

# ‘AESTHETIC PROXIMITY’ AND TRANSNATIONAL TV SERIES

## ADAPTING *FORBRYDELSEN* IN THE TURKISH CONTEXT

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**Abstract:** This article focuses on the short lived Turkish police procedural TV series, *Cinayet* (The Murder, Akbel Film and Adam Film, 2014) which is a scripted format adaptation of the celebrated Danish crime drama *Forbrydelsen* (DR, 2007-2012). By making a comparative textual analysis of the series, the article intends to emphasize the significance of ‘aesthetic proximity’ as a concept in discussing the global flow of television content and to reveal the challenges of adapting a scripted format which is stylistically different than the local stylistic conventions.

**Keywords:** *Forbrydelsen*, *Cinayet*, Turkish police procedurals, aesthetic proximity

### 1 Introduction

Focusing on style can offer great insights about the particularities of a television culture and industry. In the context of scripted format adaptations, this focus can provide another dimension for research and create a chance to develop new approaches. This article concentrates on the stylistic elements of the licenced scripted format adaptation of the Danish crime drama *Forbrydelsen* (DR, 2007-2012) entitled *Cinayet* (The Murder, Akbel Film and Adam Film, 2014) .

*Cinayet* was broadcast on Kanal D in 2014 and cancelled after 5 episodes. The Danish original revolves around the investigations that are conducted by Sarah Lund (Sofie Gråbøl), a strong-minded detective inspector and a single mother of a teenage son. In the beginning of the first season, Sarah is introduced as she is about to move to Sweden in order to be with her fiancée and start a new life. A murder investigation that she is assigned to with her colleague, Jan Meyer (Søren Malling) makes her stall her plans and stay in Copenhagen. During the first season of the series, Sarah and Jan try to solve the murder of a young woman, Nanna Birk Larsen (Julie Ølgaard), as the audience witnesses how Nanna’s parents, Theis Birk Larsen (Bjarne Henriksen) and Pernille Birk Larsen (Ann Eleonora Jørgensen) react to the tragedy of losing their daughter.

By focusing on the story of the Turkish police commissar, Zehra Kaya (Nurgül Yeşilçay) as the Turkish equivalent of Sarah Lund, *Cinayet* adapts the same narrative with certain twists. In the Turkish version, as Zehra prepares to fly to

Azerbaijan with her fiancée, she is assigned to a case in Istanbul which she cannot leave behind. She teams up with her supposed replacement, Yılmaz Seyhan (Engin Altan Düzyatan), and starts to work on the murder of the university student, Gonca Borova (Alicia Kapudağ). The reactions of the parents, Tahir Borova (Ahmet Mümtaz Taylan) and Meryem Borova (Goncagül Sunar) to the tragedy and the steps that are taken in the criminal investigation are shown in the same order in the Turkish version as in the Danish original. However, various different attempts are made to localize the story.

As Sevilay Çelenk explains, gender relations, class differences, family dynamics, religious ceremonies and grief processes are changed to a certain extent in order to make the story of *Forbrydelsen* suitable for Turkish culture.<sup>1</sup> According to the television critic and scholar Tayfun Atay, these efforts are not enough because there is a cultural incompatibility that makes *Cinayet* unfamiliar for the Turkish audiences. Interestingly, apart from the incompatibility of the narrative with the social realities of Turkey, Atay associates this unfamiliarity partially with the 'aesthetics' of the series. He states that *Cinayet* makes an effort to give the adapted script a 'local' touch but using the same costumes and similar settings as the original series prevents this series from reflecting the 'local' atmosphere.<sup>2</sup>

As Atay's comments indicate, 'style' plays a crucial role in the localization of the Danish scripted format. This article intends to uncover that role and offer a new perspective which prioritizes style as a substantial layer of the localization processes. In this context, 'aesthetic proximity' appears as a relevant concept. Discussions regarding the global flow of television content have been dominated by the discourse of 'cultural proximity' as conceptualized by Joseph D. Straubhaar who suggests that audiences choose to watch certain programmes "based on a search for cultural relevance or proximity."<sup>3</sup> However, the current flow of television content invites scholars to look out for alternative approaches to explain the underlying motives of watching television content from other nations. Straubhaar extends the scope of 'cultural proximity' and suggests that proximities could be multiple "based on topic or theme, on values, on ideology or worldview, on the qualities and characteristics of genres per se, and on ethnicity."<sup>4</sup> Enric Castello argues for the necessity "to broaden the concept of cultural proximity to embrace the communicative circuit (creation, text and reception) and so open up the spectrum of possibilities for constructing this proximity."<sup>5</sup> Susanne Eichner proposes to focus on 'lifeworld relevance' and 'practical sense-making' in order to understand the meanings and pleasures of watching TV content "beyond the logics of the framework of cultural closeness and distance."<sup>6</sup>

TV aesthetics can be considered as another layer of proximity in this endeavour of extending the scope of proximity discourses. Exemplifying this attempt, Jolien van Keulen makes multiple connections between TV aesthetics, transnational format adaptation and genre in her study on the Dutch adaptation of the Australian reality show, *Farmer Wants a Wife* (2007-2012). Van Keulen states that on the one hand, aspects of style could travel with the programmes when they are adapted in another location as a consequence of the demands in the licencing agreement. On the other hand, local producers could take the initiative by using their culturally determined tastes and standards in order to address to local expectations, needs and limitations. Formation of transnational aesthetic styles and standards is discussed by van Keulen as a consequence of the growing global exchange of programmes and know-how. But as her study indicates "television styles and aesthetics are (still) local and culturally bound."<sup>7</sup>

The first part of this article focuses on these culturally bound television styles and aesthetics in the Turkish context by mainly introducing the dynamics of Turkish TV series industry, historical influence of Yeşilçam cinema on local aesthetics and the dominance of melodramatic storytelling in Turkish TV series. At this point, it should be noted that this article aims to approach the stylistic conventions that are elaborated here as dynamic formations that are shaped at the intersection of various discourses and are open to change depending on the conditions of the historical era. Based on this background, the second part concentrates on the comparative textual analysis of *Forbrydelsen* and *Cinayet* by approaching aesthetics as 'aesthetic codes', where "'aesthetic' means elements of image-sound style and 'codes' refers to sets of image-sound conventions"<sup>8</sup> in a non-judgmental way. In this part, the article discusses the stylistics challenges that *Cinayet* faces in narrating the story of the Danish original by balancing between reflecting the essential features of the adapted text and conforming to the conventional stylistics of Turkish TV series on mainstream TV channels.

## 2 Television Style and Turkish TV Series

The implications of cultural closeness and distance within the proximity discourse<sup>9</sup> beg the question of the scope of this range. In order to address this question, before analysing selected sequences from *Cinayet* and *Forbrydelsen*, conventional stylistics in Turkish TV series have to be discussed at the time of *Cinayet*'s broadcast. Raymond Williams' concept, 'flow' becomes instrumental in this discussion. In his study on television, Williams develops the concept of planned flow as "the defining characteristic of broadcasting, simultaneously as a technology and as a cultural form."<sup>10</sup> Flow as a concept has faced various kinds of critique throughout the years<sup>11</sup> but continues to direct attention to the textual features of television broadcasting and the experience of watching television. In the framework of this discussion, the term becomes useful for understanding the scope of aesthetic closeness and distance in the Turkish context because observing the planned flow provides a reference point for deciding what could be considered as an aesthetically proximate style on the mainstream channels of Turkish television.<sup>12</sup>

According to a recent study on the changing habits of media consumption in Turkey, television still plays a dominant role in society. As stated in the 2018 report of the Professional Union of Broadcasting Organizations (Radyo Televizyon Yayıncıları Meslek Birliği - RATEM), people in Turkey watch approximately 5.5 hours of television per day and local TV series appear as the second most watched programmes on TV after the news.<sup>13</sup> Turkish TV series which dominate the primetime schedules have distinctive stylistic characteristics. In his study on television style, Jeremy Butler explains that "style exists at the intersection of economics, technology, industry standards, and semiotic/aesthetic codes; and each of these elements has their own, semi-independent history."<sup>14</sup> In the light of this approach, the distinctive aesthetics codes of Turkish TV series could be examined under three interrelated sections: the dynamics of Turkish television industry, the historical connection between Turkish TV series and Yeşilçam cinema and the dominance of melodrama as a mode of storytelling.

### 2.1 Television Industry Practices in Turkey

The Turkish TV series industry operates on unique internal and external dynamics. For instance, Arzu Öztürkmen explains that the Turkish television industry has a distinctive pace of production. Television networks do not usually commit to a project without making sure of their success in ratings. Therefore, in the beginning of the production process, only a few episodes are completed and after that the production continues on a weekly basis depending on the success of the show. Öztürkmen believes that this pace of production creates a unique opportunity for immediate feedback and interaction because "screen writers are exposed to a very rapid response from the audiences, actors and producers, a process which has a direct impact on their writing."<sup>15</sup>

On the other hand, media professionals who are interviewed by Selin Tüzün Ateşalp for her study on the Turkish TV series industry, believe that this rapid production pace diminishes quality and creativity. Apart from leaving no time for preproduction, the pressure to complete the production in a very short time results in working long hours and raises questions about work safety, job security, social security and medical care.<sup>16</sup> In this sense, it can be said that the Turkish TV series industry operates under very difficult conditions in an accelerated pace, making decisions on the go and finding quick fixes to complex problems. Evrim Yörük believes that the pressure of completing the shooting in just a few days prevents Turkish TV series from creating a meticulously designed aesthetic look.<sup>17</sup>

Other major factors that can be considered as an influence on the aesthetics of Turkish TV series are the industry's dependency on high ratings and the regulations of the Turkish Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTÜK).<sup>18</sup> Especially RTÜK regulations on commercial breaks which establish their duration and frequency have a major effect on the Turkish TV industry. According to the Deloitte report in 2014, RTÜK regulations restrict the number of

commercial breaks within individual programmes. These restrictions create financial challenges for the production companies which struggle to cover the rising production costs of the Turkish TV series with the profits from the permitted number of commercial breaks. This challenge leads the production companies to extend the duration of each episode in order to financially support the productions with the necessary amount of commercials. As a consequence of this strategy, the broadcast of an episode can change between 150 to 180 minutes with the recaps and commercial breaks.<sup>19</sup>

The long duration of the episodes in Turkish TV series plays a formative role in the construction of their aesthetics. For instance, the actor, Zafer Algöz, who is interviewed by Tüzün Ateşalp, states that audiences watch lengthy sequences of characters taking long walks, combing their hair or doing exercise with background music. Another actor, Janset Paçal, mentions what she calls 'filler scenes' which show the characters in unrealistic situations such as not answering the phone for three minutes.<sup>20</sup> These 'filler scenes' are conceptualized by Evrim Yörük as 'dead times' in her analysis of *Behzat Ç.: Bir Ankara Polisiyesi* (Behzat Ç.: An Ankara Police Procedural, Star TV, 2010-2013). In this context, Yörük approaches the long duration of the series as a mechanism which creates 'dead time' in the narrative. However, instead of reinforcing the feeling of liveness on television as observed by John Ellis, these 'dead times' are defined as something that the audiences are forced to watch mindlessly rather than a conscious stylistic decision.<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, the multitude of 'filler scenes' creates a significant stylistic characteristic for Turkish TV series.

Another significant stylistic feature that is associated with the long duration of the series is the dominance of the melodramatic tone in the narratives. According to Tüzün Ateşalp, the long duration of Turkish TV series plays a significant role in increasing the tone of melodrama in the narratives regardless of the dominant genre.<sup>22</sup> On the one hand, this tendency can be related to the widespread preferences of Turkish audiences who are usually drawn to stories with strong emotional connection.<sup>23</sup> On the other hand, the dominance of melodramatic narratives can be associated with the legacy of 'Yeşilçam' cinema which is inherited by Turkish TV series to a great extent.

## 2.2 Yeşilçam's Legacy

As discussed elsewhere in detail,<sup>24</sup> there is a great connection between contemporary Turkish TV series and the Yeşilçam period of Turkish cinema. The period between the early 1950s and the late 1980s is described as 'Yeşilçam' in Turkish cinema when a high number of films with 'unique' characteristics were created at a rapid pace. Nezih Erdoğan explains that Yeşilçam films were made by appropriating and sometimes completely plagiarising the style, the themes and the stories of popular Hollywood productions. But when these features are appropriated they are recontextualized as they take on new meanings and are consumed in different contexts.<sup>25</sup>

Genres of Yeşilçam films varied, but melodrama was the dominant genre that shaped the experience and pleasure of the audiences. Yeşilçam constantly reworked the same type of characters, stories, settings, costumes and actors which are embedded in the visual and emotional memory of Turkish audiences. In terms of style, apart from being melodramatic in tone<sup>26</sup> and heavily relying on dialogue to describe the emotions of the characters,<sup>27</sup> Yeşilçam built its legacy on the revival of old traditions such as miniatures and shadow plays instead of Hollywood's realistic approach to film.<sup>28</sup> For instance, similar to the Ottoman miniatures, "Yeşilçam prefers frontality and avoids point of view shots."<sup>29</sup> The usage of overacting, exaggerated facial expressions, long glances and excessive bodily gestures are also mentioned among the stylistic characteristic of Yeşilçam.<sup>30</sup> Turkish TV series are formed under the influence of the already established familiarity of the audiences with the codes of these films. For that reason, Yeşilçam can be approached as an aesthetic legacy that waits to be appropriated by Turkish TV series.

## 2.3 Melodramatic Storytelling

The dominant melodramatic tone in Turkish TV series can be associated with the industry's kinship with Yeşilçam's legacy. In terms of genre, Turkish TV series are frequently described as Turkish soap operas because of this affinity with melodramatic storytelling. However, Arzu Öztürkmen believes that despite being called Turkish soaps, Turkish telenovelas or Turkish dramas in the international television markets, Turkish TV series are different from soaps and telenovelas and can be categorized as 'dizi' which means 'series' in Turkish. In an attempt to establish 'dizi' as a distinctive genre, Öztürkmen states that "*dizis* are shot in natural settings and because dialogues are performed almost in real time, *dizis* are 'naturally slow'. The musical, textual and visual diversity is richer than the soap and telenovela, which also have a slow narrative flow. Structurally speaking, *dizis* offer easily comprehensible narratives in their naturally communicated slowness in a wide variety of settings."<sup>31</sup>

Öztürkmen's remarks indicate that a catalogue of conventional stylistics can be associated with Turkish TV series. This broad perspective also resonates with the viewpoints of the media professionals who underline the powerful influence of melodramatic storytelling on different genres. Media professionals that are quoted by Tüzün Ateşalp state that all television content, even sitcoms, has a melodramatic tone in Turkey.<sup>32</sup> Besides, the cut throat competition in the industry and the hesitance of the television channel executives in making risky investments in unique projects can be other reasons for these shared conventions between the series regardless of their genres. Tüzün Ateşalp explains that due to the increasing economic pressure, television channels frequently decide to go on with the previously tested formulas. This tendency creates a television culture that is based on repetition, copy and imitation.<sup>33</sup>

Based on this background, it can be said that the distinctive style of Turkish TV series is formed under the influence of the rapid pace of the production processes, the long duration of the episodes and the melodramatic storytelling. This style is designed to show the audiences everything under natural lighting. Even in their darkest moments, the characters' emotions are visible and the use of music helps the 'melodramatic elements' to infiltrate in the narration. These stylistic choices mostly make the performance of the actors the main attraction. The reproduction and recycling of the same stories and formulas results in the repetition of the same stylistic decisions regardless of the series' genre. For that reason, in adapting *Forbrydelsen* in the Turkish context, *Cinayet* appropriated the conventions of this widespread television style.

## 3 Style in Nordic Noir

Compared to the conventional stylistics of Turkish TV series, Danish crime series have very different aesthetic features. Jaakko Seppälä argues that 'Nordic noir' can be approached "as a style that can be adapted and appropriated."<sup>34</sup> By considering *The Killing* and *The Bridge* as prototypes of Nordic noir, Seppälä explains that this style is mainly associated with a slow and melancholic pace as well as the exoticism of local elements such as landscape, setting, light and climate. In comparison to glossy popular crime dramas such as *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation*, the use of isolated landscapes, muted lighting, monochrome colours and minimalist acting in Nordic noir makes it challenging for the audiences to understand what the characters think at significant moments. Apart from these, the conventions of popular crime narratives such as using windows or window like surfaces infiltrate the style of the series. For instance, Seppälä focuses on how characters are depicted in cars behind the window as a marker of isolation, estrangement and communication problems. Regional elements such as handknitted sweaters, architecture, design, nature and landscape are other characteristics that form Nordic noir as a style.<sup>35</sup>

## 4 Stylistic Differences in *Forbrydelsen* and *Cinayet*

In discussing the stylistic differences between *Forbrydelsen* and *Cinayet*, depiction of emotions in the Danish original and the Turkish adaptation becomes significant. Stylistic conventions of Turkish TV series are highly influenced by the industry's tendency to tell stories which offer strong emotional experiences. The dominance of melodramatic storytelling in almost every genre is an additional determinant in the formation of these conventional stylistics. By considering the significance of expressing emotions in Turkish TV series, Robin Nelson's 'affective' viewing experience becomes instrumental in selecting sequences from *Cinayet* and *Forbrydelsen* for the comparative textual analysis.

To challenge the conceptualization of television viewing as glancing, Robin Nelson concentrates on 'moments of affect' which make time "to encounter – feel, take in, and reflect upon – the complexity of the sophisticated constructs."<sup>36</sup> Inspired by Nelson's approach, particular 'moments of affect' from *Cinayet* and *Forbrydelsen* are selected for this analysis. These include the farewell party for Sarah / Zehra at the police station, the discovery of the body of Nanna Birk Larsen / Gonca Borova, and the identification of her body in the morgue by her parents. The analysis mainly focuses on the *mise-en-scene* elements in these sequences such as setting, lighting, costumes, colour and acting.

Starting from the setting, location has a great significance in *Forbrydelsen*. The Danish crime series tends to represent Copenhagen as a gritty, dark, urban setting. Besides, as Gunhild Agger explains, different locations are associated with different emotions, especially in constructing Sarah Lund as a character because landscape is used as a significant tool to express her feelings.<sup>37</sup> The interplay between the local landscape and the climate plays a pivotal role in this process. According to Glen Creeber, the dark and gloomy atmosphere of Nordic Noir series is associated with the representations of eerie landscapes, grey skies, gloomy rural locations and the usage of monochrome colour schemes.<sup>38</sup> This representation contributes to the mystery that constantly keeps the viewers uncertain about the feelings of the characters.

Even though *Cinayet* takes place in Istanbul which could be seen as the Turkish equivalent of Copenhagen it does not appear as a particularly significant location in the series. This trivial approach to Istanbul as a setting makes it challenging to build a similar connection between the emotions of the characters and the landscape as in *Forbrydelsen*. Moreover, the dark and gloomy climate that supports the mysterious atmosphere in the Danish original does not translate well in the Turkish context. Having fewer dark days than Copenhagen, Istanbul's climate constitutes a challenge for conveying the same level of enigma. In the first episode, *Cinayet* shows its characters working outside on a cloudy day in Istanbul in order to remain faithful to the original script. However, the use of natural lighting gives the scene a much brighter look than the Danish original and does not create the same mysterious atmosphere.

Besides, since the emotional reactions of the characters are usually the main attraction in Turkish TV series there is a tendency to illuminate their facial expressions to make these responses visible. Even though using this kind of lighting is an aesthetically proximate style in the Turkish context, it poses as an additional challenge for transferring the mysterious atmosphere of *Forbrydelsen* in which the emotions of the main characters usually remain in the background by means of dark lighting and minimalist acting. The different stylistic approaches in the usage of lighting and colour can be seen in the depiction of the farewell party that takes place in the police station in both versions. In the Danish original, the party is depicted under the influence of a film noir aesthetic which favours the contrast between light and dark areas in the frame. The lighting gives the scene a melancholic and friendly feeling. In return, in the Turkish version, the scene is depicted under high key lighting without any dark areas. Besides, instead of showing the characters being gathered around a table as in the Danish original, they are seen lined up in front of the camera in such a way as to create a sense of frontality.



Video 1. *Cinayet*, Kanal D, 2014. 'The Farewell Party,' timecode: 0:08:53 - 0:12:34.

In terms of colour, the Danish original uses yellows and blues of the Swedish flag together with the reds and whites of the Danish flag to let the conflict between the markers of national specificity sink in. In the Turkish version, it is not possible to ascribe these kinds of symbolic meanings to the colour palette. Different tones of grey, green, brown and white give the office space a formal look, underlining the implicit hierarchy among the characters. Instead of transferring a melancholic and friendly sensation as in the Danish version, Zehra's farewell to her colleagues feels like an ordinary formality by conveying the feeling of forced friendship rather than a comradeship. As seen in this example, the representation of the scene in an aesthetically proximate style changes the emotional experience of the depicted events and the character's emotional state in these situations to a great extent. When *Cinayet* misses the chance of highlighting an intense moment in the main character's life it disrupts the emotional experience that the original script promises to offer. These disruptions prevent the series from creating a complex inner world for Zehra and representing her as a strong female lead.

In a paradoxical manner, departing from the aesthetically proximate style of Turkish TV series and remaining too faithful to the aesthetic codes of *Forbrydelsen* in Zehra's costume design constitute different problems in constructing the main character. In *Forbrydelsen*, Sarah Lund's black and cream jumper is much more than a simple attire since she "wears it all the time, signalling her difference and individuality."<sup>39</sup> In *Cinayet*, Zehra is also seen wearing similar jumpers which contrasts with the conventional depiction of women in Turkish TV series. Reflecting on this issue, Nurgül Yeşilçay, the actor who plays Zehra, says that in Turkish TV series, female characters commonly appear in chic clothes, wearing full makeup even if the story is set in a rural village. In contrast, *Cinayet's* main female character does not care about her looks. As Yeşilçay sees it, Zehra does not have the urge to be feminine, because she struggles to survive in a man's job.<sup>40</sup> Based on Yeşilçay's comments, it could be said that when *Cinayet* makes stylistic decisions that are aesthetically proximate to the Danish original, the series diverges from the conventional stylistics of Turkish TV series. Although this divergence can be considered as an innovative shift in representing a female lead in the Turkish context, remaining too faithful to the Danish original without attempting to localize Zehra's costume stops the character from building an emotional connection with her surroundings.

In contrast with Zehra's creation in the image of Sarah, *Cinayet* follows a different approach in Meryem's costume design. According to Sevilay Çelenk, Meryem's costumes and the decoration of the Borova family house are highly reflective of Turkish culture. Çelenk explains that the Borova residence is surrounded by decorative items that express the family's middle class position. From the curtains to the carpets and the lace cloths on every surface, the

decoration reflects a middle-class aesthetic. Additionally, Çelenk mentions the long cardigans that Meryem wears around the house as another indication of the family's middle class status.<sup>41</sup> The costume design and decor contribute to the locally formed aesthetics together with the familiar markers of class. However, the same kind of familiarity cannot be found in the costume design for Zehra which causes her to remain unconnected to the world of the story.

A similar kind of contradiction in representing the characters in aesthetically proximate and distant manners can be found in the depiction of their emotional responses. On the one hand, *Cinayet* resorts in an aesthetically proximate style in order to localize Pernille's emotional reaction to the police investigation of her daughter's disappearance. Sevilay Çelenk notes that in the Danish version of the series, when Pernille is asked where her husbands was last night she responds with great confidence. However, in the Turkish version viewers are left with the image of a highly anxious mother who does not know how to respond. Çelenk emphasizes that the body language of the mother directly exposes her anxiety. Getting easily nervous could be an indication of Turkish culture as well as of the character's class position.<sup>42</sup>

Later in the series, these kinds of cultural differences regarding the emotional reactions of the characters become much more apparent. In Turkish TV series, big emotions are frequently expressed in an extravagant manner in a prolonged duration which increases the melodramatic tone of the content. If the characters stay silent in certain moments the music helps the narration to sustain the strong emotional connection. The conventional use of overacting mainly manifests in *Cinayet* in the highlighted facial expressions, cry outs and visible bodily gestures in the reactions of Meryem and Tahir. However, these conventional stylistics make localizing Sarah Lund who "remains consistently reserved and uncommunicative throughout"<sup>43</sup> a highly challenging task.

*Cinayet* puts a lot of effort in creating an accurate version of Sarah Lund in the Turkish context as can be seen in the costume design. This puts a lot of responsibility on Nurgül Yeşilçay's shoulders since she is required to keep the essence of Sarah Lund intact and perform Zehra in a culturally familiar manner. Because of the difficulty of this task, Nurgül Yeşilçay's acting is one of the most criticized features of *Cinayet*. There are many reasons for this, including the discourse that surrounds her star persona. Yeşim Kaptan explains that even though the television channel announces that *Cinayet* was cancelled due to low ratings the Turkish press kept blaming Yeşilçay by mentioning "her poor acting, tumultuous and much-reported personal life, and her rebellious, anti-hero character."<sup>44</sup> However, from an aesthetic perspective, it could be claimed that Yeşilçay's performance struggles to balance between preserving the core of the distant and mysterious character of Sarah Lund and being more emotionally expressive and available in the way that local conventional stylistics require her to be.

In the first episode, at the moment when Zehra discovers a hidden path in the woods which leads the search team to Gonca's body in the water, the series intends to keep the original emotional impact of the scene in balance by managing Zehra's reactions and movements. The emotional affect is achieved in *Forbrydelsen* by means of the lingering camera on Sarah's face shown in a medium close up. In the shot, her eyes are locked on children riding their bikes. Although she is simultaneously on the phone with her fiancé she does not seem to pay much attention to what he says. The calm and mysterious 'Curious' theme from the original soundtrack is heard in the background as the camera keeps lingering on Sarah's face. Only after this emotional moment of discovering a potential spot to locate Nana's body Sarah is seen walking towards the woods.

In turn, in the Turkish adaptation, as soon as she sees a group of fishermen walking around Zehra hangs up on her fiancée and runs towards the fishermen. In this way, instead of the camera lingering on the face of the main character as in the Danish original, Zehra is followed by a mobile camera as she is on the move. When she starts to talk to the fishermen the upbeat 'The Killing' theme from the original soundtrack of *Forbrydelsen* plays in the background. The camera focuses on Zehra for a while as she watches the fishermen walk down the road. Later, Yılmaz enters the frame and stands by her. 'The Killing' theme continues to play in the background.



Video 2. *Cinayet*, Kanal D, 2014. 'Discovering the Body,' timecode: 1:12:06 - 1:13:10.

The difference between the depiction of Sarah and Zehra in this scene is mainly related to their movement in the setting. Whereas Sarah's firm, motionless and expressionless posture standing in the woods "makes it difficult for the audience to know what she is thinking"<sup>45</sup> Zehra is first seen in a hurry, moving around, handling the interrogation by herself as if she is acting on an instinct. The use of the upbeat theme from the original soundtrack instead of the downbeat 'Curious' theme also reveals the need to highlight this big emotional moment. In an attempt to preserve the firm, distant character of Sarah, the camera stops for a while on Zehra's emotionless face at the end of the scene as the upbeat music tries to increase emotional tension. However, due to this hesitant approach which cannot decide whether it wants to depict Zehra as a dynamic or detached character, *Cinayet* struggles to capture Zehra's emotional state. The use of the original soundtrack of *Forbrydelsen* without any additional local music may also compound the difficulty of expressing her emotions because the original soundtrack lacks the melodramatic tone that would make the scene more aesthetically proximate.

In comparison to Yeşilçay's performance as Zehra, Goncagül Sunar's and Ahmet Mümtaz Taylan's performances as the victim's parents are described as the most enjoyable parts of the series.<sup>46</sup> Interestingly, both in the Danish original and the Turkish adaptation, the victim's parents are the characters that express big emotions. In the Turkish version, thanks to the over the top performances of the actors, as soon as these characters appear on the screen, the melodramatic tone of the series immediately heightens. Under lighting that particularly brightens the faces of the characters to highlight their emotional expressions, Sunar and Taylan's performance turn into the most appreciated features of *Cinayet*. This aesthetic choice can be considered as one of the most contrasting elements between the Danish and the Turkish series.

A comparison of the scenes in which the victim's body is identified in the morgue exemplifies the contrasting stylistic features of *Forbrydelsen* and *Cinayet*. Whereas in the Danish version, the scene begins with Theis' arrival in the morgue, in the Turkish version Meryem is seen getting off a taxi which keeps the focus on the agonized mother. When the parents reunite in front of the morgue, Meryem's and Tahsin's devastated faces are seen clearly despite the relative darkness in the scene. At this moment, different from the Danish original, Meryem's cry is heard together with 'The Killing' theme. In *Forbrydelsen*, the image of the couple embracing shortly transitions to a shot that shows Nanna's body in the morgue. However, in *Cinayet*, the camera spends much more time outside on the parents' emotions, depicting Meryem's hesitance to go in and Tahsin's emotional support as he holds her hand. This long duration intensifies the melodramatic tone of the scene and together with the melodramatic performances of the actors contributes to constructing the scene in an aesthetically proximate manner.



Video 3. *Cinayet*, Kanal D, 2014. 'Identifying the Body,' timecode: 03:41 - 13.05.

As the comparison of the stylistic elements of *Forbrydelsen* and *Cinayet* shows, the stylistic decisions that are made in adapting the Danish original in the Turkish context produce a complex combination that oscillates between fidelity and aesthetic proximity. On the one hand, *Cinayet*'s use of colour and lighting in an aesthetically proximate manner creates a familiar look, particularly similar to the production team's former police procedural, *Behzat Ç.: Bir Ankara Polisiyesi*. The series maintains this familiarity through the acting of Ahmet Mümtaz Taylan and Goncağül Sunar as well as the costume design of the characters they perform. However, the aesthetically proximate use of lighting and colour does not reflect the enigmatic atmosphere of the mystery in the same way as in the Danish original and the acting which makes the emotions of the characters constantly available contrasts with the minimalist performances of the actors in *Forbrydelsen*. These contrasting elements prevent the Turkish version from conveying the conventional Nordic noir themes such as darkness, isolation and alienation. On the other hand, in order to be faithful to the Danish original, *Cinayet* forms Zehra Kaya in the image of Sarah Lund which becomes highly visible in the costume design. Nurgül Yeşilçay's acting which hovers between expressing and hiding her emotions in an attempt to be both faithful to the Danish original and localize the content creates an ambivalent depiction which makes it difficult to emotionally connect with the main character. The use of the original music prevents the melodrama to repair this lost connection with Zehra. In this sense, *Cinayet* struggles to find a balance between localizing stylistic elements and being faithful to the original narration at the same time.

## 5 Conclusion

The comparative textual analysis shows that aesthetics play a major role in adapting *Forbrydelsen* in the Turkish context. Finding the balance in preserving the essence of the original content and using the culturally bound local stylistics appear as a significant struggle in the case of *Cinayet*. In her study on Turkish audiences' reception of Danish dramas, Yeşim Kaptan discovers that Turkish audiences expect the authenticity and the originality of *Forbrydelsen* to be transferred to the Turkish adaptation. When Turkish audiences do not find the same unique atmosphere in the Turkish version they express their frustration towards *Cinayet* because they feel like the authenticity of the original text is jeopardised.<sup>47</sup> This frustration indicates conflicting findings with Straubhaar's proximity discourse since Turkish audiences who participate in Kaptan's study tend to watch the Danish original rather than its Turkish adaptation.

However, at this point it should be noted that Kaptan describes the audience which she studied as a niche group "who passionately watches and tremendously values the Danish television drama circulating globally."<sup>48</sup> She mentions that

this audience is “extremely familiar with and conscious of aesthetic codes of the global culture industry which elevate them into the position of critics.”<sup>49</sup> Some of them even describe themselves as “enlightened viewers,”<sup>50</sup> separating themselves from the crowd to emphasize that Danish dramas are not for everyone. In this sense, it can be argued that the pleasures of the audiences can vary immensely depending on numerous factors. For that reason, as highlighted by Ib Bondebjerg and Eva Novrup Redvall, even though the cultural proximity thesis makes great sense in some situations it is not sufficient to explain the popularity of certain television programmes in different contexts.<sup>51</sup>

The same argument could be relevant in discussing the limits of ‘aesthetic proximity’ in investigating the distinctive pleasures of Turkish audiences in the context of *Cinayet*. However, as the comparative textual analysis shows, ‘aesthetic proximity’ can be a useful tool for identifying the use of culturally bound stylistic elements which are defined by industry practices and historical contexts in adapting scripted formats. In this way, the concept can provide a new perspective in examining transnational scripted format adaptations and expanding the scope of proximity discourses.

## Notes

- 1 Sevilay Çelenk, “*Cinayet*’i Eve Getirmek: Yabancı TV Dizileri, Uyarlama Çalışmaları ve Kültür” [Bringing the *Murder* Back Home: Foreign TV Series, Adaptation Studies and Culture], *Kültür ve İletişim* [Culture and Communication], Vol. 42 (September 2018 / February 2019): 34-59.
- 2 Tayfun Atay, “Böyle ‘cinayet’ görülmuş değil!” [Never Seen a ‘Murder’ Like This One!], *Radikal Newspaper*, January 9, 2014, <http://www.radikal.com.tr/yazarlar/tayfun-atay/boyle-cinayet-gorulmus-degil-1169939/>
- 3 Joseph Straubhaar, “Beyond Media Imperialism: Asymmetrical Interdependence and Cultural Proximity,” *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 8, no. 1 (1991): 39.
- 4 Joseph Straubhaar, *World Television: From Global to Local* (Los Angeles, CA: Sage, 2007), 199.
- 5 Enric Castelló, “Dramatizing Proximity: Cultural and Social Discourses in Soap Operas from Production to Reception,” *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 13, no. 2 (2010): 209.
- 6 Susanne Eichner, “Lifeworld Relevance and Practical Sense Making: Audience Engagement with Danish Television Drama Series,” in *The Global Audiences of Danish Television Drama*, ed. Pia Majbritt Jensen and Ushma Chauhan Jacobsen (Göteborg: Nordicom, 2020), 108.
- 7 Jolien van Keulen, “Aesthetic Proximity: The Role of Stylistic Programme Elements in Format Localisation,” *VIEW Journal of European Television History and Culture* 5, no. 9 (2016): 7.
- 8 Ibid.: 16.
- 9 Eichner, “Lifeworld relevance and practical sense making,” 108.
- 10 Raymond Williams, *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* (London & New York: Routledge, 2003), 86.
- 11 Mimi White “Flows and other close encounters with television,” in *Planet TV: A Global Television Reader*, ed. L. Parks and S. Kumar (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 94-110.
- 12 Mainstream television channels in Turkey are constituted of free-to-air private and public broadcasters which frequently come top in the daily ratings. At the time of *Cinayet*’s broadcast in January 2014, these channels are STAR TV, TRT 1, KANAL D, ATV, FOX and SHOW TV. Since 2016, a new wave of Turkish TV series is produced for the local and the global streaming platforms such as Blu TV, Puhu TV and Netflix. These series which are formed under various transnational influences introduce a very different style in the Turkish context. Discussing these newly introduced stylistic elements is not in the scope of this article.
- 13 KONDA Medya Raporu: Televizyonla Değişen Algılar, Sosyal Medyanın Yükselişi ve 10 Yıllık Medya Serüvenimiz 2008 – 2018 [KONDA Media Report: Changing Perceptions with Television, Rise of Social Media and a Decade-Long Journey of Media in Turkey 2008-2018], November, 2019, [https://konda.com.tr/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/KONDA\\_MedyaRaporu\\_HT2018.pdf](https://konda.com.tr/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/KONDA_MedyaRaporu_HT2018.pdf)
- 14 Jeremy G. Butler, *Television Style* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 19.
- 15 Arzu Öztürkmen, “Turkish Content: The Historical Rise of the *Dizi* Genre,” *TV/Series* 13, (2018): 7.
- 16 Selin Tüzün Ateşalp, “Nitelikli Televizyon: Medya Profesyonellerinin Perspektifinden Türk Televizyon Dizilerinde Nitelik” [“Quality TV”: Quality in Turkish Television Dramas from the Perspective of Media Professionals], *Galatasaray Üniversitesi İletişim Dergisi* [Galatasaray University Journal of Communication] 25, (2016): 25-26.
- 17 Evrim Yörük, “Televizyonda Nitelik Sorunu Hakkında Bir Tartışma: *Behzat Ç.* Örneği” [A Discussion About the Problem of Quality in Television: The Case of *Behzat Ç.*], *Ankara Üniversitesi SBF Dergisi* [Ankara University SBF Journal] 67, no. 3 (2012): 250.

- 18 For instance, as of 2008, as a part of RTÜK regulations, tobacco products cannot be shown in films, TV series, music videos and advertisements that are broadcast on television. Besides, as of 2011, alcoholic beverages cannot be depicted on television in an encouraging manner. The law also forbids the depiction of violence and obscenity on television. RTÜK regulations cause the censorship of particular scenes in Turkish TV series on mainstream TV channels. Along with tobacco products and alcoholic beverages, gory parts of the story are not shown but blurred on TV. Therefore, 'blurring' could be considered as a part of the 'local' look of the Turkish TV series on mainstream TV channels.
- 19 Dünyanın en renkli ekranı Türkiye'de dizi sektörü [The World's Most Colourful TV Screen Turkish TV Series Industry], August, 2014, <https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/tr/Documents/technology-media-telecommunications/tr-media-tv-report.pdf>
- 20 Tüzün Ateşalp, "Nitelikli Televizyon": 27.
- 21 Yörük, "Televizyonda Nitelik Sorunu Hakkında Bir Tartışma": 250.
- 22 Tüzün Ateşalp, "Nitelikli Televizyon": 27-28.
- 23 Ibid., 23.
- 24 Ayşegül Kesirli Unur, "Yeşilçam Sineması ve Yerli Televizyon Dizileri İlişkisi: *Cesur ve Güzel Örneği*" [The Affinity between Yeşilçam Cinema and Local TV Series: The Case of *Brave and Beautiful*], in *Türkiye Film Araştırmalarında Yeni Yönelimler 14* [New Directions in Turkish Film Studies 14], ed. Deniz Bayrakdar (İstanbul: Bağlam Yayıncılık, 2018), 223-240.
- 25 Nezih Erdoğan, "Powerless Signs: Hybridity and the Logic of Excess of Turkish Trash" in *Mapping the Margins: Identity, Politics, and the Media*, ed. Karen Ross and Deniz Derman (Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, 2003), 169.
- 26 Savaş Arslan, *Melodram* [Melodrama] (İstanbul: Leman Yayınevi, 2005), 61-68.
- 27 Dilek Kaya Mutlu, "Yerli Melodramlar ve Ruhsal Boşalım" [Local Melodramas and Mental Discharge], in *Türk Film Araştırmalarında Yeni Yönelimler 1* [New Directions in Turkish Film Studies 1], ed. Deniz Derman (İstanbul: Bağlam Yayıncılık, 2001), 114.
- 28 Erdoğan, "Powerless Signs," 171.
- 29 Ibid.
- 30 Ibid., 173.
- 31 Öztürkmen, "Turkish Content": 7.
- 32 Tüzün Ateşalp, "Nitelikli Televizyon": 27-28.
- 33 Ibid.: 29.
- 34 Jaakko Seppälä, "The Style of Nordic Noir: Bordertown as a Stylistic Adaptation of the Prototype," in *Nordic Noir, Adaptation, Appropriation*, ed. Linda Badley, Andrew Nestingen and Jaakko Seppälä, (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 257.
- 35 Ibid., 259-267.
- 36 Robin Nelson, "The Emergence of 'Affect' in Contemporary TV Fictions," in *Emotions in Contemporary TV Series*, ed. Alberto N. García (London: Palgrave Macmillan 2016), 40.
- 37 Gunhild Agger, "Nordic Noir - Location, Identity and Emotion," in *Emotions in Contemporary TV Series*, ed. Alberto N. García (London: Palgrave Macmillan 2016), 134-152.
- 38 Glen Creeber, "Killing Us Softly: Investigating the Aesthetics, Philosophy and Influence of Nordic Noir Television," *The Journal of Popular Television* 3, no. 1 (2015): 27.
- 39 Gunhild Agger, "Emotion, Gender and Genre: Investigating *The Killing*," *Northern Lights: Film & Media Studies Yearbook* 9, no. 1 (2011), 120.
- 40 Sinem Vural, "Katil Kim" [Who is the Murderer], *Hürriyet*, January 7, 2014, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/katil-kim-25508834>
- 41 Sevilay Çelenk, "Cinayet'i Eve Getirmek: Yabancı TV Dizileri, Uyarlama Çalışmaları ve Kültür" [Bringing the Murder Back Home: Foreign TV Series, Adaptation Studies and Culture], *Kültür ve İletişim* [Culture and Communication], (September 2018 / February 2019): 47-48.
- 42 Ibid.: 34-59.
- 43 Creeber, "Killing Us Softly": 26.
- 44 Yeşim Kaptan, "A Crime Drama Between Fidelity and Cultural Specificity," in *European Television Crime Drama and Beyond*, ed. Kim Toft Hansen, Steven Peacock and Sue Turnbull (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 199.
- 45 Seppälä, "The Style of Nordic Noir," 262.
- 46 Authors who write under the pseudonym, 'aman laf', 'colde kutup ayisi goren bahtsiz bedevi', 'viransce', 'besyaprakliyonce', 'evsizedi', 'cizgici', 'sonam', 'mutekebbir', 'laertes' and 'alfabetagama ne la' in the hypertext Internet dictionary, *Eksi Sözlük*, particularly expressed their appreciation of Taylan's and Sunar's performances, <https://eksisozluk.com/cinayet--55882?p=7>
- 47 Yeşim Kaptan, "Sensing Authenticity, Seeing Aura: Turkish Audiences' Reception of Danish Drama," in *The Global Audiences of Danish Television Drama*, ed. Pia Majbritt Jensen and Ushma Chauhan Jacobsen (Göteborg: Nordicom, 2020), 102-104.
- 48 Ibid., 92.
- 49 Kaptan, "Sensing Authenticity," 98.
- 50 Ibid., 100.
- 51 Ib Bondebjerg and Eva Novrup Redvall, "Breaking Borders: The International Success of Danish Television Drama," in *European Cinema and Television: Cultural Policy and Everyday Life*, ed. Ib Bondebjerg, Eva Novrup Redvall and Andrew Higson (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan 2015), 219.

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