meanings from television content as it moves across countries. Instead of reflecting the full complexity of shows, it picks out only the elements that fit institutional goals such as market appeal or audience expectations and ignores the rest. Through this selective approach, it helps insiders imagine how global audiences might connect with certain kinds of content.

Lore functions not through mandates but through internalized beliefs often derived from prior commercial performance about audience preferences, genre trends, and platform expectations.

Together, these frameworks help explain how self-orientalism on Netflix is not simply a matter of representation but a function of platform-constrained visibility. Mystical plotlines, dream imagery, mythical women, ancient ruins, and spiritual geography are not just cultural expressions, they are also signifiers that work within platform logics. They render content “globally legible” while enabling the platform to brand its catalog as diverse and local.

This thesis approaches such elements not as isolated aesthetic choices but as symptoms of systemic negotiation. It posits that what appears as “Turkish mysticism” in these originals is often a platform-shaped hybrid produced at the intersection of local creative agency and global infrastructural constraint. The question, then, is not whether Netflix imposes Orientalist tropes on Turkey, but how Turkish creators in collaboration with the platform navigate and internalize those tropes in the process of global storytelling.

This thesis explores how Turkish original series produced by Netflix, specifically during its launch phase in the country, reflect self-orientalist tendencies shaped by the global logic of streaming platforms. Rather than surveying the entire catalog of Netflix Turkey, this study focuses on the initial representational and strategic choices that framed the platform’s early cultural positioning.

The analysis is explored by the following research questions:

RQ1: To what extent do Netflix Turkey’s early original scripted productions exhibit self-Orientalist elements in their narrative and aesthetic choices?

RQ2: How do the industrial and infrastructural logics of global streaming platforms shape these specific representational patterns?

RQ3: How do these productions negotiate between local cultural specificity and the demands of a global market, and what are the implications for the cultural legibility of local narratives?

These questions reflect an underlying assumption that representation in the age of streaming is not produced solely by creative decision-making, but through ongoing negotiation with platform dynamics, including content commissioning, algorithmic visibility, and catalog curation. The aim is to examine how such industrial and symbolic forces shape not just what is told, but how and why certain cultural stories are told in the ways that they are.

To address these questions, the thesis adopts a qualitative and interpretive research design grounded in media and cultural studies. The analytical focus is on a close reading of three scripted Netflix Turkey originals - *The Protector (Hakan: Muhafız)*, *The Gift (Atiye)*, and *Sahmaran* - selected for their shared symbolic reliance on mysticism, mythology, and spiritual aesthetics. While each series differs in tone and structure, they collectively represent a narrative and stylistic orientation that defined the platform's early image in Turkey. The study utilizes thematic analysis to identify recurring motifs, aesthetic strategies, and spatial-symbolic patterns, interpreted through a theoretical lens that integrates postcolonial critique with platform studies and media industry theory.

The focus here is not measuring representation empirically, nor assessing audience reception. Instead my focus here is to interrogate how cultural visibility is constructed at the intersection of global platform logics and localized content production. Representational strategies are treated as both cultural expressions and industrial responses that are shaped by a complex interplay between creative agency, platform governance and global market imperatives.

The main chapters of this thesis are organized as follows. Chapter 1 reviews the existing literature and presents the theoretical framework and links concepts such as, platform capitalism, cultural primacy, industry lore and orientalism. Chapter 2 outlines the research design and presents the thematic analysis of the selected Turkish Netflix originals. The Discussion sub-chapter concludes the study by summarizing the key findings reflecting on their broader implications for understanding representation and cultural negotiation in global streaming environments.

This thesis aims to contribute to the growing body of scholarship that seeks to understand the evolving dynamics of cultural local production in the streaming era. While much existing literature on Netflix's global expansion focuses on market

penetration, technological infrastructure, or the democratization of access, fewer studies have examined the platform's representational logic in non-Western contexts with a sustained focus on symbolic form and industrial constraint. By centering its analysis on Netflix's first scripted originals in Turkey, this research highlights how representation is shaped not only by local storytelling traditions but also by platform-mediated pressures that influence what is seen, how it is seen, and why it appears legible across transnational markets.

The concept of self-Orientalism, as employed in this thesis, is adapted to reflect these contemporary dynamics. Rather than viewing it as a static or purely ideological form of cultural mimicry, the study repositions self-Orientalism as a platform-compatible strategy, one that emerges in conditions where global distribution systems reward legibility, recognizability, and symbolic density. This reframing helps explain why early Turkish Netflix productions lean so heavily on mysticism, spiritual symbolism, and mythic aesthetics: not merely as expressions of national identity, but as calculated mediations between local specificity and global accessibility.

By situating these representations within the broader frameworks of platform capitalism, cultural primacy, and industry lore, the thesis contributes a more layered understanding of how local content is shaped by global infrastructures. It emphasizes that platforms like Netflix do not simply localize; they curate, constrain, and circulate cultural narratives according to metrics that go far beyond cultural authenticity. As such, the research speaks to wider academic debates about postcolonial media visibility, symbolic power in the age of algorithms, and the tensions between national expression and global reach.

Moreover, the thesis aims to expand the methodological possibilities for media studies by combining close textual analysis with an awareness of industry dynamics. Rather than treating content as a closed text or as a direct mirror of cultural identity, the

analysis focuses on how aesthetic strategies and symbolic motifs serve as mediated responses to platform logics. This approach allows for a more nuanced reading of how representation operates under streaming infrastructures, one that accounts for both creative agency and structural constraint.

Finally, the thesis aims to be a significant attempt for what it reveals about the launch-phase imagination of a global platform: the kinds of stories, symbols, and subjectivities that are mobilized when a streaming service first enters a national market. In the case of Netflix Turkey, these early decisions seem not random or incidental; they are strategic cultural introductions that are designed to appeal and circulate. Understanding them as such provides insight into how global media flows continue to rely on familiar hierarchies of legibility, even when wrapped in the aesthetics of local storytelling.

In doing so, this study not only interrogates specific narratives but also aims to contribute to the broader challenge of theorizing global representation in the platform age which is a challenge that will remain central as streaming keeps transforming the global media and cultural landscape of the 21st century.

CHAPTER 1:

GLOBAL STRUCTURES AND LOCAL STRATEGIES: VISIBILITY, CONTROL, AND REPRESENTATION IN THE STREAMING ERA

This chapter brings together the key academic literature and conceptual tools that help explain how global streaming platforms influence local content production, with a particular focus on Turkish Netflix originals. It explores how questions of visibility, narrative structure, and cultural positioning are shaped by the platforms' operational logic, their infrastructural power, and the global aesthetic expectations they help define. Starting with the shift from traditional "television flow" to "platform flow," the chapter outlines how streaming services restructure the way content is delivered and discovered through catalogs and algorithms instead of linear schedules. This shift in visibility provides a foundation for understanding how platforms shape not only what is seen, but also how content is imagined, designed, and valued.

From here, the chapter moves into the broader structures behind these dynamics. Drawing on Dal Yong Jin's concept of platform imperialism, it considers how a small number of mostly U.S.-based platforms have come to dominate the global digital landscape, not only as content distributors but also as producers, data holders, and decision-makers. This dominance is built on ownership concentration, network effects, and data monopolies, which allow platforms to shape the rules of visibility across borders. These conditions also put pressure on local content to meet global platform standards, both in terms of form and appeal.

To understand how this cultural influence works in practice, the chapter focuses on three interconnected dynamics: cultural primacy, global value chains, and industry lore. Cultural primacy refers to the way Anglo-American norms around storytelling, aesthetics, and genre continue to influence what becomes globally visible, even when the content is locally produced. Rather than promoting direct exports, platforms shape

local content through indirect expectations and design choices. Global value chains serve as the underlying infrastructure that enables this influence, allowing platforms to decentralize production while keeping control centralized through decisions about commissioning, IP ownership, and data-driven feedback loops. Industry lore, in turn, helps naturalize these patterns by spreading shared assumptions within the media industry about what works globally, often leading to the repetition of certain tropes or aesthetics (Havens, 2013: 4,12; Lotz & Havens, 2016).

The chapter then turns to how local producers respond to these pressures. Drawing on the concept of 'marketable localism,' it revisits earlier discussions of glocalization and argues that platforms, although they seem to promote diversity, often prefer cultural markers that are easy to recognize and reuse. These are referred to as “plastic signifiers”, meaning symbols that gesture to the local without requiring deeper cultural grounding. This process of aesthetic packaging plays a key role in shaping the kinds of local stories that are made visible on global platforms.

These discussions build toward the final section of the chapter, which introduces self-orientalism as the central framework for the thesis. This concept helps analyze how representations of the local are sometimes shaped not only by internal cultural expression but also by external visibility demands. In the case of Turkish Netflix originals, the chapter explores how local creators might reproduce or stylize cultural elements, consciously or not, to fit within a framework that is legible to global audiences. Rather than assuming this is always a form of passive imitation, the chapter highlights how these strategies can be complex, negotiated responses to platform structures. Crucially, the pressures of platform visibility and transnational marketability do not only influence which local narratives are produced or circulated but also shape the symbolic and aesthetic strategies through which these narratives are made globally legible. This dynamic makes orientalism and self-orientalism particularly relevant

conceptual tools for understanding how local cultural identity is strategically packaged and performed within the visibility regimes of global streaming platforms. In this way, the discussion sets up the analytical lens that will guide the following chapters.

1.1. From Television Flow to Platform Flow

The concept of flow, first introduced by Raymond Williams in 1974, referred to the seamless scheduling and sequence of programming on broadcast television. In this model, content was delivered linearly and nationally through a temporal logic controlled by broadcasters. The notion of flow was not merely technical but cultural, shaping how audiences experienced television as an uninterrupted stream of meanings and values constructed across programs, advertising, and formats.

With the rise of streaming platforms, however, the nature of flow has undergone a fundamental transformation. The temporally structured, channel-based broadcast model has been replaced by a catalog-based interface model, where visibility, discoverability, and access are governed by platform-specific infrastructures, algorithms, and global licensing strategies rather than fixed schedules. In this sense, streaming platforms have created what Ramon Lobato (2019) calls “platform flow” a new visibility regime that reshapes not only how content is delivered but also what types of content are likely to be discovered, promoted, or globally circulated.

Unlike the traditional television model, where national broadcasters curated content for a domestic audience, platforms like Netflix manage multi-national catalogs optimized for both local and transnational reach. This shift has significant implications for cultural production and representation. As Lobato and others argue, platform infrastructures impose a new logic of selection, curation, and circulation, where algorithmic recommendations and interface positioning play a key role in determining a program’s success, rather than its temporal scheduling or national relevance. In the case of Turkish Netflix originals, this transformation of flow influences not only how shows

are discovered by audiences but also how they are conceptualized, stylized, and packaged. Thematic and symbolic elements such as mysticism, historical symbolism, or spiritual aesthetics may gain prominence not merely due to domestic preferences but as part of a broader strategic alignment with platform-based visibility logics. Thus, understanding the shift from television flow to platform flow provides a crucial foundation for analyzing the aesthetic and narrative choices in Turkish Netflix originals within the context of a global streaming ecosystem.

1.2. Platform Imperialism and the Global Logic of Streaming

Building critically on the shifting visibility regime introduced as "platform flow" in the preceding section, this part of the chapter explores the structural power dynamics that govern content creation and circulation in the streaming era. Dal Yong Jin's (2015, 2025) theory of platform imperialism offers a crucial lens to understand how a handful of global digital platforms, primarily headquartered in the United States, exert increasing hegemony over global communication infrastructures and digital content flows. This phenomenon represents a contemporary evolution of classical cultural and media imperialism, extending control beyond content to encompass technological infrastructures, intellectual property rights, and the monopolization of user data.

Platform imperialism functions through a set of interconnected mechanisms that allow dominant platforms to consolidate power across the digital media landscape. First, platform ownership concentration enables a small number of companies like Netflix to control large segments of global digital services, thereby shaping access to content and influencing user behavior within curated environments. Second, network effects amplify this dominance: as more users join a platform, they attract more content, which in turn draws in more users, creating a self-reinforcing cycle of growth. Third, data monopolization provides these platforms with extensive insights into global viewing habits, user preferences, and engagement trends. Although such data may not directly

determine creative decisions at the outset, it nonetheless guides higher-level strategic choices regarding content development, commissioning, and promotional priorities.

Netflix, as a paradigmatic example, embodies this imperial logic through its vertically integrated structure. Unlike traditional television models where production, distribution, and broadcasting were carried out by separate entities, Netflix combines these roles into a single global infrastructure. This structural convergence allows the platform to exert significant influence over which stories are produced, how they are told, and how they circulate globally. This centralized platform governance ensures that even when commissioning local productions, these are often structured around global platform standards, reinforcing economic and cultural asymmetries between core platform countries and peripheral content-producing regions.

Consequently, the global logic of streaming inherent in platform imperialism dictates a pervasive pressure for local content to align with established, globally legible formats and aesthetics to secure visibility. Decisions about which content is promoted, localized, or commissioned are deeply embedded in algorithmic and market-driven logics, which inherently prioritize content that conforms to global viewing habits and standardizable, scalable formats. This is not a neutral process but one designed to maximize global reach and profitability. As Sümer and İlaslan (2023) observe, drawing on Lotz (2021), local productions financed by global platforms are often positioned in a subordinate catalog placement despite their ‘original’ label highlighting the complexities of platform-driven internationalization.

This understanding of platform imperialism is foundational for analyzing Netflix’s global-local content dynamics. It shows that the economic and technical dominance of these platforms provide the main structure for creating content strategies, such as cultural primacy and localization. In this system, the need for local content to be visible on a global level directly affects the strategic adaptation of both narratives and

visual-aesthetic elements. This ongoing structural pressure thus serves as a critical contextual factor for the rise of self-orientalist tropes, where local cultural elements are reshaped to meet global aesthetic expectations and market demands.

1.3. Maintaining Global Cultural Power: Cultural Primacy, Value Chains, and the Logic of Industry Lore

Building upon the understanding of platform flow (2.1) and the structural dominance of platform imperialism (2.2), this section delves into the specific mechanisms through which global cultural power is maintained and reproduced in the contemporary streaming era. This cannot be fully understood without accounting for the transnational infrastructures that underlie the operations of streaming platforms. Scholars such as Jean K. Chalaby (2022), Ramon Lobato (2019), and Dal Yong Jin (2019) have emphasized that platforms like Netflix are not simply global in reach; they are transnational by design, embedding cross-border flows into their very structure of commissioning, content visibility, and symbolic representation. Chalaby (2022:13) argues that with the rise of streaming platforms, what was once at the margins now sits at the core of TV culture, as the transnational has become an everyday mode of media consumption and interaction. Rather than targeting distinct national audiences, these platforms organize their catalogs, production strategies, and interface logic around the idea of scalable transnational consumption, where local content is produced with the explicit goal of crossing cultural and linguistic boundaries. This framework complicates older models of international media that treated the local and global as separate poles and instead suggests that transnationalism is the defining mode of cultural circulation in the platform era.

Within this transnational operational mode, global cultural power is maintained through a sophisticated and integrated interplay of cultural primacy, global value chains, and industry lore. While at first glance, the increased investment in local narratives and

localization by US-based platforms might appear to diminish traditional American cultural dominance, Chalaby (2023) argues that this is, in fact, a strategic adaptation designed to reinforce their fundamental position as dominant global players. This means that cultural primacy, defined here as the aesthetic and representational norms that determine global visibility, is subtly sustained and diffused through the structural mechanisms of global value chains. These chains, by decentralizing content production geographically while maintaining centralized control (e.g., through commissioning and IP ownership), ensure that local content is selected and shaped to align with globally accepted, or marketable characteristics. This strategic shaping of local visibility then permeates the industry through industry lore, which comprises the common sense ways of doing things among media industry executives and workers, often based on perception and convention rather than research. This integrated framework, directly aligning with a critical media industry studies approach, explains why content appearing to support local production can, in reality, reinforce the enduring influence of a dominant cultural order. The following sub-sections will explore each of these concepts in detail, demonstrating how cultural influence shifts from direct exports to indirect design logic, how control over content is centralized through infrastructure, and how shared industry assumptions reinforce existing visibility logics within this pervasive transnational context.

1.3.1. From Dominance to Design: Cultural Primacy in the Platform Age

As explored above, the dominance of global streaming platforms operates through a transnational infrastructure that shapes content production and circulation beyond national borders. Within this framework, global cultural power is no longer maintained only through the export of media products but through more embedded and systemic strategies. One such strategy is cultural primacy, the subtle but persistent influence of aesthetic and narrative norms that originate from dominant media

industries, particularly those of the United States and other Anglo-American contexts. While the visibility of non-Western content has increased in the streaming era, this visibility is often tied to how well such content conforms to platform-defined standards of genre, pacing, and visual style.

Chalaby (2006) argues that the shift from direct export to strategic adaptation reflects a transformation in how power is exercised. Rather than imposing cultural products, dominant platforms now shape local content through their commissioning logic and infrastructural design. This results in what can be called a form of indirect influence where platforms promote surface-level diversity while subtly reinforcing familiar aesthetic codes. Jin (2019: 52-55) explains this change as part of platform imperialism where global platforms support local creators become visible but also place them in systems that focus on global reach and international market appeal.

This model of influence is especially effective because it aligns with the economic logics of scalability. As Lobato (2019) notes, streaming platforms depend on content that travels across regions, languages, and demographics. This necessity influences what kinds of stories get told, which themes are emphasized, and how characters are constructed. Even when content is produced locally, it is shaped to meet transnational expectations, what might be called a platform-ready aesthetic. Jin (2019) and Lobato (2019) both emphasize that this does not simply reflect audience preferences, but rather the internal decision-making structures of platforms, where metadata systems, discoverability metrics, and brand coherence guide creative choices.

In this sense, cultural primacy can be understood through what might be called a “design logic,” drawing on Chalaby and Plunkett’s (2021) discussion of platform commissioning practices. This refers to a set of principles that shape how content is imagined, developed, and commissioned. Building on this argument, I suggest that this logic is not neutral; it encodes assumptions about what kinds of narratives are valuable,

relatable, or sellable on a global scale. For example, while platforms outwardly support the production of diverse content, they often favor narratives that fit within familiar genres (such as crime, romance, mystery) or include recognizable cultural elements that can function as signifiers of locality without disrupting global readability.

This process also points to the broader shift from international to transnational modes of cultural circulation. As Chalaby (2022:13) puts it, the transnational is no longer an exception but the norm in contemporary media. Rather than treating the global and local as separate poles, streaming platforms operate through a structure where content is inherently meant to cross boundaries. This transnationalism is built into the very architecture of platforms from user interfaces that recommend content across languages to algorithmic systems that promote shows based on global data patterns. As such, the local is not simply represented but also reconfigured in ways that align with global visibility logic.

While platforms seem to embrace diversity on the surface, the range of narratives that gain visibility tends to follow certain recognizable templates. This dynamic highlights how aesthetic and narrative expectations are built into the very design of platform infrastructures. As content circulates across borders, what counts as local is often shaped in advance by assumptions about what will resonate globally. These assumptions are not only cultural, but also deeply connected to how platforms manage production, outsourcing creative work across multiple territories while maintaining centralized control over key decisions. In this way, the structure of global content flows continues to reflect and reproduce existing hierarchies, not just through what stories are told, but through how and under what conditions they are made.

1.3.2. Value Chains as Infrastructure: Controlling Local Content Globally

Complementing the idea of cultural primacy discussed above, the operation of global value chains (GVCs) reveals the structural mechanisms through which streaming

platforms maintain centralized control over content that is geographically decentralized in production. As Jean K. Chalaby (2021) argues, the streaming industry is reshaping television production around GVCs, in a manner similar to other globalized industries, each coordinated by a handful of powerful lead firms managing thousands of suppliers worldwide. Streaming platforms benefit from transnational network effects and coordinate content supply chains on a global scale, thereby embedding control into the infrastructure itself.

Dal Yong Jin (2019) shares a similar perspective on Global Value Chains (GVCs) and analyzes that in the digital media age these chains expand beyond distribution to cover the entire lifecycle of content, from conception to financing, production, marketing, and monetization. In this model, streaming platforms do not merely distribute local content; they actively shape it from the outset. Although local production may occur in various national contexts, this decentralization does not translate into a decentralization of power. Instead, platforms operate through a highly centralized structure, ensuring that all nodes within the chain conform to their strategic imperatives.

Control manifests most clearly at the commissioning stage. Streaming platforms provide content guidelines and quality benchmarks and increasingly dictate narrative preferences based on perceived global trends. Genres with presumed transnational appeal, such as dystopian thrillers, youth dramas, or identity-focused family sagas tend to dominate. While this can lead to more international exposure for some local productions, it also fosters a logic of selection based on marketability rather than local distinctiveness. Netflix's strategic investment in content from markets such as South Korea and Spain, for example, demonstrates how regional content is curated and stylized for global consumption (Idiz, Noordegraaf and Vliegthart, 2024).

A central mechanism reinforcing this control is the ownership and management of intellectual property. Platforms frequently require the full transfer of IP rights from local producers, granting themselves long-term, global control over the content. This shift from production-for-broadcast to production-for-platform has significant implications for local creative industries. Without IP ownership, local producers are cut off from secondary monetization opportunities and long-term asset development. This structural asymmetry reinforces platform dominance across markets while limiting the autonomy and sustainability of local production ecosystems.

Moreover, data feedback loops and algorithmic metrics further reinforce this centralized control. Performance data collected from global audiences shapes future commissioning decisions, subtly privileging content that fits existing formulas of success. As such, industry lore which is those informal, experience-based beliefs about what works internationally, intersects with data-driven strategy to further narrow the scope of acceptable narratives. Over time, this cultivates a landscape in which risk-averse, familiar storytelling becomes normalized as global, even when emerging from culturally diverse origins.

This infrastructure of control blurs traditional boundaries between local and global production. As Chalaby (2021) notes, streaming platforms are shifting from export-based expansion to a foreign-asset-based growth model, licensing and commissioning international content while retaining control over its distribution and branding through their direct-to-consumer (DTC) services. This de-territorialized production system enables seamless transnational management, where national industries become embedded within the logic of platform infrastructures.

Despite the appearance of growing diversity in global content, the control exercised through GVCs ensures that only certain kinds of local stories, those that align with the commercial, aesthetic, and logistical parameters defined by global platforms

become visible. In this way, value chains function not only as logistical systems but as instruments of cultural filtration, sustaining platform power while shaping the boundaries of transnational storytelling. This structural shaping of content will be further contextualized in the following sections through a closer examination of representational strategies, platform aesthetics, and the influence of industry lore on narrative adaptation, with particular attention to how these dynamics unfold in the Turkish context.

1.3.3. What Sells Globally: Industry Lore and the Internalization of Platform Norms

The influence of cultural primacy and the structural control of global value chains are internalized and enacted through industry lore. This concept outlines how shared assumptions and beliefs within the media industry guide producers' creative choices and reinforce existing visibility logics. In the streaming era, this lore is heavily influenced by the practices and perceived successes of dominant global platforms like Netflix, establishing an implicit set of guidelines for what works globally.

More specifically, industry lore comprises the common sense ways of operating among media industry executives and workers, encompassing prevailing ideas about consumer preferences and popular trends. Crucially, this lore often relies more on ingrained perceptions and established conventions than on rigorous market research. As Havens and Lotz (2016) further explain, media workers frequently adhere to organizational norms and industry lore, the supposed but untested rules about what audiences desire and what will or won't be commercially successful. This concept is fundamental for critical media studies, as it elucidates how corporate decisions are shaped not only by data but also by these naturally accepted knowledge sets that can perpetuate hegemonic narratives.

Timothy Havens's (2013) work on the global circulation of African American television content illustrates how industry lore shapes content and representation. Havens (ibid, 4) defines industry lore as an institutionalized form of knowledge that functions as a carrier discourse, filtering which content and aesthetic forms are deemed marketable across different territories. While not directly producing content, it establishes a structural framework that determines which representations will circulate.

Within this framework, stereotypes play a central and commercially strategic role. Havens (2013: 8) argues that stereotypes are not merely simplistic images but function as highly recognizable, quickly codable, and easily marketable narrative building blocks for media professionals. In the global media economy, stereotypes serve to make the unknown familiar, particularly in representations of culturally othered groups. They allow content to appear authentically rooted in a culture while simultaneously adhering to market-driven demands for recognizable forms. This ensures content is readily understood and positioned within buyer-seller-producer relationships across transnational circuits.

Crucially, Havens (2013) contends that stereotypes are products of the industry's institutional labor, reflecting how media professionals actively structure content for target markets. This dynamic holds true even when content is produced by individuals from within the culture being represented. For instance, an African American producer might inadvertently reproduce stereotypical Black characters under the pressure of industry lore, as buyers, distributors, and international broadcasters presume such characters will resonate with a global audience. This makes stereotypes a kind of commercial safety net, reinforcing dominant narratives and potentially suppressing alternative, more complex cultural meanings. Such institutional practices, as this thesis will demonstrate, extend to the strategic packaging of Turkish cultural elements, influencing how dominant cultural preferences are subtly reinforced as local content is

framed for global legibility and results in phenomena like “conspicuous localism” or content being designed for global appeal. Industry lore thus acts as a powerful mechanism that ensures content produced within global value chains conforms to the aesthetic and narrative norms of cultural primacy, effectively standardizing what is deemed sellable on the global stage.

1.4. Localizing for Legibility: Adaptive Strategies in the Age of Streaming

In the age of global streaming, producers increasingly find themselves adapting local content to fit the expectations of platforms that prioritize global scalability. As discussed in earlier sections, platform logic rooted in algorithmic visibility and transnational content flows encourages the creation of content that is both culturally specific and globally accessible. This tension gives rise to a variety of adaptive strategies that reframe local narratives through global genre conventions, aesthetic codes, and narrative simplifications. This section explores how such strategies reflect broader pressures of marketable localism, the creation of content that is legible to global audiences while appearing to retain its cultural roots. To do so, it first revisits the widely used concept of glocalization before moving to concrete examples of how narrative and representational strategies function within this framework.

1.4.1. Reconsidering Glocalization: Cultural Hybridization and Its Limits

The emergence of global streaming platforms such as Netflix has renewed scholarly attention to how global and local forces interact within contemporary media systems. Among the most frequently cited frameworks for understanding this interaction is the concept of glocalization, introduced by Roland Robertson (1995), which describes the simultaneous interplay of universalizing and particularizing dynamics in cultural production. Glocalization has since been adopted widely in media studies to account for how global media companies operate across diverse national contexts, often adjusting

content strategies to reflect local aesthetics, narratives, and sensibilities while retaining centralized infrastructural control.

In the context of streaming platforms, this model appears especially applicable. Netflix for example, finances and distributes locally produced series in national/local languages, often with local actors and culturally specific motifs while integrating them into its global catalog. This production logic has led some scholars to interpret platforms local contents as evidence of a hybridized or glocalized media environment. Dal Yong Jin describes this as a form of hybridity in platforms' sense (2019: 7,8, 35-38) whereby local creators combine culturally specific elements with global storytelling conventions to reach broader audiences. According to Jin (*ibid*), such hybridization can be a productive form of global participation by non-Western producers, offering visibility and mobility in a previously restricted international content economy.

However, the applicability of glocalization as a framework for platform-mediated cultural production requires closer scrutiny, particularly in cases where representational strategies appear to be shaped more by global visibility logic than by local cultural agency. While platforms like Netflix outwardly support diversity and regional specificity, the content they commission is often influenced by structural forces, such as algorithmic discoverability, commissioning guidelines, and internalized production norms that favor globally legible formats. These forces complicate the premise that local content retains full cultural autonomy within global flows.

Although Turkish Netflix originals may fit the formal definition of glocal content being both locally rooted and globally circulated their representational strategies often reflect deeper asymmetries of symbolic power. This selective adaptation process where local narratives are adjusted for global visibility while retaining a surface level of cultural specificity is referred to in this thesis as marketable localism. As will be explored in subsequent chapters, some of these productions reconfigure national myths,

historical symbols, and aesthetic tropes in ways that align with global market expectations rather than expressing cultural specificity on its own terms. While such strategies may still fall within a broad definition of hybridity, they also risk reducing local identity to what this thesis refers to as marketable cultural signifiers, symbolic elements of national or ethnic identity that are selectively emphasized, stylized, or simplified in order to enhance global appeal within platform infrastructures. These signifiers are often designed less for local resonance than for recognizability within transnational circuits of distribution and consumption.

While existing literature has addressed the structural hybridity of global-local content, there remains a notable gap in studies specifically examining how platform-driven pressures affect narrative construction and symbolic representation at the textual level. This research suggests that such pressures play a considerable role in shaping these elements. This thesis aims to contribute to filling this gap by analyzing how platform logic and global expectations shape the aesthetic and cultural grammar of Turkish Netflix originals, with particular attention to how they navigate the boundary between cultural specificity and transnational legibility.

1.4.2. From Cultural Specificity to Marketable Localism: Strategic Adaptation and Narrative Packaging

Building on the limitations of glocalization discussed in the previous section, this part turns to concrete manifestations of how local cultural narratives are shaped under the influence of platform infrastructures. As previously defined, marketable localism refers to the strategic adaptation of local narratives to meet platform expectations, often through the use of symbolic elements that visually or narratively encode cultural difference in ways legible to global audiences. These elements, whether mysticism, folklore, national history, or visual symbolism are not rejected but reformatted to align with transnational tastes and the discoverability metrics embedded

in platform infrastructures. While such content may appear culturally specific on the surface, its narrative structure and symbolic logic are often molded by global circulation imperatives.

This section expands on how marketable localism materializes narratively, specifically through the deployment of recognizable cultural signifiers and narrative tropes. Such strategic adaptations align with how Michael L. Wayne and Deborah Castro (2025) characterize Netflix's use of cultural authenticity in its industrial discourse. According to their analysis, cultural authenticity is no longer a textual or narrative property, but a form of corporate behavior and industrial practice. It functions more as a stylized performance than as an expression of deep cultural knowledge providing the appearance of diversity without requiring substantial engagement with cultural specificity. This rhetorical maneuvering, they argue, transforms cultural identity into a commodity designed for global readability rather than local resonance.

This rhetorical strategy is exemplified in the public discourse of Netflix executives themselves. In their work on the topic, Wayne and Uribe Sandoval (2021) note that Netflix's public relations discourse often frames the company as a champion of local authenticity. This discourse is clearly seen in the words of then Chief Content Officer Ted Sarandos, who explicitly connected global success to what he calls "authentically local" content:

We've kept one strict principle around it, which was that these shows had to be very locally relevant. And to do that, you have to be pretty authentically local. So what we're trying not to do is try to inauthentically make a global show because basically that doesn't work for anybody. So the more authentically local the show is, the better it travels. ...We don't try to make it -- water it down or make it travel any better inorganically and have found that the best way to make global stories is to make them incredibly, authentically local (Netflix, 2019b).

While Sarandos's statement seems to promote deep cultural embeddedness, my analysis of Netflix Turkey's launch-phase productions reveals a disconnect between this public discourse and the content's actual representational logic. The platform's rhetoric defines "authenticity" as a quality that facilitates global travel and commercial viability, aligning it with the logic of marketable localism. As a result, cultural symbols such as mysticism, spiritual guides, and mythological narratives are treated as commercial commodities that can be easily recognized and consumed by global audiences.

A similar line of critique is developed by Juan Llamas-Rodríguez (2023) in his chapter on Netflix Mexico, where he analyzes the selective deployment of national cultural symbols in service of transnational storytelling. His reading of *Luis Miguel: La serie* and *Ingobernable* reveals how surface-level cultural references are turned into what he calls "plastic signifiers" (*ibid*, 242): Symbolic markers that gesture toward national specificity while remaining narratively hollow. In *Luis Miguel*, the "wise Indian" trope is embodied by a fictional Indigenous character whose sole purpose is to guide the white protagonist's emotional and spiritual development. Rather than representing a contemporary Indigenous presence, the character functions as a narrative device rooted in exoticism and nostalgia. In *Ingobernable*, the historically subaltern neighborhood of Tepito is briefly invoked as a marker of cultural texture, only to be narratively discarded in favor of a redemptive arc centered on a privileged protagonist. These examples, according to Llamas-Rodríguez, illustrate how symbolic difference is flattened into simplified aesthetic elements that offer a 'simulacrum' of cultural specificity without disrupting dominant platform logics.

Importantly, these representational strategies are not confined to the Latin American context. Comparable dynamics can be observed in Turkish Netflix originals, where similar narrative mechanisms are employed. A particularly illustrative example is found in the series *The Gift*, in which a mystical Eastern elder woman guides the

protagonist through spiritual insight. Although this figure appears to draw from local esoteric traditions, her function mirrors that of the “wise Indian” figure discussed above serving the heroine’s self-discovery rather than embodying autonomous cultural meaning. In both cases, the culturally specific is reframed as a universally intelligible archetype, stripped of contextual complexity and designed for transnational legibility.

This recurring reliance on aestheticized cultural shorthand aligns with what Wayne and Castro describe as the platform’s tendency to emphasize universal storytelling. Executives routinely assert that “great stories are universal. They can come from anywhere, be created by anyone, and be loved by everyone.” While seemingly inclusive, this discourse reduces the value of local narratives to their capacity to illustrate universal themes, ultimately eroding the “particularity and partisanship” that make stories culturally resonant. For instance, Netflix co-CEO Ted Sarandos once described the French series *Lupin* as a “very French show,” without specifying what makes it distinctively French. This kind of rhetorical vagueness reflects what Wayne and Castro (2025) call a “neutered form of authenticity,” wherein cultural difference becomes interchangeable, aestheticized, and instrumentalized to fit the logic of global content flows.

Such framing is further complicated by Netflix’s self-positioning as a counter-hegemonic force in the global media economy. Through the rhetoric of “structural inversion,” the platform claims to reverse traditional Hollywood-centric flows by empowering local creators. However, as Wayne and Castro argue, these claims often remain vague and underdefined, suggesting that the appearance of local collaboration is prioritized over substantive creative autonomy. This raises critical questions about how cultural storytelling is repurposed within a platform logic that values visibility, scalability, and algorithmic discoverability over narrative depth and cultural embeddedness.

In conclusion, the dynamics explored in this section suggest that marketable localism on platforms like Netflix is less about showcasing diverse cultural narratives and more about reshaping them into globally legible formats. Through the combined effects of symbolic repackaging, rhetorical performances of authenticity, and platform-optimized storytelling structures, cultural specificity is rendered into a consumable surface, a stylized difference that performs diversity without engaging its complexities. While such strategies may foster international reach, they also pave the way for the emergence of self-orientalist tendencies, which will be examined in the following chapter.

1.5. Framing the Local Self: Orientalism, Self-Orientalism, and Narrative Strategy

In contemporary platform ecosystems, cultural representation is not merely a question of visibility but of framing of how local identities are symbolically constructed, stylized, and made legible under global infrastructures. While previous sections examined how streaming platforms exert structural and aesthetic control over local productions through algorithms, value chains, and platform logic, this section turns to the symbolic strategies through which the local self is narrated, often within historically embedded asymmetries of representation. Central to this inquiry are the concepts of orientalism, latent orientalism, and self-orientalism.

Edward Said's (1978) foundational theory of orientalism provides a key reference point for understanding how the East has historically been constructed in Western discourse as exotic, backward, or mystical. Said argues that such representations were never neutral but deeply tied to structures of imperial domination. While his original critique targeted externally imposed depictions of the Orient by the West, subsequent scholarship has expanded the framework to examine more subtle, internalized, or systemically embedded forms. One such extension is latent orientalism. It is a term Said himself introduces to describe the deep, often unconscious assumptions

and symbolic codes that continue to shape perceptions of the East, even in seemingly progressive or multicultural contexts.

In platform-driven media environments, these dynamics are not only maintained but often intensified through new forms of symbolic circulation. The concept of self-orientalism becomes particularly useful in examining how local creators may adopt or stylize cultural tropes, such as mysticism, ancestral myth, or spiritual geography not solely for internal audiences, but to ensure recognizability and discoverability within global platforms. In this sense, self-orientalism functions not just as internalized bias, but as a strategic response to platform logics that reward cultural legibility over complexity.

In this thesis, self-orientalism is understood as a representational strategy shaped by global visibility regimes, aesthetic expectations, and platform infrastructures. It draws on the earlier discussions of cultural primacy, platform imperialism, and industry lore, but centers the symbolic work of identity-making in the streaming era. Rather than framing representation in terms of authenticity versus distortion, this chapter focuses on how cultural narratives are selectively shaped, stylized, and optimized for platform circulation.

The following sub-sections build on this conceptual framing by tracing the theoretical trajectory from orientalism to self-orientalism, examining how narrative strategies are shaped by the logic of visibility and introducing aesthetic tropes that structure the representation of the Turkish local self in Netflix originals.

1.5.1. From Representation to Internalization: Orientalism and Its Transformations

This sub-section reviews Edward Said's (1978) foundational theory of orientalism, which provides a key reference point for understanding how the East has historically been constructed in Western discourse as exotic, backward, or mystical.

Said argues that such representations were never neutral, but deeply tied to structures of imperial domination, serving to reinforce Western power and create a binary of us versus them. This perspective portrayed the East as a passive, backward, and exotic other, in contrast to the civilized and superior West, often seen as a monolithic entity devoid of agency and trapped in its own traditions. Said emphasizes that orientalism was not just a scholarly field but a power structure reinforcing Western dominance. Dirlik (1996) concurs that orientalism was an integral part of a Eurocentric conceptualization of the world that placed Europe at the center of development, characterizing non-European societies by what they lacked in comparison to European development.

A crucial aspect of Said's theory is the concept of latent orientalism. Said (1978: 206) discusses two forms of orientalism: latent and manifest. While manifest orientalism refers to overt and explicit portrayals, latent orientalism denotes the underlying and implicit representation of the Orient in cultural expressions. This dimension signifies how deep, often unconscious assumptions and symbolic codes continue to shape perceptions of the East, even in contemporary and seemingly progressive media contexts. Meyda Yeğenoğlu (1996: 110) builds on this, explaining that latent orientalism corresponds to an "almost unconscious (and inaccessible) certainty," reflecting the realm of the unconscious where dreams, images, desires, fantasies, and fears reside. She further emphasizes that the sexual and unconscious dimensions are constitutive elements of this discourse, arguing that the portrayal of "oriental women" and sexuality is fundamental to its structure, driven by Western desires and fantasies.

However, the understanding of orientalism extends beyond a one-way imposition. Arif Dirlik (1996) argues that orientalism is a relational phenomenon that has involved the active participation of orientals themselves, leading to "self-

orientalization", where Asians internalize and even adopt Euro-American images of the Orient. This occurs within "contact zones," spaces of interaction where cultures, though unequal in power, mutually influence each other. These zones serve as sites where representations are mutually produced, and even dominant cultures undergo shifts in understanding. Sean Golden (2009) further expands this conceptual field by introducing terms like "occidentalism" (the East's distortion of the West), "reverse orientalism" (nativist projects denying external understanding), and "retro-orientalism" (ironic deconstruction of western orientalist views by Eastern artists). Golden (2009) defines "self-orientalism" or "auto-orientalism" as the process by which an Eastern author or artist distorts their own culture's representation to the West by conforming to orientalist western discourse or value systems.

The concept of self-orientalism itself has a documented historical lineage predating some contemporary conceptualizations, with one of its earliest known appearances in Antonio Chuffat Latour's 1927 study on Chinese communities in Cuba (Çifci, 2013). This historical context underscores the concept's broader scholarly trajectory, illustrating its continuous application across various postcolonial contexts. Contemporary scholars like Alahmed (2019) continue to apply 'internalized orientalism' as a tool for de-Westernizing media theory in postcolonial nations. This critical review of orientalism's evolution establishes the enduring legacy of symbolic exoticization, forming the theoretical backdrop for understanding self-representation and its strategic deployment in local content for global audiences.

1.5.2. Strategic Self-Orientalism: Producing the Local for Platform Visibility

Building on the preceding discussion of orientalism's transformations and its internalized forms, this sub-section delves into how local producers strategically adopt or stylize cultural tropes such as mysticism, ancestral myth, or spiritual geography, not

solely for domestic audiences, but to ensure recognizability and discoverability within global platforms. This phenomenon of strategic self-orientalism functions as a direct response to platform logics that reward cultural legibility and marketability over complex, unmediated cultural expression. It details how local creators may inadvertently or consciously reproduce cultural stereotypes, not out of passive acceptance, but as a structural response to pressures for platform visibility, aligning with established industry lore about what works globally. This section draws on the earlier discussions of cultural primacy and platform imperialism to highlight how platforms' aesthetic expectations and infrastructural control create an environment where local content is shaped for global appeal, forming a commercial safety net that reinforces dominant narratives.

Ji Yeon Lee's (2005) interpretation offers a comprehensive framework for understanding how strategic self-orientalism operates in media production, moving beyond interpretations that frame it solely as a passive internalization. Lee's work, drawing on Rey Chow's (1995) concept of "autoethnography" highlights how filmmakers can proactively employ Orientalist imagery not as passive acceptance, but as a form of self-affirmation, returning the gaze through the colonizer's own terms. This concept is directly applicable to Turkish Netflix local original content, where producers, writers, and directors, as part of the "Orient," strategically utilize orientalist tropes to achieve global visibility on the platform.

Within Lee's theoretical framework, which is deeply rooted in Mary Louise Pratt's (1992) concept of the "contact zone", strategic self-orientalism is understood through the lens of asymmetrical power relations. Lee extends Pratt's notion of colonial encounters to encompass the subtle yet powerful social and cultural interstices where diverse cultures meet and intertwine in contemporary global media, highlighting a process of "transculturation". This contact zone provides the very space where Lee

observes strategic self-orientalism being performed, with filmmakers consciously engaging with orientalist imagery through "self-subalternising" and "self-exoticising" tactics to provide the otherness that global markets are perceived to desire. This is evident in how producers of Turkish Netflix originals might craft narratives or visual aesthetics that perform a recognizable, marketable otherness for international audiences.

Furthermore, content gains visibility by conforming to Western labeling practices such as national cinema. These labels become "brand names" that leverage generic expectations of national essence (in this case Turkish-ness) to market content. For Netflix, this translates into how platform algorithms, curation, and audience reception might privilege content that fits established foreign film categories or reinforces certain cultural archetypes, thereby influencing creative choices to fit these pre-existing molds. A common strategic approach also involves marketing aspects of national history as an international spectacle. This is highly relevant to Turkish historical dramas on Netflix, which can become globally appealing by stylizing historical elements into marketable narratives that resonate with universal themes, often prioritizing visual grandeur and dramatic intensity for broad appeal while maintaining an exotic or distinct surface.

The strategic adoption of self-orientalism is profoundly shaped by the mechanisms of the global media industry. Western criticism and the labeling practices of film festivals and streaming platforms act as gatekeepers, influencing how content is understood and circulated. Productions that conform to established Western categories and fulfill generic expectations of national essence or historical spectacle are more likely to achieve international recognition. While this strategic engagement can be a necessary entry point into global platforms, it also poses dilemmas: it risks perpetuating orientalist stereotypes and can contribute to inner colonization. However, creators may also use this strategy critically, challenging Western preconceptions and fostering

critical distance for domestic audiences. This nuanced approach to self-Orientalism, as a negotiated and strategic response within asymmetric power relations, underpins the analysis of Turkish Netflix Originals.

1.5.3. Between Authenticity and Performance: Aesthetic Tropes in Turkish Netflix Originals

The strategic deployment of Self-orientalism in Turkish Netflix originals, as explored in the previous section, is not only reflected at the level of production strategies and market positioning, but also embedded within the recurring narrative and aesthetic patterns of the content itself. Building on this understanding of self-orientalism as a negotiated response within asymmetric power structures, the following section turns to the concrete visual and narrative motifs through which this strategy is enacted. In other words, it moves from the conceptual and production-level dynamics explored above to the level of recurring aesthetic forms, examining how "recognizable otherness" is encoded to balance global market imperatives with local cultural markers.

This sub-section outlines the specific narrative and aesthetic motifs that will be analyzed in detail in the empirical chapters of this thesis, framing them not as authentic cultural expressions but as platform-aligned aesthetic strategies. It introduces recurring tropes such as mysticism, spirituality, and historical elements frequently observed in Turkish Netflix originals. Building on the concept of marketable localism, this section explores how these cultural elements are packaged and stylized to create plastic signifiers.

While such strategies aim to present a veneer of cultural authenticity, they often rely on a selective, aestheticized reworking of local motifs that conforms to transnational legibility and global marketability imperatives imposed by streaming infrastructures. In this regard, these aesthetic choices embody a dynamic of self-

orientalism, yet not always in the same theoretical depth or framing across scholarly works.

Existing analyses of Turkish Netflix productions offer varying conceptualizations of Self-Orientalism and the aesthetic construction of local narratives, though many remain limited in their engagement with platform-driven dynamics. For example, Özcan and Şakı Aydın (2022) approach *Hakan: Muhafız* through an audience reception study, examining how viewers interpret Orientalist and self-orientalist elements in the series. Drawing on Said's framework and Hall's encoding/decoding model, their research provides valuable insights into how such representations are perceived and negotiated by local audiences. However, the study's focus on reception means that broader questions of industrial structuring and platform-driven aesthetic shaping remain outside its analytical scope.

A complementary but methodologically distinct perspective is found in Özcan's (2022) doctoral thesis, which frames its analysis of *Hakan: Muhafız* within the conceptual triad of cultural reproduction, cultural hegemony, and orientalism/self-orientalism. Offering a comprehensive semiotic analysis of the series, the thesis situates self-orientalism primarily as a cultural and ideological phenomenon within this broader framework. While it provides a rich account of narrative and visual elements, it does not fully engage with the industrial constraints and platform-driven logics that shape the aesthetic and structural dimensions of Netflix originals.

Another example of how self-orientalist aesthetics are explored in recent scholarship is provided by Tanrıvermiş (2021), who draws on Said's concept of latent orientalism as interpreted by Yeğenoğlu (1996) to analyze how mystical, irrational, and exotic elements in *Atiye* construct an Eastern imaginary that is both locally situated and globally legible. While her utilization of latent orientalism provides a valuable lens for examining aesthetic strategies in the series, the study's theoretical framing of the

concept remains somewhat underdeveloped, and broader industrial and platform-driven dynamics are not addressed. Nevertheless, the analysis demonstrates how such aesthetic elements can be strategically mobilized to facilitate transnational readability, offering useful insights for understanding the packaging of cultural specificity in streaming content.

Building on these insights but moving beyond purely ideological or cultural readings, this thesis foregrounds the industrial and aesthetic dimensions of self-orientalism as they manifest in the platform-driven production of Turkish Netflix originals. In sum, this thesis adopts a critical perspective on self-orientalism, viewing it not merely as an ideological stance or a product of elite intentionality, but as a strategic aesthetic compromise shaped by industrial forces, platform expectations, and transnational marketing demands. The empirical analysis will thus examine how recurring tropes such as mysticism, spiritual guides, exotic visuals, and pseudo-historical narratives function as plastic signifiers within this dynamic, balancing the desire for local authenticity with the imperative of global performance.

CHAPTER 2

ANALYSIS

2.1. Methodology

2.1.1. Research Approach

This thesis adopts a qualitative and interpretive methodological approach to investigate how self-Orientalist representations manifest in Turkish original productions on the global streaming platform Netflix. The research specifically focuses on the strategies and representational choices observed in Netflix's earlier Turkish scripted originals, released during the platform's initial efforts to localize content for the Turkish market. Through the analysis of selected original series, the study explores how the platform's content strategies sought to appeal simultaneously to both local and global audiences, and how cultural elements were reconfigured accordingly.

The study is situated within a critical-interpretivist paradigm, drawing from cultural and media studies traditions that treat meaning as constructed within textual and industrial frameworks. Rather than seeking objective truths or participant perspectives, the research explores how cultural narratives and aesthetic strategies are structured within the media texts and platform logics of a global streaming service. This approach enables an in-depth examination of how symbolic and visual representations reflect broader patterns of power, identity, and market positioning.

The research seeks to answer the following key questions:

- To what extent do Netflix Turkey's early original scripted productions exhibit self-Orientalist elements in their narrative and aesthetic choices?
- How do the industrial and infrastructural logics of global streaming platforms shape these specific representational patterns?

- How do these productions negotiate between local cultural specificity and the demands of a global market, and what are the implications for the cultural legibility of local narratives?

2.1.2. Data and Sampling

The primary data of this research includes three original Turkish series produced by Netflix: *The Protector* (Hakan: Muhafız), *The Gift* (Atiye) and *Sahmaran* (*Şahmaran*). These productions were selected for their significance as Netflix's initial major investments in Turkish scripted content, and they include recurring thematic and symbolic elements such as mysticism, mythology, sacred heritage, and hybrid cultural representations, all central to this study's research questions.

The analysis is grounded in a comprehensive examination of the full narrative arc of each series. This encompasses all seasons and episodes, enabling a holistic understanding of common representational patterns in these early Netflix Turkey original productions¹. Each series was examined in terms of plot development, character trajectories, visual design, and recurring symbolic patterns.

While specific scenes and sequences are cited for illustrative purposes in the analysis chapters, these examples are drawn from broader patterns identified across the entire narrative. Themes such as dualistic spatial contrasts, mystic femininity, and spiritualized storytelling were traced through consistent engagement with the full storyline of each production.

Rather than applying a statistical sampling model or focusing on isolated episodes, the study treats each series as an integrated narrative text. This approach follows a qualitative, interpretive logic commonly used in media and cultural studies, where entire audiovisual works are analyzed to explore the construction of meaning within industrial and cultural contexts.

¹ Although the initial plan was to use episode based sampling, the final analysis covers the full narrative of each series in order to provide a more complete and coherent thematic analysis.

The theoretical concepts that guide this analysis such as Orientalism, cultural primacy, and platform logic are elaborated in Chapter 1 and are applied throughout the interpretive process.

Although *Sahmaran* (2023) was released several years after *The Protector* (2018) and *The Gift* (2019), its inclusion in this study is based on thematic and symbolic continuity, rather than production chronology. The term launch strategy is used here not as a formal industrial classification, but as an analytical framing that reflects recurring patterns of mysticism, mythological symbolism, and culturally stylized representation observed in early Netflix Turkey originals. Within this framework, *Sahmaran* is considered a later but aesthetically and in narrative sense aligned example that reinforces the representational tendencies seen in the platform's initial scripted productions. While the overall trajectory of Netflix Turkey's original output has since expanded into more diverse genres and representational styles, *Sahmaran* retains a strong connection to the symbolic and narrative strategies that marked the platform's early phase. Additionally, as *Sahmaran* has received limited scholarly attention to date, its inclusion helps to expand the scope of this analysis.

2.1.3. Analytical Framework

This study employs thematic analysis as defined by Braun and Clarke (2006), which provides a flexible yet structured framework for identifying and interpreting patterns (themes) within qualitative data. While Braun and Clarke (2006) provide the foundational model for identifying and organizing themes in qualitative research, this study integrates their framework within a media-focused, textual content analysis tradition as described by Krippendorff (2004). This approach is particularly well-suited to the analysis of audiovisual cultural texts such as television series, where meaning is constructed through narrative structures, visual motifs, and symbolic elements. In this context, thematic analysis is applied as a form of qualitative content analysis, enabling a

conceptually grounded exploration of how self-orientalist representations are constructed across selected Netflix Turkey original series.

The thematic coding process was conducted manually, through iterative close viewing the episodes. Initially, all episodes of the selected three series were watched in full, during which exploratory notes were taken regarding visual motifs, symbolic elements, and narrative structures that aligned with the study's conceptual framework, particularly in relation to mysticism, myth, spatial symbolism, and aesthetic stylization. These observations were not coded using software but rather organized manually through repeated engagement with the material.

Coding was primarily inductive, meaning the thematic categories were not determined prior to analysis but emerged organically through repeated pattern recognition. However, the conceptual lenses of self-Orientalism and latent Orientalism informed the interpretation of these patterns throughout. Once initial codes (such as dream motif, mystical female figure, ancient architecture, ritualistic music, color symbolism, mythological origin story) began to recur across multiple episodes, they were clustered into four higher-order themes. These thematic patterns were consistently observed throughout the narrative with recurring codes such as mystical dream sequences or references to ancestral myths. To better understand the patterns in the episodes, these repeated codes were organized into four main themes below:

History and Mythology (such as use of national legends, mythic origin stories, ancestral knowledge)

Mysticism and Spiritual Symbolism (such as dreams, supernatural powers, symbols of fate or destiny)

Spaces and Architecture (such as symbolic cityscapes, ruins, spiritual geography)

Artistic Components (such as costume and color palette, cinematic music, visual stylization)

These themes were used to analyze how certain symbolic patterns appeared repeatedly across the selected series and how they contributed to broader cultural narratives shaped by Netflix's platform logic and global aesthetic expectations. Rather than simply listing recurring elements, the analysis focused on how these patterns reflected deeper representational strategies, particularly those associated with latent orientalism. This included attention not only to what was made visible on screen but also to what was excluded, emotionally flattened, or represented in a detached way.

The four main analytical themes in this study were also shaped by the logic of dualism in representation, which plays a key role in Orientalist discourse. As Stuart Hall (1992: 308, 309) explains, stereotypical representations often work through a process of "splitting", dividing the world into binary oppositions such as civilized-uncivilized, rational-irrational, or modern-traditional. In the Turkish Netflix series analyzed here, similar oppositions appear frequently. Scientific thinking is often contrasted with mysticism; modern urban life is placed against spiritual or rural landscapes; and rational male figures are positioned opposite emotional or intuitive female characters. These dualisms not only reproduce simplified "cardboard cut-out" identities (Hall, 1992: 308) but also function to highlight the exotic or symbolic weight of the 'other' by framing it through contrast. For this reason, the selected themes of mysticism, mythology, space, and artistic aesthetics were not only commonly recurring, but also became the main areas where such representational splitting was most clearly observed.

Another contrast between how modern urban life, including both physical environments and the people who inhabit them and traditional or mystical worlds were portrayed. While urban modernity was often linked to cold color schemes, plain architecture, and characters portrayed as emotionally distant, aimless, or spiritually

empty, scenes associated with tradition, ancestry, or myth were depicted with symbolic richness, emotional intensity, and narrative centrality. This binary construction expressed through *mise-en-scène*, spatial codes, and narrative framing was interpreted as a key feature of the self-Orientalist representational logic, in which both modernity and tradition are reduced to stylized and exaggerated extremes rather than being presented as complex and lived realities.

Unlike traditional television models where production, distribution, and broadcasting are carried out by separate entities, Netflix functions as a vertically integrated platform that combines these roles into a single global infrastructure. This structural convergence allows the platform to exert significant influence over which stories are produced, how they are told, and how they circulate globally.

While Netflix plays a significant role in curating and circulating content, the series analyzed here were developed in collaboration with local creative teams. Writers, directors, and production professionals based in Turkey actively shaped the narratives and visuals. Therefore, the representational strategies discussed in this study are not seen as direct impositions from a singular global authority, but they are understood more like locally produced and culturally internalized expressions, influenced by the broader conditions of platform-based visibility and market expectations. This analytical approach forms the basis for using self-Orientalism as a guiding concept as it both highlights local agency and critically examines the symbolic representation of identity within a globalized media environment.

2.1.4. Limitations and Delimitations

When the initial idea for this thesis emerged in 2022–2023, a notable portion of Netflix Turkey’s original scripted content prominently featured mystical and exotic themes that could be interpreted through the lens of self-Orientalism. This tendency was not only observed in academic discussions but also reflected in informal viewer

feedback, including one-on-one conversations and social media commentary where users frequently questioned Netflix's reliance on mystified and stylized portrayals of Turkish culture. These representations, even when not explicitly labeled as self-Orientalist, drew public attention and criticism.

The anecdotal reception material that helped shape the research idea's direction including informal viewer insights and online discourse is not included in the study. Future research might expand upon this work by incorporating reception studies that explore how audiences interpret and respond to early Netflix Turkey originals, or by conducting comparative content analyses across regions and timeframes to more fully understand whether self-Orientalist launch strategies are employed beyond the Turkish market.

However, as Netflix consolidated its position in the Turkish market and expanded its catalogue, its original content offerings diversified. While some cultural clichés and stereotypes remained, the overtly mystified narrative structures seen in *The Protector*, *The Gift*, or *Sahmaran* were no longer as central or dominant in many of the newer productions. Consequently, the thesis was conceptually refined to focus on what is here defined analytically as a launch-phase representational pattern, emphasizing the initial aesthetic and narrative approach taken by Netflix Turkey.

Originally, the thesis also aimed to compare the representational tendencies of Netflix's early original scripted content across other Middle Eastern markets. This would have allowed for a broader regional analysis and tested the generalizability of the framework proposed here. However, due to time constraints, this comparative analysis could not be pursued. The study therefore narrows its empirical focus to the Turkish context while maintaining a strong conceptual orientation toward platform strategies and transnational localization practices.

2.2. Analysis of Netflix Turkey Original Series

This chapter examines how self-Orientalist representations are visually and narratively constructed and screened in Netflix's early² Turkish original series. Building on the theoretical and methodological framework outlined earlier, the analysis focuses on recurring thematic patterns such as history and mythology, mysticism and spiritual symbolism, spaces and architecture and artistic components that reflect broader platform-driven expectations of cultural marketability. The chapter analyzes how these productions represent cultural identity within a global media environment and portray Turkish culture to international audiences focusing on symbols they use to highlight based on a close reading of *The Protector (Hakan: Muhafız)*, *The Gift (Atiye)*, and *Sahmaran*.

The Protector: Hakan Demir is a young man who works in his adoptive father's shop in Istanbul's Grand Bazaar but hopes to open his own store and become as successful as the wealthy entrepreneur Faysal Erdem. After his adoptive father is killed, Hakan learns that he is connected to an ancient order responsible for protecting the city. His ordinary life is transformed as he discovers that he is destined to become The Protector, inheriting a mystical shirt and sword that grant him powers to fight a centuries-old adversary known as the Immortal. He is supported in this mission by Kemal and his daughter Zeynep, members of the Loyal Ones, while his personal life becomes tied to Leyla, Faysal's ambitious general coordinator. Faysal, once admired by Hakan as a model of success, is revealed to be the Immortal himself, determined to destroy Istanbul. The series places this conflict within a vision of Istanbul as a symbolic

² Although *Sahmaran* (2023) was released several years after *Hakan: Muhafız* (2018) and *Atiye* (2019), its inclusion in this study is based on thematic and symbolic continuity, rather than production chronology. The term launch strategy is used here not as a formal industrial classification, but as an analytical framing that reflects recurring patterns of mysticism, mythological symbolism, and culturally stylized representation observed in early Netflix Turkey originals. Within this framework, *Sahmaran* is considered a later but aesthetically aligned example that reinforces the representational tendencies seen in the platform's initial scripted productions. While the overall trajectory of Netflix Turkey's original output has since expanded into more diverse genres and representational styles, *Sahmaran* retains a strong connection to the symbolic and narrative strategies that marked the platform's early phase.

meeting point of East and West, where historical legacies and contemporary urban life intersect.

The Gift: Inspired by Şengül Boybaş's novel *Dünyanın Uyanışı* (The World's Awakening), the series follows Atiye, a painter in Istanbul who has drawn the same mysterious symbol since childhood. Her life, seemingly stable with her family and her partner Ozan, changes when she learns that the same symbol has been found during the excavations at Göbeklitepe, the world's oldest known temple. At the site, archaeologist Erhan discovers the connection between Atiye and the ancient symbol, prompting her to search for the truth about her past. This discovery leads her on a journey across Istanbul, Göbeklitepe, and Nemrut, where she confronts hidden secrets and begins to question her family, her relationships, and the boundaries between reality and spirituality. The series positions Turkey's archaeological heritage as central to a narrative that merges personal identity with universal themes, framing Anatolia as a space where history, myth, and the contemporary world intersect.

Sahmaran: The series follows Şahsu, a psychology lecturer who travels from Istanbul to Adana to teach at a local university and to confront her estranged grandfather, who abandoned her mother years earlier. What begins as a personal journey soon leads her into the world of the Mar, a secretive community that claims descent from Shahmaran, the legendary figure associated with love and wisdom. The Mar believe that Şahsu's arrival will fulfill an ancient prophecy, placing her at the center of their expectations. Her encounter with Maran, a member of this community, transforms the course of her life as she becomes drawn into the myth and its implications. The narrative intertwines family conflict, romance, and mythological heritage, situating the Shahmaran legend within a contemporary Anatolian setting.

2.2.1. History and Mythology

The series consistently engages with the reinterpretation of historical legacies and the East-West dichotomy while framing elements of Turkish heritage within a specific representational strategy. An important example occurs in *The Protector*'s opening scene, which symbolically juxtaposes traditional Eastern wisdom with modern global aspirations. In the setting of the series opening, as presented in Figure 1, a book titled 'Rumi' accompanied by the sub-title 'Sufi gibi düşünmek' (Thinking like Sufi) is observed beneath an alarm ringing phone.



Figure 1: Opening scene with a Rumi book placed under a ringing phone (*The Protector*, S1E1)



Figure 2: The Rumi book falling to the floor and landing upside down, businessman on the cover of a magazine (The Protector, S1E1)

As the protagonist Hakan reaches for his phone, the Rumi book symbolically falls to the ground and lands upside down (Figure 2). Mevlana Celaleddin Rumi, widely recognized in Western contexts, is typically framed as a universalized and globally accessible representation of the East within Orientalist narratives. So in that context, this visual act, where an emblem of ancient Eastern introspection is literally inverted, powerfully signifies a disruption of conventional heritage. Also, with the phone alarm ring, it implies a temporal shift, suggesting that a traditional 'Rumi time' is giving way to a more urgent, contemporary reality, or perhaps a forceful repositioning of established cultural wisdom.

The positioning in Figure 1 immediately reinforced by the subsequent shot shown in Figure 2, which cuts to a GQ magazine, featuring businessman Faysal Erdem, boldly titled 'The Sultan of Success' on its cover. Erdem is portrayed as a symbol of novelty and modernity, and as later we will learn, he is the idol and role model of the protagonist Hakan. But here as we see, even a modern looking successful businessman would be 'sultan' of the success, still be identified with the old eastern leader position.

This visual contrast is noteworthy from an Orientalist perspective. The portrayal of the Rumi book falling and the subsequent appearance of a European looking businessman on the screen reflects the Orientalist tendency to construct narratives and imagery that reinforce certain historical perspectives and stereotypes. This scene depicts the theme of history within the context of Orientalist analysis. It highlights the Orientalist preoccupation, the East-West dichotomy, and the perpetuation of Western dominance and superiority in historical representations.



Figure 3: Atiye looking at “Rumi” quote inscribed on a historical building’s gate (*The Gift*, S2E4)

The similar strategic reframing is also pronounced in *The Gift*, where references to Mevlânâ (often presented as “Rumi”) and his companion Shams Tabrizi are recurrent. Importantly, one particular scene shows Atiye searching for something in Istanbul. She arrives at the gate of a historical *tekke*-a dervish convent, where a quote by Mevlânâ “Do not go back to sleep” is inscribed in Turkish with Latin script and notably attributed to “Rumi” rather than “Mevlânâ.”

Importantly, this inscription does not exist on the actual gate of the historical building in real life. The quote and the name “Rumi” were deliberately added as part of the show’s production design. While Mevlana or Mevlana Celaleddin Rumi is the name

most commonly used in Turkey or within Islamic scholarly contexts, Rumi is the dominant form in Euro-American discourse, detached from his Islamic roots and rebranded as a universal, secular, spiritual figure. By presenting this quote in Latin script on an Ottoman-era structure, the series not only fabricates a cultural artifact but also visually translates heritage into a globally legible form. This deliberate intervention turns the physical site into a symbolic threshold, reinforcing the show's aesthetic strategy of merging the mystical East with accessible, internationalized imagery. It exemplifies the logic of marketable localism, where traditional elements are selectively stylized for cross-cultural consumption without contextual fidelity.

2.2.2 Mysticism and Spiritual Symbolism

A central unifying element across *The Protector*, *The Gift*, and *Sahmaran* is the recurring presence of a protagonist whose journey is framed by an extraordinary destiny to serve as a savior or hero. In each series the storyline revolves around this central figure and the progression of the plot shaped by their gradual awakening to this unique, savior role. To conceptualize this shared narrative design, this analysis draws upon Joseph Campbell's theory of the Hero's Journey. It is a theory that has developed in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949). Campbell's "monomyth" (1949: 28, 35) unrolls a universal narrative arc that repeats across diverse mythologies, folklores and storytelling traditions. By providing a narrative arc, Campbell shows that almost every narrative in the world, independently of the culture it has developed, followed and still follows the similar arc. By this arc Campbell unrolled, it can be inferred that even the cultural, folk tales are globally appealable in essence. It provides a flexible tool to interpret narrative structures even in character-driven dramas, as long as the plot centers on a protagonist undergoing a profound transformative journey. Notably, the hero figures in the examined series here portrayed quite literally as saviors are individuals tasked with protecting or saving the world and they are often endowed with supernatural powers or

distinct destinies. This literal interpretation of the savior role, while aligning with archetypes found in messianic or superhero narratives, is best analyzed through Campbell's adaptable model, given its capacity to interpret transformative journeys involving mystical trials, supernatural allies, and profound spiritual experiences.



Figure 4: Woman reads coffee fortune (The Protector, S1E1)



Figure 5: Fortune teller woman tells Hakan about his destiny (The Protector, S1E1)

The scenes in Figure 4 and Figure 5 can be cited as examples that shed light on the notion of the 'savior role' mentioned above being the destiny of the main character. As Hakan arrives at the Grand Bazaar, Turkish tea in hand, on his way to his foster father's antique shop, he encounters a woman on the upstairs of the building, who is reading coffee fortunes for another client. Hakan playfully remarks to her, "I had my fortune told; a huge display window appears in my future." Their exchange reveals a familiar rapport, indicating a pre-existing relationship with the fortune teller, much like his interactions with other individuals he met upon entering the Grand Bazaar. The fortune teller stops Hakan as he passes by and calls him closer, looking at him with an anxious expression. Adorned with large rings on her fingers and an ethnic-patterned shawl on her shoulder, she touches Hakan's hand. In a mysterious tone, she tells him his destiny is changing, asserting, "a completely different fate is written on your forehead." Hakan laughs off her ominous words and continues on his way while the fortune teller looks behind him with concern. The fortune teller woman's use of the word "fate" (kader) is a particularly noteworthy element here, that will be analyzed later.

While Campbell's Hero's Journey provides a useful framework to understand the savior role across these productions, its applicability is often shaped by a masculine-coded archetype. In this respect, Maureen Murdock's *The Heroine's Journey* (1990) developed as a response to Campbell, offers a complementary perspective, particularly relevant for analyzing female protagonists such as Atiye and Şahsu. Murdock emphasizes the heroine's journey not merely as an external battle or universal savior role, but as an inward spiritual and psychological journey that negotiates the split between masculine and feminine energies. The stages she outlines - from the separation from the feminine, through identification with the masculine, the road of trials, and the illusory boon of success, to the eventual awakening to spiritual emptiness and the healing of the mother/daughter and wounded masculine splits - resonate with the

trajectories of Atiye and Şahsu. Their encounters with mystical symbols and ancestral wisdom are not only external trials but also moments of profound inner confrontation and self-discovery. The heroines' eventual openness to myth, destiny, and spiritual symbolism reflects what Murdock identifies as the integration of masculine and feminine principles, suggesting that these narratives can also be read as archetypal 'Heroine's Journeys.



Figure 6: Fortune teller woman narrates the story of Shahmaran to the crowd while holding a Shahmaran-figured necklace during the Hıdırellez celebration (Sahmaran, S1E1)

Regarding the hero's/heroine's journey arcs, similar arc can be examined in *Sahmaran* too. Şahsu, arrives at the Hıdırellez celebration fair and approaches a group gathered around a woman who tells the legend of Sahmaran in a mysterious, impressive, and enchanting tone. The red-haired fortune teller, who sells necklaces with the Sahmaran figure, reads prophecies, and wears ethnic tattoos on her face and a shawl with ethnic patterns, continues telling the story: "...You think these are just tales, just prophecies. No. These lands are sacred. Love will bring Sahmaran back. And Sahmaran will bring love." When she sees Şahsu, she asks her to try on a necklace. Şahsu refuses and says she doesn't believe in such tales. The woman responds, "You don't know what happens when you believe." Şahsu responds by saying that what the woman describes is

actually a self-fulfilling prophecy, suggesting that there is a psychological explanation behind it.

Şahsu, who is a psychology lecturer, expresses her disbelief in legends by grounding them in logical reasoning, implying that they are nonsense. As a scientist from a modern city, she shows the audience that she sides with reason and logic rather than believing in irrational things like legends. Her stance here reflects a dichotomy between the myths, tales, mysticism of the East and the rationality of the West. However, just like in *Atiye*, where Erhan, a scientist and archaeologist, initially rejects tales, prophecies, and coincidences as irrational but later changes his attitude after confronting them, Şahsu will also gradually lose this attitude in the following episodes.



Figure 1: Şahsu trapped inside a ring of fire during Hıdırellez celebration, with necklace on her neck (Sahmaran, S1E1)

In a following scene, Şahsu gives in to the woman trying to convince her and wears the necklace. Later in the same scene, a fire breaks out in the middle of the Hıdırellez celebration. Şahsu finds herself trapped inside a ring of fire, and the Shahmaran figure on the necklace she has just put on burns her skin like a tattoo. When Şahsu wakes up the next day, the mark is gone, and everyone acts as if nothing happened, yet the scene carries meaning in the broader context.



Figure 8: Şahsu faints amid the flames, her body marked by the burn left from the Sahmaran-figured necklace (Sahmaran, S1E1)

In *The Protector*, although Hakan is not a scientist like Şahsu or Erhan, he also does not believe in prophecies or magical objects in the beginning and mocks them. His journey of disbelief and eventual acceptance of fate and prophecy is shown as follows:



Figure 9: Hakan wears so called enchanted shirt with mystical figures (The Protector, S1E1)

In this context, first he encounters with fortune teller woman who is worried about him mentioning the completely different and greater ‘fate’ is written for him, then Hakan laughs it off, as mentioned above. After this encounter, following the sudden death of his father, Hakan finds himself among a mysterious group called “The Loyal

Ones.” In a basement, Kemal and his daughter Zeynep tell him that they have been waiting for this moment, for Hakan and the enchanted shirt, for years, and that he is the “Protector”. Hakan thinks what they say is nonsense and even describes it as madness. However, the shirt he inherited from his father which he thinks is just an ordinary garment is considered sacred by the Loyal Ones. Kemal tells him, “You can’t escape this, Hakan. This is your destiny,” and Zeynep says, “You have a duty. You are The Protector,” trying to convince him. Still not understanding what is happening, Hakan reluctantly puts on the shirt. As it fuses with his body, the symbols on it become surrounded by flames, the writings come alive, and one of the enchanted symbols is burned into Hakan’s chest like a tattoo. This experience, which cannot be explained through reason, confronts Hakan with a destiny he did not choose.



Figure 10: The enchanted shirt fuses with Hakan’s body (The Protector, S1E1)



Figure 11: Enchanted symbol is burned into Hakan's chest like a tattoo
(The Protector, S1E1)

In *The Gift*, the character of Zühre functions as a mystical guide who transmits ancestral knowledge to both her granddaughter Atiye and to Erhan, the male scientist. Her role mirrors what Juan Llamas-Rodríguez (2023: 229, 236) identifies in Latin American Netflix originals as the “wise Indian” trope: an Indigenous or spiritually coded elder who exists primarily to support the protagonist’s personal journey. In this case, Zühre appears as a “wise Eastern woman”, offering cryptic phrases and esoteric knowledge that propel Atiye’s transformation. This figure exemplifies what Edward Said (1978) calls “latent Orientalism,” where the East is imagined as a site of ancient mysticism, intuition, and spiritual wisdom often accessed through feminized intermediaries. Furthermore, the male characters in *The Gift* are often linked to science and rationality, while women are portrayed as intuitive and emotionally driven, a gendered division that also reflects latent Orientalist thinking in the general gender coding (Yeğenoğlu, 1996) where masculinity aligns with logic and modernity, and femininity with mysticism and tradition, emphasizing how the Eastern female body is frequently cast as a symbolic vessel for mystic excess. These representations turn deep

cultural symbols into marketable visual motifs and this aligns with Wayne and Castro's idea of stylizing performance of cultural authenticity (2025:7).

These dynamics highlight that Zühre's role is shaped not only by Orientalist gender coding but also by her function as a feminine guide. This guiding role of Zühre also resonates with Maureen Murdock's *The Heroine's Journey* (1990:141, 142), particularly her discussion of the 'Grandmother as Guide' in the stage of healing the mother/daughter split. Murdock notes that the grandmother figure often emerges as a source of feminine wisdom, nourishment, and spiritual protection, channeling an ancestral connection that supports the heroine through moments of transition. In Atiye's journey, Zühre embodies precisely this function: She transmits esoteric knowledge, frames the heroine's destiny, and provides a safe symbolic bridge to the mystical realms of the feminine. In this sense, Zühre's presence not only mirrors the 'wise elder' archetype but also aligns with a specifically feminine-coded guide who situates Atiye's transformation within a lineage of maternal and ancestral wisdom.



Figure 12: Atiye's grandmother Zühre performing ritualistic dances to greet the sun on Mount Nemrut (The Gift, S1E4)

In all three analyzed series, a similar scene shows a wiser character telling the protagonist that it is their inherited destiny to become the savior. In *The Gift*, Even

though Atiye always believes she is different and has some dreams about it, it is her spiritual grandmother that explains this to her. When they went to Mount Nemrut for a spiritual journey, her grandmother Zühre, after performing ritualistic dances to greet the sun, quotes Shams Tabriz, “Infinity does not mean having endless time. It means timelessness. If you want to experience infinite enlightenment, forget the past and the future, and stay in the present,” said a wise man, Shams-i Tabrizi.” Then, she explains to her saying,

“You are starting your own journey. You will decide to what and where to, yourself. You have to do it my child. This is your duty. The duty you owe to your blood. It’s time. There is eternity in your destiny. “

Even though the characters are portrayed as “Westerners of the East” within their fictional universe, they are still part of that East and are shown as if they are doomed to believe in tales, legends, prophecies, and mystical events. Because the East is such a place, at least from the stereotypical Western perspective. Similar to the male gaze discussed in gender studies, this could be seen a “western gaze” in the orientalist discourse.

Fate is a recurring theme in all three series analyzed in this study. Each of the main characters initially leads a relatively ordinary life but eventually discovers through different circumstances that they are a “chosen one”. They are portrayed as the person who will change the course of the world’s fate. Becoming a savior or a hero is framed in the narrative as their destiny.



Figure 13: Zühre draws the mysterious symbol that connects Atiye and Göbeklitepe on the ground at Mount Nemrut (The Gift, S1E4)

2.2.3. Spaces and Architecture



Figure 14: Hakan walking through his neighborhood, portrayed as a traditional Turkish district with children playing and laundry hanging above (The Protector, S1E1)

An early scene from the first episode of *The Protector* presents a scene offering a visual assemblage of Orientalist images. Protagonist Hakan leaves his house in an old neighborhood, joyfully walking down the street, greeting his neighbors whom he sees in their windows. As Hakan walks through the neighborhood, he greets everyone and

maintains a genuine connection with them. The impression is given that Easterners align with the concept of community. In Figure 5, laundry hangs from windows between the apartments as can be seen. A simit vendor and a junk collector pass simultaneously down the street, their calls echoing. Hakan joins children playing and running, then continues with his flatmate. This scene gathers classic images that give the impression of a non-modern or underdeveloped neighborhood. This scene represents traditional Turkey.



Figure 15: Hakan and his friend looking at the tall grey residential towers in the grey city ahead (The Protector, S1E1)

Following this traditional sequence, Hakan and his friend go to the city center to look for a shop, peering through the windows of an empty one for themselves. They turn around, and before them the giant, tall, multi-story corporate buildings of Faysal Erdem stand, who was seen on the magazine cover in the opening scene. The scene presents a grey city with tall gray buildings, with an apparent contrast to the earlier neighborhood scene.

After that section, a traditional Istanbul visual assemblage is displayed, which will be analyzed in the Artistic Components (3.2.4) section. Displaying the sequence of

traditional, modern, then traditional imagery, the protagonist Hakan heads to one of the most utilized places in modern Orientalist narratives, the Grand Bazaar. In line with commonly held Orientalist narratives, the Grand Bazaar here is again depicted as such. Here, similar to his neighborhood, we observe the existence of a network of relationships. As Hakan enters the Grand Bazaar, with its old and damaged walls and columns adorned with ethnic figures and Turkish flags, he engages in friendly conversations with everyone, just as he did in his neighborhood.

While *The Protector* relies on spatial contrasts within Istanbul, *The Gift* and *Sahmaran* expand this representational logic to Anatolian geographies. In both series, the protagonists leave the metropolitan center and encounter peripheral spaces that are consistently constructed through a Western gaze. What viewers see is not the region as lived space, but its stylized representation through sepia filters, dusty landscapes, outdated architecture, and stagnant social environments.

The Anatolian cities of Göbeklitepe, Urfa, Adıyaman, Mardin, Adana, and Tarsus are thus presented as static and timeless settings. Architecture and urban design lack signs of contemporaneity: city centers, hotels appear neglected and reminiscent of the earlier years, marketplaces are reduced to exotic backdrops, and streets are marked by dust and oppressive heat.



Figure 16: Atiye and her grandmother Zühre walking through a traditional market street in Adıyaman, depicted with foggy lighting, hanging fabrics, and local men drinking tea (The Gift, S1E4)

In *Sahmaran*, for instance, Şahsu arrives in Adana–Tarsus, in a sepia toned dusty train station that looked like in the middle of nowhere, only to be placed in a malfunctioning hotel without a bathroom or air conditioning. When she seeks a place to wash, she is directed to a distant lake, an image that situates the city outside modern infrastructure, as if locked in a pre-modern temporality. Similarly, *The Gift* codes Urfa-Göbeklitepe, Adıyaman, Mardin and its surrounding towns through yellowed tones and arid scenery, foregrounding mystical ruins while erasing modern contemporary life. These choices create the impression of a geography frozen in time, echoing Edward Said's notion, in which the East is imagined as unchanging, archaic, and irrational.



Figure 17: Şahsu getting into a taxi at a remote train station in Adana, surrounded by a dry, dusty and isolated landscape (Sahmaran, S1E1)

Although this aesthetic is spatial in nature, it is narratively mediated through the protagonists' perspectives. Atiye and Şahsu are depicted as modern, urban heroines, embodying Westernized prototypes that closely resemble the “savior” figures of Hollywood cinema. Their journeys frame Anatolia as if it were an alien landscape, encountered for the first time by a rational, dynamic outsider. This asymmetry positions the protagonists as active agents of discovery, while the spaces and communities they encounter appear passive, static, and in need of interpretation or redemption. In effect, the Anatolian periphery is transformed into Turkey’s internal “Orient,” rendered legible only through the gaze of a Westernized central figure.

The combination of spatial aesthetics and narrative positioning thus produces a double Orientalization: on the one hand, through the mise-en-scène that codes Anatolia as timeless and stagnant, and on the other, through the Hollywood-inflected savior role of the protagonist who interprets these spaces for the audience. The result is not a representation of Anatolia as a living and complex geography, but as a cinematic elsewhere—an exoticized backdrop against which the Westernized hero(ine) enacts their transformative journey. In this way, Netflix Turkey’s originals reproduce global East–

West binaries within national space, demonstrating how the Western gaze is internalized and projected through both architecture and character mediation.

2.2.4 Artistic Components

Beyond their thematic implications in History and Mythology (see 3.2.1), the opening visuals of *The Protector* serve as a prime example of the series' use of Artistic Components to convey specific messages. The visual act of the Rumi book symbolically falling and landing upside down (in Figure 2), along with the subsequent shot cutting to the GQ magazine featuring Faysal Erdem, creates a potent visual contrast. This deliberate compositional choice is noteworthy from an Orientalist perspective, as the precise portrayal and imagery used on screen reflect tendencies to reinforce certain historical stereotypes.



Figure 18: Close-up of a traditional Turkish tea glass being stirred at an outdoor café (The Protector: S1E1)

The episode presents another scene offering a visual assemblage of traditional Istanbul images. This scene displays one of the most stereotypical orientalist imageries in this analysis. In this scene, the background music playing is a remixed version of the well-known Anatolian folk song 'Leylim Leylim', originally by Anatolian rock and

singer-songwriter, political musician Fikret Kızılok and reinterpreted by modern composer and mixer Hey! Douglas with an electronic beat. In this scene, traditional, stereotypical 'Eastern' Istanbul landscapes, similar to Turkey's Ministry of Culture and Tourism city promotion videos, appear on screen. In sequence: Ferries in Eminonu, eastern young boys jumping from the Galata bridge to the sea, fishermen in the Bridge, stray cats of Istanbul, street food vendors, close up Turkish tea, graffiti on the walls, chaotic neon signs, hanging colorful dried peppers, eggplants, and herbs in a Street bazaar, Taksim-Tünel tram in Istiklal street, Kitschy fish sandwich boats made to look like mini Ottoman palaces docked at Eminönü and crowded open shops around the Grand Bazaar.



Figure 19: Kitschy fish sandwich boats made to look like mini Ottoman palaces docked at Eminönü (The Protector, S1E1)

The choice of the word "visual assemblage" above is intentional. It signifies the seemingly random and unsystematic aggregation of various traditional Istanbul images, lacking a clear narrative purpose beyond merely supporting a generalized 'traditional' backdrop. This creates a stylized identity using recognizable visual clichés. This method is central to how Orientalist tropes operate, by giving random traditional images all together to make a place look more exotic than it actually is. This approach, by mixing

diverse yet often stereotypical elements, aims to present an exotic, diverse, and visually appealing image of Istanbul to the foreign viewer, akin to a cultural tourism promotional advertisement. Such images function as plastic signifiers, which are symbolic markers that gesture toward national specificity while remaining narratively hollow, designed for transnational legibility rather than deeper cultural grounding.



Figure 20: Grandmother Zühre puts her traditionally tattooed (dak) hand on Atiye's forehead, symbolically evoking themes of fate and ancestral transmission (The Gift, S1E4)

In *The Gift*, Atiye's grandmother Zühre's portrayal does not rest on culturally grounded or psychologically complex traits, as discussed earlier in sub-chapter 2.2.2 (Mysticism and Spiritual Symbolism). Instead, Zühre is constructed primarily through visual markers such as dak/dek tattoos reminiscent of Arab and Kurdish tribal traditions and an ethno-folkloric costume that references Anatolian or Middle Eastern femininity. Her body is laden with ethnic signs, yet her ethnic identity remains deliberately vague and hybrid. While the second season hints she is from Urfa and has complex ethnicity, her native language or cultural specificity is never disclosed. She speaks in standard Istanbul Turkish, devoid of regional inflection or minority linguistic identity.

This visual richness combined with narrative flattening points to what Llamas and Rodríguez (2023) define as a “plastic signifier” a semiotic shorthand for cultural authenticity that is instantly legible on global streaming platforms. Zühre’s identity is not shaped through historical depth, but rather through a curated set of recognizable signs like tattoos, costume, mystic posture that simulate cultural meaning while remaining flexible, decontextualized, and optimized for the platform. Her function is less to embody ethnic subjectivity and more to perform an aestheticized “Eastern wisdom” for international audiences.

In this sense, Zühre operates as a “shamanic grandmother” figure, an archetype stripped of narrative autonomy and repurposed as a folkloric facilitator of the heroine’s spiritual awakening. Cultural diversity, rather than being embedded in the character’s inner world or social history, is displaced onto the surface of her body and costume.



Figure 21: Assyrian woman in Mardin narrating a tale within a historical setting, wearing traditional costume (The Gift, S3E5)

This use of visual and linguistic abstraction is not unique to Zühre. A similar dynamic appears in the third season, when Erhan’s search takes him to Mardin, where a local Assyrian woman narrates a tale in a historical building. Although presented in traditional costume, and traditional tattoos on her face, her attire is stripped of contextual

meaning, functioning merely as a visual marker of ethnic otherness. At the same time, her narration is delivered in standard Istanbul Turkish rather than in Syriac language or in a local dialect, further detaching the scene from lived cultural specificity. What is staged as authentic tradition thus becomes a decontextualized performance, where regional identities are flattened into recognizable but generic signs.

The result is not an authentic ethnic representation, but a hybridized, exoticized construction that blends multiple cultural references such as Kurdish, Arab, Assyrian, Muslim, and Christian into a visual collage lack of historical or political anchoring. What appears as ethnic specificity is, in fact, a stylized abstraction: a “plastic signifier” of mysticism designed to circulate across borders, detached from real world cultural complexity. This abstraction further contributes to a homogenization of cultures, whereby diverse ethnic, religious, and regional identities are collapsed into a monolithic “Eastern” construct. Costumes, architectural motifs, and spiritual beliefs drawn from different groups are presented interchangeably, flattening the intricate histories and distinctions of the region into a simplified identity tailored for global consumption.

To summarize, the analysis of *The Protector*, *The Gift*, and *Sahmaran* directly addresses the three central research questions: the extent of self-Orientalist elements in the series, how platform strategies influence these representations, and the negotiations between global visibility and local cultural expression.

The findings show that all three series consistently employ narrative and visual strategies that reflect self-Orientalist elements. This is particularly evident in the repetitive patterns of mystical destiny, spiritual journeys, and savior-like characters, which are common storytelling tools resembling the "Hero's Journey". These elements form a repetitive pattern that can be seen as part of the platform's internal logic. They are not merely creative decisions but reflect what Lotz and Havens describe as "industry lore"—the internalized beliefs about what kind of content is globally successful. The

combination of ancient myths, modern struggles, and stylized visuals helps these series become visible within Netflix's algorithmic structure, a process Jin explains through the concepts of platform imperialism and algorithmic discoverability.

This process creates a complex negotiation between global legibility and local authenticity. On one hand, the series increase the global visibility of Turkish culture by highlighting unique symbols, spaces, and legends. On the other hand, these same elements are often simplified or exaggerated to fit platform-friendly expectations. The cultural depth of Istanbul or Anatolian heritage is repackaged into a visual and narrative form that aligns with global genre patterns like fantasy, drama, or mystic thriller.

Therefore, the findings support the thesis argument that early Turkish Netflix originals reflect a strategic self-Orientalism shaped by platform structures. These productions are not simply traditional or modern; they are hybrid products that blend authentic local elements with symbolic codes that perform well across global markets. This aligns with Chalaby's idea of cultural primacy, where global standards continue to shape local narratives, even when they appear to support cultural diversity.

This analysis demonstrates that self-Orientalism in these Netflix originals is not merely a cultural or ideological choice but is also a platform-driven strategy. It is shaped by global storytelling norms, algorithmic logics, and commercial expectations. These findings offer valuable insight into how local identity is stylized and globalized in today's streaming ecosystem, where visibility often depends on how well a story fits into predefined structures of recognition and appeal.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has examined how Netflix's early Turkish original productions reflect self-Orientalist patterns shaped by platform logic and global content infrastructures. By focusing on *The Protector*, *The Gift*, and *Sahmaran*, this study approached these series as cultural products situated within Netflix's initial localization strategy in Turkey. The analysis demonstrated how these productions, while domestically created, embed visual and narrative strategies that align with global genre conventions and platform-driven visibility mechanisms.

The findings indicate that these series consistently draw upon historical narratives, mystical symbolism, mythological heritage, and stylized spatial imagery. These motifs function not only as narrative devices but also as globally legible cultural markers that support the platform's objectives of translatability, discoverability, and catalog coherence. This thesis has aimed to explore how ideas from postcolonial theory and platform studies can be applied together to analyze the representational strategies of Netflix's early Turkish originals. By focusing on the intersection of platform structures and local cultural elements, it offers a perspective on how globally distributed productions are shaped through both aesthetic and infrastructural choices.

The case of Netflix Turkey illustrates how early originals became sites of negotiation between national heritage, global legibility, and platform-driven strategies. The thesis argues that streaming platforms like Netflix do more than just distribute local content; they play an active role in shaping its symbolic structure. Through commissioning decisions and production frameworks, platforms contribute to the formation of new patterns of cultural visibility.

The scope of the study is limited to three early Netflix Turkey original series. Future research could expand this analysis by comparing similar content from different regions, or by further examining how historical imagery and cultural markers are treated

under streaming conditions. Investigating audience responses, production-level decisions or platform commissioning patterns may also offer valuable insights for understanding how platforms influence local storytelling.

Additionally, future studies could explore the linguistic choices in these productions. One striking aspect I noticed while analyzing the series was the unnatural tone of the dialogues. The dialogues in the analyzed series often sounded as if written with their English translation in mind rather than as organic Turkish speech. The word choices and sentence structures in some scenes felt overly simplified even though richer or more contextually appropriate alternatives were available. While this study doesn't examine this aspect for analysis, it may be worth investigating whether such scripting reflects an intention to prioritize international comprehensibility over linguistic and cultural nuance. Thus, if such screenwriting choices really exist, it can be deduced whether local productions prioritize the international audience over the local audience.

In conclusion, the thesis argues that streaming platforms like Netflix not only distribute local content but also play an active role in shaping its symbolic structure. Through commissioning decisions and production frameworks, platforms contribute to the formation of new patterns of cultural visibility. Recognizing this dynamic contributes to a broader understanding of how local narratives evolve in the global digital media landscape.

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the original content strategy developed by Netflix during its entry into the Turkish market, focusing on how this strategy was shaped through cultural imagery. Analyzing *The Protector*, *The Gift*, and *Sahmaran*, the research explores how the platform's initial attempt to appeal to both local and global audiences is reflected in narrative and visual preferences. While not strictly chronological, these productions are considered as part of Netflix's initial localization strategy due to their shared symbolic emphasis on mysticism, mythology, and culturally stylized imagery. The study centers on the concept of self-Orientalism and situates it within a broader theoretical framework supported by concepts such as platform capitalism, cultural primacy, global value chains, industry lore, and marketable localism. Using a qualitative thematic analysis, the research investigates self-Orientalist elements across four main themes: history and mythology, mysticism and symbolism, space and architecture, and artistic components. The thesis argues that these productions restructure local imagery in alignment with platform logic and demonstrates how digital platforms act as shaping forces in the construction of localized narratives for global circulation.

Keywords: Self-orientalism, digital platform logic, Netflix Turkey, localization strategies, cultural imagery

ÖZET

Bu çalışma, Netflix'in Türkiye pazarına giriş sürecinde geliştirdiği yerli orijinal yapım stratejisini ve bu stratejinin kültürel imgeler aracılığıyla nasıl şekillendiğini incelemektedir. Hakan: Muhafız, Atiye ve tematik sürekliliği nedeniyle ele alınan Şahmaran dizileri üzerinden yapılan analiz, platformun hem yerel hem de küresel izleyiciye hitap etme çabasının anlatı ve görsel tercihlere nasıl yansıdığını araştırmaktadır. Çalışma, bu yapımları Netflix'in erken dönem yerelleşme stratejisinin bir parçası olarak konumlandırmakta; self-oryantalizm kavramını merkezine almakta ve bunu, platform kapitalizmi, kültürel öncelik, küresel değer zincirleri (GVC), endüstri söylencisi ve pazarlanabilir yerellik gibi kavramlarla desteklenen daha geniş bir teorik çerçeve içerisinde ele almaktadır. Nitel tematik analiz yöntemiyle yürütülen çalışmada, self-oryantalizme dair unsurlar; tarih ve mitoloji, mistisizm ve semboller, mekân ve mimari ile sanatsal unsurlar olmak üzere dört ana tema üzerinden incelenmiştir. Tez, bu içeriklerin yerel imgeleri küresel görünürlük mantığına uygun biçimde yeniden yapılandırıldığını ve dijital platformların yerel anlatılar üzerinde yönlendirici bir etki kurduğunu ortaya koymaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Self-oryantalizm, dijital platform mantığı, Netflix Türkiye, yerelleşme stratejileri, kültürel imgeler