

THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE *ASMALI KONAK* INTO A TOURISTIC PLACE¹

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SUMMARY

Popular series have aspects that infiltrate various areas of daily life/cultural fields in general. In other words, a popularized series may become a part of daily life practices of people. Numerous elements of the characters in a series, from a word to an act of behaviour, from their clothes to the spaces they live or spend time, touch upon the lives of the audience. Characters, spaces, events can integrate into life as if they are real. A popularized output of popular culture may easily draw the interest, albeit indirectly, of the whole society and gain popularity by slipping into other fields. For instance, popular series transcend the specific characteristics of the portrayed space by creating a distinct spatial perception and thus set the scene for a new popular field. Within the scope of this study, it is elaborated how a mansion in the Cappadocia region turned into a historical/touristic place through the TV series *Asmalı Konak* broadcasted in 2002-2003 in Turkey. Semi-structured interviews with tourist guides working in the area and domestic tourists who visited the mansion were utilized in line with the aim of the study.

Keywords: Popular Culture, Media, Serial, Economy-Politic

ÖZET

Popüler dizilerin çoğunlukla gündelik yaşamın/kültürel alanın çeşitli mecralarına sızan yanları vardır. Diğer bir deyişle popülerleşmiş bir dizi, insanların gündelik yaşam pratiklerinin bir parçasına dönüşebilmektedir. Dizideki karakterin kullandığı bir sözcükten davranış biçimine, giydiği kıyafetten yaşadığı ya da zamanını geçirdiği mekâna kadar birçok öge izleyicilerin hayatlarına dokunmaktadır. Karakterler, mekânlar, olaylar gerçekmişçesine yaşamla bütünleşebilmektedir. Popüler kültürde bir alanda popülerleşmiş bir çıktı diğer alanlara da kayarak toplumun tüm kesimlerinin ilgi alanına dolaylı da olsa kolayca girebilmekte ve popülerleşebilmektedir. Örneğin; popüler diziler olayın geçtiği mekânları o yerin özgün karakteristiğinin de üzerine çıkararak ayrı bir mekânsal algı yaratmakta ve dolayısıyla yeni bir popüler alana zemin açmaktadır. Bu çalışma kapsamında da Türkiye’de 2002-2003 yılları arasında yayımlanan Asmalı Konak dizisi aracılığıyla Kapadokya bölgesindeki bir konağın nasıl tarihi/turistik bir mekâna dönüştüğü üzerinde durulmaktadır. Çalışmanın amacı doğrultusunda bölgede çalışan turist rehberleri ve konağı görmeye gelen yerli turistlerle yarı yapılandırılmış görüşme yapılmıştır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Popüler Kültür, Medya, Dizi, Ekonomi-Politik

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INTRODUCTION

Culture is a complex whole which includes knowledge, art, custom, and any other capabilities, skills and habits learned (acquired) by human as a member of society (Tylor, 1871, cited in Güvenç, 2015, s.129). Culture defines how humankind produces its own life through past experiences and accumulations and with what it creates by itself. In other words, culture is a way of self-production of humankind. Culture expresses the social personality in the way of production of a specific community in a certain time and conditions (Erdogan, 1999: 19).

Although culture is a creation of a certain time, geography and society, it spreads throughout the world by means of mass media in our time. Thus subjective and local culture has become general and global (Şentürk, 2007, s. 25). Despite gaining a global character, culture is neither same for everybody nor is it created for everyone or utilized commonly and fairly by everyone. Culture is a part of relations of domination. Depending on these relations, some people are owners of what is made in cultural production while some are waged producers, purchasers, users, or consumers of the product. Thus ownership relations are prevailing in capitalist systems in terms of cultural production (Erdoğan, 1999, s. 20).

Cultural production today is predominantly materialized and reproduced through media, such that media corporations operate both as economic and ideological institutions (Çakmur, 1998, s. 112-113). From this viewpoint, it can be stated that the media corporations operating as economic and ideological organizations in the capitalist system play an important role in maintaining the capitalist system and materializing symbolic/cultural production. In this context and based on capitalism and technological advancements in the twenty-first century, popular culture appears as a culture that is produced by the media but at the same time forms the media (Kellner, 1982, s. 403).

From the viewpoint of that popular culture is produced and reproduced by media, the subject of this study is how the TV series *Asmalı Konak*, which was broadcasted in the period of 2002-2003 in Turkey and became considerably popular, transformed a mansion into a popular touristic place. The series which gained a wide audience during its broadcast was filmed at the Cappadocia region and the mansion rapidly became a touristic place. Even though it has been fourteen years of the series to discontinue broadcasting, the mansion is still a popular touristic place in our present day. Moreover, this popularity of the mansion is even considered to have overreached the geographical and historical characteristics of the Cappadocia region. Yet the considering other places in the region, the mansion is a top priority place to see for many domestic tourists. In this sense, the aim of this study is to analyse how a fictional/imaginary mansion in a popular TV series is transformed into a concrete reality, in other words, into a popular/historical place and why it is still popular. At this point, domestic tourists who have either watched or not watched the series were interviewed. Semi-structured interviews with 32 domestic tourists and 3 tourist guides are carried out.

THE THEORETICAL BASIS OF THE STUDY

Popular culture describes the mass culture ordered from the market to be consumed in the market and the most used, watched, listened, read, spectated in the changing time. To put it differently, popular culture is the culture of usage and consumption (Erdoğan, 1999, s. 22). The popular is made popular by economic power and ideological power. Popular culture, likewise, is the culture of quantitative abundance and qualitative poverty through mechanical and electronic reproduction. By means of this poverty, the capitalist market structure gains material wealth and power (Erdoğan, 2004, s. 5-6).

Popular culture is a culture which is standardized by formulas and repetitions, and gives prominence to fulfilling desires, supporting collectivism only in case of the interest of the system and market, otherwise emphasizing individuality. Unlike folk culture, popular culture doesn't consist of cultural sources produced by the society who uses it. Not only the product, but the relational meanings of humans with themselves and others are also consumed and produced. The bourgeoisie lifestyle is sublimated and idealized by the sensibilities and emotions that are created. Images/scenes can supersede the essence through popular culture. Nonetheless, popular culture is based on forms of capitalist production, marketing, distribution and consumption of goods which are founded on the mechanical production and wide division of labour of cultural "things" (Erdoğan, 2001, s. 9-14).

Popular culture in our present day is produced, directed and made consumed by executives in accordance with the interests of the owners of the capitalist industrial order. Culture industries are organized in compliance with the specific structure of culture. The production process realized in the culture industry is steadily transforming this structure, in which individual and social relations occur, in line with the needs of capital (Çakmur, 1998, s. 118). Culture has become an industrial product with capitalism and been processed by institutions of cultural production (media) in accordance with capital owners.

The commodities which are directly related to culture and ideology are produced by the media in the capitalist structure. With the goods of popular culture, both profits are gained and the capitalist system is marketed ideologically, ensuring the legitimation of the system. Today the tabloid news, images, advertisements in the newspapers and the narratives in the economy section postulating the main ideological presentation, that is the liberal economic approach, as the only option can be found together. This case represents the association of profit and ideological effect. Popular culture is produced by the media to ensure the economic and ideological interests of the media-owning class. When the subordinate and dominant class members consume the popular culture in terms of their roles in capitalism, this culture is being reproduced (Özer ve Dağtaş, 2011, s. 109-110; Garnham, 2008, s. 79-80). In addition, the products of cultural production realized through the media are transformed into objects of needs as they are consumed. The main difference of cultural products from the objects of need is that they are crystallized in the reproduction process of capital —that is to say, the re-consumption mechanism of the production realized towards cultural products is established differently. The re-consumption mechanism of cultural products is established ideologically while the re-consumption mechanism of subsistence goods is established spontaneously. This case explains the nature of the commodification process within cultural production and various commodity forms generated in this process. As stated by Barış Çakmur (1998, s. 119) "the surplus value materialized in these processes creates new cycles for new capital investments in the circulation of capital. The entering of capital into new cycles and its expansion also leads to the change/expansion of the cultural commodity form".

Taking into account the *Asmalı Konak* series, we can see that another popular culture medium (the mansion) is created and reproduced by means of a popular culture element. In addition, the mansion was opened for tourist visits since the broadcast of the series and started to provide surplus value to its owner. Indeed one of the tourist guides who is working in the area emphasized that the rate of domestic tourists visiting the Cappadocia region increased with the series. During the study, it was found out in the interviews with the tourist guides that mansion visits were added to the tour programmes upon visitors' request. It is considered that this continuously maintains the popularity of the mansion.

The mansion being located in a touristic region is effective in its transformation into an area of popular culture; however, it is also thought that the series' plot, narration and representation

of the mansion are key factors. Likewise, the mansion in the series is disconnected from reality and thus represented as a mystical and poetic place. In this context, the audience/consumer is drawn into the fictive world created by the series. At this point, it is revealed in the study which elements of the series are effective in mythologizing the series and transforming it into a field of consumption. In the course of the study, the elements in the series are analysed in categories.

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

From the interviews with domestic tourists, the elements providing and maintaining the popularity of the mansion are determined as follows: the plot of the series, the factor of romance, the impact of the characters and the space setup.

The Plot of the Series

The series that started on ATV in 2002 was broadcasted until March 2003. The series which was directed by Çağan Irmak was filmed in the Cappadocia region. The series tells the story of an established family in the Cappadocia region, the Karadağ Family and its members' relationships with themselves and others. Through the love between the characters, Bahar and Seymen, the story is based on differences of traditions, East-West conflicts, rule of landlords, feudal family relationships and generational conflicts. The series is considered to be the first to treat the rule of landlords and the generational conflicts emanating from it. The domestic tourists who visited the mansion did also mention these points and stated that they wanted to see the mansion accordingly. Indeed, one of the interviewees affirmed the effect of the conflict between modern and traditional life being treated so intensely in the series. Yet another interviewee highlighted that the cultural differences in Turkey between East and West are treated for the first time in a series. The interviewee continued, "The series took for the first time the mansion life as a subject and showed two kinds of lives in Turkey. It made us see how different people we are". Similarly, another interviewee stated that *Asmalı Konak* is impressive and memorable in terms of being the first series to depict the feudal order. It must be taken into account that Cappadocia is a region of Central Anatolia that doesn't have the rule of landlords and East-West conflict. Thus the series constructed its own reality through the story created and is departed from the fabric of the region. In this way the audience is drawn into the fictive reality of the region rather than its actual reality.

The Factor of Romance

Despite the love stories of Sümbül Hanım-Ali Bey, Dilara-Yaman, Seyhan-Lâle and Dicle's platonic love towards Seymen, it came out that one of the key factors being influential on the tourists to visit the mansion is the love affair of Bahar and Seymen. Hence in most of the interviews, the love between Bahar and Seymen was pointed out as one element of the series that was fascinating. For instance, one interviewee expresses her opinion on this affair by saying "*They come from one end of the world to the other. A person who comes from a disparate culture to another, who tries to adapt to that, there are both love and respect in this*" while another interviewee reflects the impact of this love on her by remarking "*Although showing excessive love to Bahar, being grown up in rural areas, being the son of a landlord, Seymen is looking like a macho having a very soft heart.*" Yet another interviewee commented that Turkish people like very much to watch TV series featuring romance, and therefore love is distinguished as the most fascinating element of the series.

It was observed that the interviewees are generally impressed by the case that the individuals from two different cultures meet on a common ground and tolerating their cultural differences and try to sustain their love against all odds. One of the interviewees, as well, expresses her

fascination by saying “A person who grew up in Eastern culture on the one hand, and a completely Western person on the other... These people sharing something in common and their impacts on each other’s lives”.

The Impact of the Characters

One factor that influenced the audience as much as the love between Bahar and Seymen are the personalities of the series characters and what happens to them. The names that the interviewees mostly referred to were the characters of Bahar, Seymen, Dicle and Sümbül Hanım.

First, the points that the interviewees mostly gave attention to as regards the character of Bahar were her entrance to a different culture environment for her lover, attempt to adapt to that place, endearing herself to the household, at the same time her effort to keep the culture she came from, and pursue to maintain her own occupation. For example, one of the interviewees uttered “I don’t forget Bahar drawing a picture at the veranda” while another stated that she was affected by the fact that Bahar was pacing around inside the house with her boots when she got angry. In general, the modern style and clothes of Bahar are details that attracted the attention of the interviewees. Furthermore, the shirt, foulard and similar accessories of Bahar were sold by local sellers for a long period and thus being turned into goods of consumption.

In the expressions of the interviewees, Seymen is distinguished with his appearance, being modern as a landlord, his Eastern sides with Western education, protection of his love, being liked by local people and the like. For instance, one of the interviewees declared his impression by referring to the powerful character of Seyman Ağa, his protection of the girl he loved against his family and opposing his family in that vein. Yet another emphasized the appearance of Seymen Ağa, stating “He was very handsome, I was mostly watching the series for his look, his landlordship”. Additionally, many of the interviewees mentioned the character of Seymen for their reason of watching the series. Yet one of the interviewees explained that her sister was fascinated by the Seymen character and gave her child the name of Seymen.

Dicle, who is another character that influenced the interviewees, appears with her tricky sides, her belief in supernatural powers, her love for Seymen and her evil look. Two interviewees remarked they were impressed particularly by Dicle’s mystical side. Further, one of them said “I was afraid of Dicle”. Yet another commented by saying “I was very sorry for Dicle. She became the second woman and had to keep silent” and pointed out a different aspect.

Although to a lesser extent than the characters of Bahar, Seymen and Dicle, another character highlighted by the interviewees was Sümbül Hanım. Her powerful stance, ladyship, interference on Bahar and Seymen’s affair were some points they mentioned.

It can be concluded from the interviews that the traits of the characters are the factor of why the mansion is still visited. Indeed, it is seen that accessories identified with the characters, such as Sümbül Hanım scarf, Dicle kohl, Seyman Ağa ring, are sold. Therefore, the series has created more than one medium of consumption.

The Space Setup

The atmosphere and size of the place are other primary elements of the mansion that attracted the attention of the interviewees. In particular, it is considered that the way the mansion is presented in the series has attracted visitors; such that they have widely commented on the size of the mansion and its parts open to visit. Some of the visitors found the place smaller than they expected while others found it greater or just as they expected. Besides, some

visitors expressed their liking for the mansion and others noted that some parts of the mansion open to visit are not sufficient. As it is seen, the representation of the mansion in the series led to an expectation of the visitors making either positive or negative remarks on the location. The mansion is especially depicted as magnificent and authentic in the series. Many visitors confirmed that they came to the mansion to see this atmosphere. One of the interviewees who came with these expectations and wanted to remember the series, expecting to recall his past feelings again, expresses his disfavor of the existing order of the visits as follows: *"I came here about ten years ago. I wanted to come again and have my photo taken at the same place. The table in the middle, it was here I suppose, is absent now. My purpose was to revive the same frame, but it is bad that I couldn't have this feeling"*. One of the visitors who came with similar feelings suggested it would be better to put in the rooms some pictures showing the filming of the series or sound recordings in order to reminding the series. In this context, it is seen that feeling the place and reviving the series in the memories are essential for the mansion visitors in general.

CONCLUSION

In line with the findings in this study, a popular series has transformed its filming location to a popular and touristic place. It is witnessed that those who have and have not watched the series are visiting the location by virtue of the series. Accordingly, tourist guides noted that the domestic tourists want to visit the mansion; even it is not included in the travel program. The guides also emphasized that, while touring the mansion, the domestic tourists show such an excitement they don't possess while touring the historical and touristic places of the region. In this context, it is considered that this impact is achieved by referring some elements for the first time in the series, the filming region being a touristic place outside Istanbul, the authentic representation of the location, creating strong characters. However, undoubtedly the strongest aspect of the series is the modern legend of love it created. Through this legend of love, both the series became the most popular TV series of its period and the place of this love transformed into popular culture. Therefore, the love of Bahar and Seymen is commoditized by turning it into a modern legend of love, i.e. its production is maintained by launching it to a new mass of consumers. Put it differently, the myth of love produced and consumed by means of the series is now produced and consumed through the mansion.

Initially with other elements, this popular myth of love makes the TV channel gain surplus value through the series while it is ensuring surplus for the mansion and region in our present day. As referred in the section of analysis, particularly by means of the characters of the series, various consumption mediums were opened to the Cappadocia region. Generally speaking, the mansion has earned a touristic reputation as much as the natural and historical places of the region albeit being constructed artificially. Particularly it is seen that the domestic tourists visiting Cappadocia considered the mansion equal to the other natural and historical places. This case proves the power of media in creating popular culture and maintaining this culture under new mediums.

Thereby, as claimed by Barış Çakmur, creating new cycles in the circulation of capital by means of media and the expansion of capital accordingly pave the way for a change in the cultural commodity form. From this point on, it is possible to assert that a popular culture element produced by means of the series contributes to the production of capital in various mediums. And this supports the nature and functioning of popular culture, as it is reproduced through consumption and allows its producer/owner to gain profit from it.

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