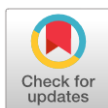


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Rediscovering the Ottoman Era: Portrayal of Muslims and Non-Muslim Characters in Turkish Dubbed Dramas in Pakistan

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Abstract

This study aims to explore the portrayal of Muslim and non-Muslim characters in the history-oriented TV series ‘Dirilis Ertugrul’ and ‘Kurulus Osman’ to complement the ideological shift to ‘Neo-Ottomanism’. Following the qualitative approach, qualitative content analysis technique was employed to code and categories the visuals and dialogues. The results of the study discern that the policy shift to 'Neo-Ottomanism' is prominently reflected in the TV series. Muslim characters have been portrayed as the best human beings, whereas non-Muslims are depicted as having evil designs, intentions, and approaches. Those who convert to Islam or swear allegiance to Muslims are illustrated as positive characters. The research findings contribute to the understanding of how political and cultural influences the depiction of characters in TV plays and how the portrayal of these characters influences the political and cultural environment.

Keywords: foreign policy, neo-Ottomanism, ottoman empire, justice and development party, Turkish historical dramas

Introduction

Historically, Turkish foreign policy has withstood numerous shifts from the Ottoman rule to the west-oriented policies of Mustafa Kemal and, in recent times, to the Erdogan-led government’s Neo-Ottomanism (Melouk & Sarra, [2021](#)). The ideology of Neo-Ottomanism is ascribed to Turkey’s ruling Justice and Development Party, which shifted Turkish foreign policy focus from Europe to Middle Eastern countries (Albayrak & Turan, [2016](#)). While the foreign policy of a state influences the political relations between two countries, it is also influenced by the internal political environment of the state (Yukaruc, [2019](#)). The shift in policy was an outcome of successive political developments spanning a few centuries.

After the end of the Ottoman rule, Turkey, under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal, maintained a Western-influenced secular policy, which

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brought Turkey closer to the Western ideological perspective while distancing itself from the Middle Eastern bloc. Nonetheless, this trend did not continue for long, and alternative perspectives began to appear with the emergence of Pan-Islamist ideology in the 1950s and the 1980s, coupled with advancements in politics and changes in national economic preferences (Oran, [2009](#)).

The Kemalist hegemony began to weaken with the electoral victory of the pro-religious 'Democratic Party against the pro-secular "Republican People's Party" in 1950 (Bali, [2021](#)). Pro-Islamic parties like the National Order Party in 1970, the National Salvation Party in 1972, the Welfare Party in 1983, and the Virtue Party in 1997, under the national vision moment initiated by Necmettin Erbakan, had the mandate to re-establish Turkish conventional beliefs and ethics, and to resurge the Turkish national identity. Focus on foreign and domestic policies based on diplomatic ties with Muslim nations rather than Western states, and restoring Turkey's links with its Ottoman heritage and Islam.

Despite their populist efforts, these parties were forced out of the Turkish political system, either through a martial law coup or through the seizure of their political operations by the constitutional courts (Ozelkan, [2025](#); Yang & Guo, [2015](#)).

The emergence of the Justice and Development Party (JDP) in Turkish politics in 2002 marked a significant shift in Turkey's foreign and ideological policy. According to Demir ([2021](#)), the JDP initially adopted a non-religious, modernist rhetoric in its first term in office, consistent with Turkey's long-standing efforts to join the European Union. However, the JDP's influence over the country's political structure and public opinion increased significantly during its second and third terms, particularly after the 2010 constitutional referendum. This stay in power provided an opportunity for the JDP to strengthen Islamist and nationalistic ideology, countering the Westernised secular rhetoric established by Mustafa Kemal, also referred to as Ata-Türk (Sümer & Adaklı, [2010](#)).

According to Bozoglu and Whitehead ([2018](#)), this approach, commonly known as neo-Ottomanism, focuses on re-establishing Turkey's connection with its Ottoman heritage and maintaining an Islamic identity, which led the Turkish government to pursue an independent foreign policy that prioritises strong relations with Middle Eastern countries.

The Rise of Neo-Ottomanism in the Turkish Foreign Policy Paradigm

The ideological shift not only influenced foreign policy, but its effects can also be noticed in the sociopolitical narrative within the country. To propagate the new narrative, TV plays highlighting the glorified past of Turkey were broadcast, which became popular not only among the Turkish people but also inspired the Muslims of other countries. The portrayal of Muslim and non-Muslim characters in these plays depicted the ideological realignment, which was evident in the foreign policy shift in the Neo-Ottomanist regime. Melouk and Sarra ([2021](#)) and Elswah and Howard ([2022](#)) argue that this ideological realignment is an attempt to reincarnate historical Islamic traits rather than test the less familiar and less reliable Western ideology. The implications of the Neo-Ottoman ideology can be witnessed in Turkey's popular culture. It is also reflected in media products such as television series, where the Turkish authorities use media as an instrument to foster a positive image of the Turkish legacy.

Recently, there has been a surge in the making of TV plays based on historical Ottoman themes. The content of these TV plays reflects the Turkish policy shift, the implications of which can be witnessed in Turkey's international relations and changes in its local politics. Studying the portrayal of Muslim and non-Muslim characters in these dramas can serve as a lens to comprehend Neo-Ottomanism's influence on Turkish media (Pothou, [2020](#)). Some studies have pointed out that the role of media in communicating state ideology and culture helps shape people's opinions and understanding of the world around them (Hassan & Mukhtar, [2020](#); Khan & Won, [2020](#); Weldes & Rowley, [2015](#)).

The changing national identity of Turkey in recent years, departing from a secular and west-oriented liberal identity to an Islamic national identity inspired by the Ottoman ideological relic, is an outcome of the administrative policies introduced by the Justice and Development Party during its rule (Uzer, [2018](#)). This change in national identity is also reflected in the foreign policy shift of Turkey, which has been reconstructed under the new political regime of the Justice and Development Party. The Republic of Turkey has moved away from strengthening ties with its traditional Western allies, such as the United States and its European allies, and is developing close relationships based on cooperation with Middle Eastern states and countries with long-running conflicts with the West, including Balkan nations and Russia. Western nations have termed this shift

in foreign policy as "Neo-Ottomanism" (Gopal, [2024](#); Iqbal, [2018](#)).

According to Bozoglu and Whitehead (2018), Turkish foreign policy's drifting away from America and Europe can be seen in several political decisions made by the Republic of Turkey over the years. These include the rejection of the American invasion of Iraq in 2003, advocacy for the rights of Palestinians against Israel since 2009, and the official termination of EU-Turkey membership negotiations in 2018. These developments have contributed to the weakening of Turkish ties with the West, the loss of its position as a U.S. ally, and its failed bid to become a member of the European Union.

Iqbal ([2020](#)) suggests that the Neo-Ottoman ideology has motivated the Turkish government to pursue a nation-building movement that emphasises the Islamic identity of the Ottoman Empire and its accomplishments while emphasising the construction of a Turkish national identity based on the concept of Islam. This political strategy has made Turkey a significant power in the region and has played a major role in its efforts to expand its political, military, economic, and cultural power. This is evident in President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's administrative policies, which highlight the Islamic identity of the Ottoman Empire and its golden era as the accomplishments of Muslims (Lombardi, [2012](#); Mughal et al., [2023](#)).

Turkish Soap Operas work as an effective tool for elevating the neo-Ottoman ideology under the ruling government authority, the Justice and Development Party, which is in total contrast with the ideological policies of Mustafa Kemal Ata-Turk. (Laurence, [2019](#))

Erçel ([2016](#)) suggests that the Turkish government has projected that image onto European nations and non-Muslims, who lived in the Ottoman Empire, to reshape and alter its negative image in the West. However, as the revival of the Ottoman golden era persists, minorities in Turkey, particularly non-Muslims, are likely to be viewed as hostile "others".

Çetinkaya ([2020](#)) emphasizes the role of Turkish Ottoman-themed soap operas in promoting the re-imagination of European nations as "others" in opposition to the "modern Ottomans" (present-day Turkish individuals) and are also against the unity of Islamic countries in the Middle East. These soap operas have also played a significant role in altering Turkey's national attitude towards the European Union and promoting Turkey's image as a powerful and influential player in the region.

These studies imply that the Neo-Ottoman ideology is portrayed in TV dramas to influence Turkish popular culture (Yukaruc, [2019](#)). During the rule of the Justice and Development Party since 2013, a number of TV dramas on historical themes were broadcast on state-sponsored as well as private channels. This notable increase in such plays not only coincides with the change in Turkish foreign policy but also necessitates an analysis of the way the characters are portrayed in these TV productions to ascertain the influence of Neo-Ottomanism.

Objectives

- To explore the dominant personality characteristics associated with Muslim and Non-Muslim Characters in Turkish dubbed dramas.
- To explore the presence of Neo-Ottomanist ideology in Turkish dramas through the examination of prominent themes associated with Muslim and non-Muslim characters.

Research Questions

- What are the most dominant personality characteristics with which Turkish history-based series portray non-Muslims in contrast to Muslims?
- How does the Turkish Neo-Ottoman ideology impact the portrayal of Muslim and non-Muslim characters in Turkish history-based TV series?
- Do the prominent themes associated with the portrayal of Muslims and non-Muslims in Turkish dubbed dramas indicate the presence of Neo-Ottoman ideology?

Theoretical Framework

This study employed Framing Theory (Goffman, [1974](#)) to analyse the portrayal of Muslim and non-Muslim characters in Turkish historical dramas. The theory points out that the media emphasizes certain issues while excluding others—a phenomenon often referred to as “cherry picking” by media experts—and associates those issues with specific narratives to create certain meanings. The framing theory helps analyse the characters and the content of dramas, presenting Muslim and non-Muslim characters and the neo-Ottoman ideology through these selected dramas aired in Pakistan in dubbed language. The inductive method has been used in this research, which involves an open approach to analyse the text while

describing the frames associated with Muslim and non-Muslim characters in the dramas. This approach contrasts with the deductive method, which works with predefined frames. (Semetko and Valkenburg, [2000](#)).

Method

The current research is based on a qualitative content analysis of Urdu-dubbed Turkish dramas, where the data obtained are analysed through the "categorical analysis technique" that is built on two significant steps: the partitioning of messages into various categories and their analyses, i.e., coding the statements under certain categories and then assessing their meanings. In this study, all the Urdu-dubbed Turkish Historical series have been included as a research population, which contains Ottoman-era-based themes and portrays Muslim and non-Muslim characters. The central unit of analysis is every recurring non-Muslim and Muslim character shown in the series in the context of their social roles, behaviour, and communication or interaction with other characters. By virtue of the analysis of the Turkish Historical series, certain dominant personality traits associated with Muslim and non-Muslim characters were identified based on the visuals and dialogues assigned to them, then they were coded, and specific categories were allocated to them. The selected sample comprised five seasons of *Dirilis Ertugrul* (Resurrection Ertugrul) and the first season of *Kurulus Osman* (Establishment: Osman).

Selective Sample

Drama: Dirilis Ertugrul

Released: 2014-2019

Produced by: Mehmet Bozdağ

Directed by: Metin Günay

Written by: Mehmet Bozdağ

Language: Urdu (Dubbed), Original (Turkish)

Seasons: 5

Drama: Kurulus Osman

Released: 20 November 2019 –present

Produced by: Mehmet Bozdağ

Written by: Mehmet Bozdağ

Directed by: Ahmet Yilmaz

Language: Urdu (Dubbed), Original (Turkish)

Total Seasons: 3

Selected Seasons: Season one

Episodes: 68

Narrative Structure

Dirilis Ertugrul



The narrative structure is usually based on three sections of stories. A story or character is divided into three phases: the beginning, conflict, and end. This research has analysed the representation of Muslim and non-Muslim characters in drama from the beginning, entering into a conflict, and toward the end. The series begins with the Kayi, a Muslim-nomadic Turk tribe, facing the challenges of survival and the constant threat of danger from their enemies. The tribe members' main objective is to find a permanent homeland where they can settle peacefully instead of wandering around with no place to call their own. As they migrate from one land to another, they encounter various enemies, including Mongols, Knight Templars, and Byzantine Empire officials, whose ultimate aim is to disunite powerful Muslim states and destroy all Muslims, mainly Turks, while

taking control of the whole world. The encounter between the Muslim Turks and the non-Muslims changed the Kayi Tribe's goals from finding a permanent settlement to unifying the Islamic world to save it from the attacks of the non-Muslims and protect the oppressed, including the non-Muslims. Ertugrul's bravery catches the attention of other enemies, including Mongols and Byzantine state officials. Throughout the series, the Turk tribes, led by Ertugrul, struggle to survive the never-ending conspiracies and hidden attacks of their non-Muslim enemies, who are portrayed as determined to destroy the Muslim Ummah.

Kurulus Osman



The series *Kurulus Osman* picks up where *Dirilis Ertugrul* left off, focusing on the life of Ertugrul's son, Osman. The story begins with the Kayi Tribe, led by Dundar Bey, being settled in the land of Sogut under the influence of Mongols because of the weak Seljuk state. Their focus is now on achieving peace, prosperity, and development, which leads to their interaction with the Kulucahisar Castle under the control of the Byzantine state. However, the Mongols and Knight Templars created hurdles for Muslims and destroyed any opportunity for peace. The Kayi Tribe, under Osman's leadership, ultimately succeeds in achieving peace by taking over Kulucahisar Castle. However, this peace is short-lived, as the non-Muslim enemies plan other conspiracies and attacks to retaliate for their crushing defeat by the Muslims.

The Muslim characters are portrayed throughout the series as the epitome of ideal human beings. In contrast, the non-Muslim characters are

depicted as evil, except for some who convert to Islam or turn their loyalties towards Muslim characters. The study finds that the foreign policy shift of Neo-Ottomanism in Turkey influenced this portrayal. The prominent themes in the series reflect this foreign policy shift and highlight the importance of uniting and protecting the Islamic world against non-Muslim enemies.

Results

Themes

Glorification of Islam

In the TV series *Ertugral*, the words and actions of Muslim characters portray the teachings of Islam, glorifying the Islamic tradition as a desirable phenomenon. Islam, as a religion, is portrayed as an ideology that promotes peace, justice, and the protection of the oppressed across the board. The TV play stresses the Islamic way of thinking and portrays the idealistic behaviour of Muslim characters, which is deliberately juxtaposed against the contrasting behaviour and intentions of the non-Muslim characters. The reinforcement of this theme is evident in the storyline with the instances of Muslim characters' efforts to maintain peace, create a system to ensure justice, and fight against enemies and internal traitors (antagonists, which are primarily non-Muslims or infidels). This portrayal of Muslim characters places Islam as an idyllic ideology and Muslims as ideal human beings across the world.

Muslim Unity and the Consequences of Dis-unity

The theme of Muslim unity and the repercussions of disunity recur throughout the series. There appears to be an emphasis on the significance of unity among Muslims as a wellspring of success, while highlighting the perils of disunion in the form of failures, which make Muslims vulnerable to their adversaries. This theme is highlighted while showing tussles within Muslim states, suffering losses in clashes against non-Muslims, and the presence of traitors among Muslim ranks. The protagonists of the play stressed the need for the Turk tribes and Muslim states to unite while setting aside their differences to become a force to be reckoned with.

Glorification of Turk Nationalism and its Association with Religion

The glorification of Turkish national identity is a significant theme in the series, depicted through the dialogues and the characters' behaviours.

Turk nationalism is associated with past success, bravery, faithfulness, goodwill, loyalty, and determination, and Turk people are portrayed as peaceful, just, and "protectors of the oppressed." Non-Muslim characters frequently refer to Muslims as "Turks" rather than "Muslims", acknowledging their bravery and faith. Muslim characters also emphasise this theme through their actions, demonstrating their determination to protect the oppressed and save the Islamic world by recalling the historical successes, bravery, and other honourable traditions of the Turk nation.

Truthfulness vs Falsehood

The core theme of 'Truthfulness vs Falsehood' is depicted throughout the series, focusing on the interaction between Muslim and non-Muslim characters. Muslims are depicted as truthful, while non-Muslim characters represent falsehood, except for non-Muslim characters who convert to Islam and are portrayed as truthful. Some Muslim characters are also shown to represent falsehood, who betray their own people for their sheer lust for power.

Glorification of a Turk Muslim State: The Ottoman Empire

One of the most important themes that emerged in the series was the establishment of a powerful Turk-Muslim state (the Ottoman Empire), where the oppressed, including both Muslims and non-Muslims, would find a safe sanctuary from the oppressors, and justice would prevail.

Jihad: An Un-wavering Principle of Muslims

The theme of Jihad is recurrently depicted in the series, portraying it as an unwavering principle of the Muslim faith, particularly when Muslim characters are exposed to non-Muslim characters who are hell-bent on destroying Muslims. Denying Jihad is deemed a gesture of cowardice and a lack of internal strength. The speeches of Muslim characters reinforce the idea of Jihad as the only solution to their problems, while their fighting sequences with their enemies, especially non-Muslims, highlight this theme

Setting

Dirilis Ertugrul and Kurulus Osman

Mise-en-Scene refers to everything presented by the camera, including the set design, actors, and various props placed on the screen. There is a significant reason behind the placement of even a single prop, such as a

needle, because it carries a certain meaning that the director wants to deliver to the audience. The series is set in 13th-century Anatolia, focusing on the Kayi Tribe's search for a permanent homeland suitable for cattle grazing and living without the threat of non-Muslim enemies. Season one is primarily set in Halep city (Ayyubid state), and subsequent seasons are set in Anatolia as the Kayi tribe migrates west towards the Byzantine Empire border in season three and eventually to the land of Söğüt in Western Anatolia in season five. Non-Muslim characters, including Knight Templars, the Byzantine Empire army, and Mongols, are present wherever the Kayi tribe moves, living in castles or open fields.

The historical series 'Kurulus Osman' is set in 13th-century western Anatolia, where Muslim characters are settled in the form of nomadic tribes, particularly the Kayi Tribe, seeking to make Sogut their permanent homeland. Muslims live in tents made of clothes, while non-Muslims, such as the Knight Templars and Byzantine Empire authorities, live in concrete castles. Mongols mostly lived under the open sky in forests, but some conquered Konya from Seljuk state and now live in the Seljuk state palace.

Props and Costume

Muslim Characters

The Muslim characters in the series are depicted as fierce and skilled warriors, with their primary weapons being swords, bows, arrows, chain armor, daggers, iron shields, and spears. Both men and women are shown to carry swords to safeguard themselves and their people. As the series is set in the 13th century, the costumes mainly consist of animal skin and fur clothing. Women wear bright colours, jewelled hats with coined veils, and jewellery to give a feminine touch to their tough exterior as warriors. Men wear dark colours and bork hats, with shoes made of animal hide. Characters that represent spirituality, such as Ibn-ul-Arabi, are shown wearing pure white clothing from head to toe, indicating their complete purity in comparison to other Muslim characters.

Figure 1

Muslim Characters



Non-Muslim Characters

Non-Muslim characters in the series are depicted as Christians, wearing white dresses with a red holy cross imprinted on them. They carry war weapons such as straight swords, spears, daggers, chain armor, and arrows with bows, but they do not wear bork hats like Muslim characters. Non-Muslim women wear bright-coloured clothes with delicate jewellery, giving them a feminine character. They do not carry war weapons such as swords or daggers, which gives them a sensitive and weak look compared to the rugged look of Muslim women unless they intentionally go into a war zone.

Figure 2

Non-Muslim Characters





In "Kuruluş Osman," some non-Muslim characters associated with the Byzantine Empire wear maroon-coloured war costumes comprising chain armour on their bodies, head armor with black leather belts on their waists, and carry war weapons.

The Mongol characters in the series are depicted as similar in appearance to the Turk tribes, wearing costumes and bork hats made of animal hides. They wear dark-coloured costumes, which reflect their dark and mysterious personalities. Women also wear similar costumes made of animal hides without hats, but with a veil or some jewellery.

Blocking and Staging

The power dynamics between Muslim and non-Muslim characters are evident in the fight scenes in both TV series. Characters with strength are shown surrounding others in the camera frame, while those in power are depicted as skilled fighters. Non-Muslim characters, such as Mongols and Knight Templars, are often portrayed as dominant in strength, while Muslim characters are depicted as dominant in terms of power and skill. However, there are scenes in which characters from either group are shown to be dominant in power and strength. Camera movement reinforces the story narrative by focusing on the dominant characters. Muslim characters are generally portrayed as dominant in most scenes, except when non-Muslim characters engage in hidden attacks.

Analysis of Muslim and Non-Muslim Characters

As Kuruluş Osman is a sequel to Diriliş Ertuğrul in terms of story, it contains the exact character representation with their defined roles, except

for the change in the cast. The character descriptions of both dramas were not written separately.

Muslim Characters

The Muslim characters in the dramas are mostly Turks, representing both the Seljuk state and small tribes. The series focuses on the Muslim characters living in the Kayi Tribe, who play a crucial role in the establishment of the Ottoman Empire, with the main character Ertugrul leading the way.

Muslim male characters protect and unify the Islamic world from their enemies. They also handle the political and financial affairs of their tribes. They are seen discussing issues related to the settlement of the tribe in a permanent homeland, as well as the arrangement of their daily needs.

The female characters in the series are portrayed as active participants in the internal and domestic affairs of their tribes. They are involved in producing products for trade and catering to men's needs (Hassan et al., [2023](#)). In addition to their involvement in domestic matters, they actively participate in the tribe's political matters and share their opinions. Moreover, they take on the warrior role and fight with swords alongside men when the need arises.

Non-Muslim Characters

The non-Muslim characters in the series are Christians and Mongols. The Christian characters aim to defeat Muslims and regain control over Jerusalem. They are divided into two groups: the Knight Templars and the Byzantine Empire officials. The former supported the Latin regime, which took over Constantinople from its ruling authorities, while the latter supported the ruling regime in Nicaea, which had once ruled Constantinople. The Mongols, who mainly followed Tengrism and represented the Mongol Empire, arrived in Anatolia to expand their empire and defeat powerful Muslim states.

The male characters are majorly focused on the political matters of their states, which involve the downfall of powerful Muslim states at that time, as well as the Turk tribes. Hence, these characters are constantly seen in a war zone with Muslims with the aim of defeating them to rule the world.

In the series, non-Muslim women characters are not involved in political matters unless men use them to defeat Muslims. Mongol women are only

involved in politics if they are needed to support the goals set by men. In Establishment Osman, female characters are fully involved in the political matters of the Byzantine Empire, but their primary motivation is to destroy Muslims for personal gain. The women in both series are portrayed as skilled fighters. In season 1 of Establishment Osman, female Mongol characters are almost nonexistent.

Major Personality Traits in Muslims and non-Muslim Characters

Dirilis Ertugrul: Muslim Characters

The Muslim characters in the series are consistently portrayed as ideal human beings with positive traits, such as bravery, honesty, empathy, humility, and compassion. Some Muslim characters are initially depicted negatively, showing their lust for power, envy, or treachery, but later, they redeem themselves. In contrast, non-Muslim characters are predominantly portrayed as evil, reinforcing the Neo-Ottomanism foreign policy shift present in the series. Non-Muslim characters who either embrace Islam or become loyal to Muslims are reflected positively, while those who are against Muslims come to a dreadful end (Hassan et al., [2021](#)). This notion exhilarates Islam's supremacy and the Muslims' superiority over the non-Muslims. The leading Muslim character, Ertugrul, is portrayed as a model of positive traits, making him an ideal Muslim character for others to follow.

Non-Muslim Characters

The non-Muslim characters, on the other hand, are shown as people with negative characteristics, with deceit, cruelty, and conspiracy as their hallmarks. Such portrayals of non-Muslim characters seem to complement the Neo-Ottomanism foreign policy shift, where Western powers are thought to be unreliable. Only a few non-Muslim characters who either converted or became loyal to Muslims were portrayed positively. The depiction of these characters as positive is limited to a few characters and is conditioned to their allegiance to Muslims. It can be observed that the influence of Neo-Ottomanism has led to the glorification of Muslim characters and the traducement of non-Muslim characters. The study's findings suggest that the themes portrayed in the dramas reinforce the shift in foreign policy to restore Turkey's lost legacy.

Kurulus Osman: Muslim Characters

The portrayal of Muslim characters in Kuruluş Osman highlights traits

such as piety, loyalty, bravery, and commitment. Some Muslim characters are depicted as having undesirable traits such as jealousy, cowardice, and a strong hunger for power, which result in negative consequences for them. Here too, those who embrace Islam or become allies with Muslims are not portrayed negatively.

Kurulus Osman: Non-Muslim Characteristics

In *Kurulus Osman*, non-Muslims are shown as cowardly, hostile, and deceitful towards Muslims. The Mongols' attack on Muslims is shown as lacking a plan, while the Byzantines are depicted as conspirators and are shown fleeing from the battleground. Some of the non-Muslim characters, Prince Salvador and Kongur, are shown to have positive values, but only when they embrace Islam. The influence of the Turkish foreign policy shift on the play seems evident.

Discussion

The dramas in question focus on themes such as the unity of Muslims, the consequences of disunity, Jihad, the glorification of the Ottoman Empire, Turkish nationalism, and Islam. Muslim characters are glorified to the extent that they are portrayed as ideal (Ozelkan, [2025](#)). In contrast, non-Muslim characters are portrayed as epitomes of evil, focused on destroying the unity of the Muslim state. Muslim characters embody goodness, while non-Muslims are portrayed with negative traits such as cowardice, deceitfulness, and hostility (Ali et al., [2024](#); Gopal, [2024](#)). The few non-Muslim characters with positive traits are shown to have converted to Islam or been influenced by the kindness of Muslim characters.

There are conditions for the positive and negative portrayal of characters. Negative Muslim characters are redeemed at the end or given a painful and tragic end, while positive non-Muslim characters are portrayed as having redeemed themselves for their sins. However, the number of non-Muslim characters with positive traits is much lower than that of positive Muslim characters. The positive traits of non-Muslim characters are not glorified to the same extent as those of Muslims characters. Overall, the dramas reflect the ideology of Neo-Ottomanism and its impact on the portrayal of Muslim and non-Muslim characters in Turkish TV series.

The findings of the study revealed that the foreign policy shift, 'Neo-Ottomanism', does exist in these dramas and has impacted the representation of Muslim and non-Muslim characters. Turkey's inclination

toward Middle Eastern, specifically Muslim states, is visible in the form of prominent theme:: unity of Muslims, Consequences of dis-unity, Jihad, glorification of the Ottoman Empire, Turk nationality, and Islam, while its distancing from traditional allies, i.e., Western states, is evident in the portrayal of non-Muslim characters who are depicted as the epitome of evil excluding some characters that convert to Islam or turn their loyalties toward Muslims in contrast with a glorified version of Muslim characters who are portrayed as the ideal human being to exist on earth. Even if some Muslim characters are depicted negatively, they either become repentant at the end, redeem themselves, or meet a tragic and painful death, which indicates zero tolerance toward such Muslims.

Author Contributions

Taseer Fatima: Conceptualization; Writing – original draft. Ali Ab Ul Hassan: Methodology; Formal analysis; Writing – original draft. Syed Hussain Sajjad: Writing – original draft; Writing – review & editing. All authors read and approved the final version of the manuscript and agreed to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

Conflict of Interest

The authors of the manuscript have no financial or non-financial conflict of interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

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Data supporting the findings of this study will be made available by the corresponding author upon request.

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