

THE MAGNIFICENT CENTURY: HISTORICAL FICTION IN TV SERIES

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# THE MAGNIFICENT CENTURY: HISTORICAL FICTION IN TV SERIES

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## ABSTRACT

### THE MAGNIFICENT CENTURY: HISTORICAL FICTION IN TV SERIES

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The aim of this thesis is to analyse the effects of the Magnificent Century TV series, and to show the interpretations of the audience regarding history. The Magnificent Century series is a work of fiction; however, its effects on the audience go beyond the limits of fiction. The series was a big success and at the top of the ratings during its broadcast. However, popularity of the series did not diminish. It was broadcasted over a hundred countries worldwide. On the other hand; the popularity of the show, and its depiction of the historical figures caused a reaction among the local audiences. This thesis will show how the audiences, both local and international, of the series reacted to the events of the past that is shown in the series, and the interpretation of history. Furthermore, it will show how the Magnificent Century series changed the perception of history for some people; and the role of the series in the debate about the relationship between fact and fiction.

## ÖZET

THE MAGNIFICENT CENTURY: HISTORICAL FICTION IN TV SERIES

EZGİ VEYİSOĞLU

TARİH YÜKSEK LİSANS TEZİ, EYLÜL 2019

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Anahtar kelimeler: kurgu, televizyon dizileri, Muhteşem Yüzyıl, tarihsel kurgu

Bu tezin amacı Muhteşem Yüzyıl dizisinin etkilerini analiz etmek ve izleyicinin tarihe ilişkin yorumunu göstermektir. Muhteşem Yüzyıl dizisi kurmaca bir eserdir; ancak, izleyici üzerindeki etkileri kurgu sınırlarının ötesine geçer. Yayınlandığı dönemde dizi büyük bir başarı yakaladı ve reytinglerde birinciydi. Ancak, dizinin popülerliği azalmadı. Dizi, dünya genelinde yüzden fazla ülkede yayınlandı. Bununla birlikte; dizinin popüleritesi ve tarihî figürleri tasvir ediş biçimi yerli izleyiciler arasında bir tepki yarattı. Bu tez; dizinin yerel ve uluslararası izleyicilerinin dizide gösterilen olaylara ve tarihin yorumlanmasına nasıl tepki verdiğini gösterecektir. Dahası, Muhteşem yüzyıl dizisinin tarih algısını nasıl deęiřtirdiđi ve serinin kurgu ile gerek arasındaki tartiřmadaki rolü gösterilecektir.

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

- RTUK: Radyo ve Televizyon Üst Kurulu  
TRT:Türkiye Radyo Televizyon Kurumu  
AKP: Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi  
CHP: Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi  
NATO: North Atlantic Treaty Organization  
TBMM: Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi  
TCCB: Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Cumhurbaşkanlığı

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Literature uses many devices to tell stories and fiction is its main device.<sup>1</sup> However, fiction is not only used for literary works such as poems and novels; historians also use fiction to give a flow to their story. The work of a historian becomes a part of the world of literature in this sense, for they present their research in written narrative form (Curthoys and Docker 2006, 11).

Historians use fiction to complete the lines that occur in the documents and fill in the blanks. They can say that the history and past is not the same and that they draw a picture of a bird. There could really be a picture of a bird, or it can be another picture. They can only make assumptions and analyze it deeply. Historians re-write history by using fiction. History is a struggle of creation which needs creativity in order to make it fluent (Erdem 2019, 74). However, historians cannot know the past. They can only know the history which consists of the texts created about the past (Erdem 2019, 83).

The purpose of the historian is to find and identify the historical documents in order to explain the past. The difference between the history and fiction lies with the fact that historians find their stories while the fiction writers invent theirs (White 1975, 6). The first idea indicates that historians use already shaped stories, whether they are from chroniclers or from archival documents. The second idea that the fiction writers invent their own stories covers the fact that historians also invent stories to shape their own accounts. They use fiction in order to give meaning to the events of the past (Jenkins 1995, 151).

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<sup>1</sup> Fiction here does not mean fiction as a genre which includes the works such as novels and poems. I mean the form that consists of imaginary or fabricated accounts of events.

In order to understand history and its relationship to the fiction, we need to understand what history is. How does the historian use the past to re-write history? What are the criteria for writing history? Natalie Zemon Davis, Professor of History and Anthropology and Professor of Medieval Studies at the University of Toronto, suggests that the historians should keep their minds open when they are examining the documents they find. They need to tell the reader where they found this document, or their evidence, and if they are uncertain about it, they need to state that. She also wants the historians to decide what the evidence means, and what will they use to give an account about it. She believes that the readers should be considered while writing their project. Historians should not falsify events in order to create an impression (Davis 2000, 4).

The criteria mentioned by Davis only focuses on the moral factors in writing of history. There is also the fact that historians represent the past by using historical data. We need to look at the way they shape their work, and how they study the past, in order to understand history. For some, “proper study” of the past is a study for “its own sake”, that the only legitimate study of the past is one which disinterestedly and objectively understand it “on its own terms”, and that proper historians should always attempt to get to the “truth of the past”. Today, it is recognized that there is no such a thing as a past for its own sake, it is just a way of articulating the interests of a bourgeoisie as if it belonged to the past itself. The whole modernist history is seen as a self-referential, problematical expressions of interests, and an ideological and interpretive discourse without any connection to the past itself. We now live in social formations which cannot legitimize our beliefs or actions by ontological, epistemological, or ethical grounds. What historians make of this present situation, that identifies history as just one more expression in a world of postmodern expressions, determines what they think history now is (Jenkins 1997, 1-6).

Keith Jenkins, historiographer, draws a distinction between history and historiography in order to understand what history is. He uses the ideas of Bennett, Ankersmith, and White to get general ideas about historiography. The main problem of historiography is what can be learned and constructed from the historicized records or archives. Historians access these historicized records. These records are the final products of historical processes which include the work of the librarians and archivists: collecting, cataloguing, preserving and such.

By pointing out this process, Jenkins concludes that the history itself is historicized, and the historians access the historicized records in order to interpret history. From this perspective, historiography is an irregular system which regulates the way the past is transformed and maintained by different procedures. The “real past” is not a part of the historiography except theoretically. The status of historical knowledge is based on the historicized versions of it, so that historiography stands in for the past.

After he explains the relationship between history and historiography, Jenkins turns to ideas of White, what he thinks history is. White thinks that the history is a narrative discourse, and its content is as much invented or imagined as found. Because of this imagined characteristic, history cannot be literary factual, or completely found, or true. Thus, all historical accounts are ultimately metaphorical, consequently metahistorical (Jenkins 1995, 19).

A second point is that most historians believe that the narrative form they use to represent the past is its actual content. The traditional historiography believes that the past consists of collections of lived stories, and that the task of the historian is to discover these stories and re-tell them in narrative form; White argues that the people in the past did not actually live stories either individually or collectively. Seeing the past in a story form makes it a part of an imaginary series of narrative structures and gives the past a meaning it never had. We can say that, to see the content of the past as if it were a series of stories is a part of “fiction”. This is a result of confusing the constructed narrative form of the historian with the actual past. The only stories the past has are the interpretations of the historians (Jenkins 1995,20).

A similar point is made by Ankersmith. The statements historians made are carefully selected and distributed. This results in a fabricated “picture of the past”. This picture of the past cannot be checked because it is formed by the historian, and it does not have a picture of its own that can be checked. This self-referencing character of historiography makes it as much invented, or imagined, as found. This means that historiography is a series of ideas historians have for making the past into history (Jenkins 1995,21).

The problems of historiography reveal the characteristics of history. Jenkins takes his ideas from White to show these problems. The first one is ideological: any claims suggesting that history is needed to be considered in a specific way, that it reflects or expresses what the past/historiography really are, are ideological. History is always an history for someone, and

the past cannot be that someone, because the past does not have a self. Thus, any history which considers its discourse as identical to history is ideological, even ideological nonsense (Jenkins 1995,22).

Another problem is that all histories are historicist, White argues. This mentality is the product of the hope that the past can illuminate the present problems and events, or it is the component which the people can redeem themselves by recognizing their mistakes in the past. However, all historians shape their materials, and just like historicists they distort the past in an imaginary way. We look at the past and history in general in terms of our needs and goals which are personal. We try to find some meaning and hope for the future (White 1975, 284). Thus, we can say that history is present-centered and ideological. We change our conception of history according to our ideologies and aspirations. As a result, history becomes interpretive. The historians structure their works according to the ideas they wish to endow regarding the history culture of their social formation (Jenkins 1995,25).

In this thesis, I will focus on the relationship between history and fiction by examining *The Magnificent Century* TV series, and the reaction of the audience to this series. The series created a debate about the historical films and series and about their accuracy. It also caused a lot of questions regarding the fiction and its function in history. Does *The Magnificent Century* series represent the past accurately, is it purely fictional, or is there something historical about it?

In the next chapter, I will try to show the place of the historical movies in the discipline of History. What is different in the movies that they are more effective than the written words? Can we learn about history from the films and TV series? What does the films say about the past?

In the chapter “Television and the Case of Turkey”, I will analyze the interaction between the audience and television. I will make a case about *The Magnificent Century* in order to show the effects of the fiction on the audience, put differently, I will try to show how the TV series are able to change the perception of some people about the events of the past.

In “Depiction of the Characters in The Magnificent Century”, I will start by showing the similarities of *The Magnificent Century* series to the famous British TV show *The Tudors*. I

will also show how their similarities are seen by the Turkish audience. Furthermore, I will examine the storyline of *The Magnificent Century* in order to show the representation of historical characters. How does fiction use these figures to create a new understanding about the events of the past, why did the audience react so much to this series, and why did it become so popular are my main questions.

In the chapter, “Reactions to The Magnificent Century”, I will look at the critics of the series both locally and internationally. I will try to show the success of the series worldwide, and some political consequences of this popularity. In other words, I will show the reaction of the government officials after the broadcast of the series, and their attitude towards *The Magnificent Century* series. I will try to explain why they reacted so much to a work of fiction, legitimizing it more in the eyes of the audience, and the aftereffects of this reaction.

## 2. FILM AND HISTORY

Aristotle argues that the historians relate what has happened, and the poet's function is to relate what may happen. The world of poetry expresses the universal, while the history focuses on the particular (Aristotle 2000, IX). However, in modern times providing an account of the past goes beyond simply telling what has happened. The ancient contrast between poetry and history, and the crossover between them, anticipate the contrasts and crossover between historical film and historical prose (Davis 2000,4). History can use the elements of poetry to interest the readers. In other words, Literature helps history to popularize. There are other genres that popularize history and creates an historical consciousness by transforming historical knowledge; such as historical films, series, magazines and so on (Özcan 2011, 12).

The written word is different from the cinema and television. Cinema and television have a different language from literature. Film takes its power from the visual representations of the concepts; literature tries to affect the thoughts and emotions of the readers by using words (Mandal 2005,37). The images we see in the screen make us believe more easily. In *Screening the Past: History since the Cinema*, Tony Barta questions what makes us so enamored with the screen, and how do images shown on the screen succeed in making us believe in the things we see. He asks: When did seeing become believing? He ties this phenomenon to the positivist belief of the modern era. Cinema recorded the natural world, just as history recorded the accounts of the past (Barta 1998, 2).

In *History on Film, Film on History* Robert A. Rosenstone tries to show how the world of history on screen has an importance as a new historical perspective. Historical films, mini-

series, documentaries, docu-dramas, and other genres have been important in our relationships to the past and the understanding of history in general.

Rosenstone gives examples on the genres mentioned, to show the reaction they caused among the public. In the United States, Oliver Stone's *JFK* was attacked by politicians; in Germany, *The Nasty Girl* was denounced for showing that a town's leaders were complicit with the Nazi regime; in Japan, major distributors refused to carry *The Emperor's Native Army Marches On* after a public controversy arose over its depiction of cannibalism among starving soldiers on Pacific Islands during World War II. There are also some works that have positive contributions. For example, the controversy surrounding *JFK* led to the opening of a Congressional inquiry into the Warren Committee's Report on the assassination of the President. All these examples show that the historical films or series influence our understanding of the past (Rosenstone 2006, 4).

The point Rosenstone makes is that the history that is taught in the classroom is different from the history we see in the historical films. His own experiences within the world of historical films shows that the kind of history he learned was just only one way of approaching the truth about the past. Rosenstone believes that spoken language and images explain the world in a different way; what a film can explain is different from a book. Thus, history presented in the visual world needs to be examined differently. Films create facts by focusing on events or people and select their story accordingly. It can invent facts according to these selections. Rosenstone invites us to see the world these films created to understand our relationship with the past. He says that we live in a world that is shaped by visual media, and instead of labeling historical movies as "entertainment", we need to investigate the practices filmmakers use for bringing history to screen.

The early historical films were mostly focused on love and adventure. This focus on love has become a tradition in most of the historical films and continued to be a part of the story to this day. Films like *Titanic* (1997) and *Gladiator* (2000) can be examples for this tradition. These kinds of films did not question the meaning of past events or tried to understand the events and the behaviors of individuals. They used the past as a setting for their plot. However, according to Rosenstone there are also movies that asks serious questions about the past ((Rosenstone 2006,13).



D. W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* released in 1915. Its depiction of the American Civil War, its view of the South as suffering under the depredations of ex-slaves and carpetbaggers during reconstruction, its exaltation of the Ku Klux Klan as heroes in a racial conflict, and its dreadful stereotypes of African Americans were direct reflections of the major interpretations of the era in which it was produced (Rosenstone 2006, 13). Sergei Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin*, 1925 silent film that uses the mutiny in a battleship as a metaphor to show how the proletariat can overturn oppression and make a revolution (Rosenstone 2006, 14).

Another movie by Eisenstein, *October: Ten Days That Shook the World* honouring the tenth anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution was released in 1928, and was regarded as propaganda by many. However, its interpretation was not so different from the historians of the revolution. The revolution was also an inspiration for Esfir Shub's *The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty*, a compilation film released in 1927 (Rosenstone 2006, 15).

Rosenstone considers Griffith, Eisenstein, and Shub as originators, or the early practitioners of the three types of serious historical films: mainstream drama, including television mini-series and docu-dramas, the opposition or innovative history, and the compilation documentary.

Dramatic feature films are directed by the followers of Griffith, such as *Gandhi* (1982), *The Night of the Shooting Stars* (1983), *Born on the Fourth of July* (1989), *Schindler's List* (1993), *Underground* (1998) and *Frida* (2002), caused debates about history and influenced the audience more than the other types of films (Rosenstone 2006, 15).

Dramatic film focuses on the individuals, showing the historical processes through the eyes of the characters. It does not only aim to create an image of the past but wants to create an emotional reaction about the historical situations. By focusing on the experience of the individual films set themselves apart from the academic history. It is closer to biography, and micro-history, or the popular history than the academic works of a historian. However, dramatic film shares some similarities with the methods of historians. Each story has a beginning, a middle, and an end with a strong moral message. By showing the mistakes or pleasures of the past, filmmakers manage to show what humanity has lost through their work just as the historian does (Rosenstone 2006, 16).

The documentary film differs from dramatic film due to its use of materials that are gathered from museums and archives. It also includes interviews with the participants of the historical events or the experts, professors of history, to shape and give meaning to the past. Documentaries claim that they give direct access to history compared to dramatic films which need to create a scene to film. However, this claim is a nostalgic approach to history.

Audience and their reaction are affected by passing years when they look at the old photos or clips, as oppose to the people shown in the documentaries. When we look at the old photos or clips, we see that time has passed and think about the things that we gained, or how much we lost. The people in those photos did not think that the life they were living, or the tools they used were old- fashioned. Thus, we can say that documentaries do not bring a direct experience of history, but a sense of nostalgia (Rosenstone 2006, 17).

The opposition or innovative films propose new ideas about the events of the past, they try to make the history more complex, interrogative, and self-conscious, a matter of tough, even unanswerable questions rather than of slick stories (Rosenstone 2006, 18). Works by Godmilow, Trinh, and Syberberg fit into post-modern history with their different point of views about the past. They problematize the stories they tell and use different modes, such as parody and humor, to represent the past. They also remember to see the present moment as the center of the representations of the past.<sup>2</sup> Rosenstone believes that we need to look at the finished products of the filmmakers rather than their intentions to understand the historical thinking we see on the screen.

Historians began to be interested in film after 1960s. A conference named “Film and the Historian” hosted by University College London in 1968 was the first event about the relationship between history and film. It continued with similar gatherings at the universities in Utrecht and Gottingen, at Bielefeld's Centre for Interdisciplinary Research, and at the Imperial War Museum in London. These firsts did not focus on fictional films; however, they were the foundation of the International Association for Audiovisual Media and History, which since 1981 has published the *Historical Journal of Film, Radio, and Television*. The books dealing with the questions asked in these conferences were published starting with

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<sup>2</sup> Hans Jurgen Syberberg's *Hitler, a Film from Germany* (1977). Jill Godmilov's *In Far From Poland* (1984), Trinh T. Min-ha's *Surname Viet Given Name Nam* (1989). (Rosenstone 2006, 21)

“The Historian and Film” in 1976. It focused on movies that can be used in the classroom, and how to evaluate films as historical evidence (Rosenstone 2006,21).

Another book published in 1979 “History and the Audio-Visual Media”, divided its essays into three categories: Didactic Problems, Film and TV Materials as Source Material for Historians, and Content Analysis and Mass Communication. An article by D.J. Wenden, analyzing Eisenstein’s *Battleship Potemkin*, in the “Feature Films as History” published in 1981 was the first example of showing that films has a different way of representing the past events, that it is different from the history we know.

Marc Ferro, a French historian, argues in his book *Cinema et histoire* that the filmmakers use ideologies, nationalist or leftist, in their representations of the past; so that it makes their works a part of a vision determined by others. On the other hand; Pierre Sorlin, professor of sociology in University of Paris, suggests in *The Film in History* that historical films are fictional, even the ones based on historical evidence, and they should be analyzed according to the understanding of the past in the time they were made. In other words, historical movies represent their own time rather than the past (Rosenstone 2006,22).

According to Rosenstone, historians, including himself, is critical of historical films because of their training and practices as academics. They criticize the events they see in the movies like they criticize a book. However, a historical film constructs the past by using images and sounds, it goes beyond the literal and realistic expectations of the written word and becomes more poetic and metaphoric (Rosenstone 2006,35). Thus, the same criteria used for written words cannot be applied to the historical films:

“Dramatic films are not and will never be 'accurate' in the same way as books (claim to be), no matter how many academic consultants work on a project, and no matter how seriously their advice is taken. Like written histories, films are not mirrors that show some vanished reality, but constructions, works whose rules of engagement with the traces of the past are necessarily different from those of written history. How could they be the same (and who would want them to be?), since it is precisely the task of film to add movement, colour, sound, and drama to the past?” (Rosenstone 2006,37)

Historical film creates a fictional reality that asks questions about the past using metaphors. It is different from the written histories. However, if we manage to “read” it correctly, we can understand the message the filmmakers want to convey, whether it is meaningful or not.

The movie has a beginning, a middle, and an end just as the written history. It focuses on individuals in the past, showing their struggles or deeds whether they are heroic or not. The past we see in the movies is a completed, and closed past. While some movies hint at alternative stories, they mostly do not offer any alternative possibilities at the end. Their aim is to personalize and dramatize the past using sounds, images, close-ups of the scene, and so on. They create a sense of experience putting the audience in the middle of the events. The costumes, and the tools used in the movies enhances this experience showing us a glimpse of the past. Furthermore, the history is shown as a process. The movies bring together, the economics, politics, class, the things that are set apart by written history, in the lives of the individuals. They reflect the life with its intermingling relationships.

All these things shape the history the movies want to show, creating their own language, a film historical language in which past is shown differently from the discourse of history as we know it (Rosenstone 2006, 48). It attempts to make us learn about the past by living through the story we see on the screen, adding new elements to discourse of history. The directors create works that vision, contest, and revision history to make the past meaningful. They put individuals in situations that can be dramatized and identified by the audience. Then, they interpret and challenge the accepted values about the past, and show the history in a new light, leaving the traditional expectations behind to make the audience rethink what they already know (Rosenstone 2006, 119).

In *The Film in History: Restaging the Past*, Pierre Sorlin provides guidelines for identifying, describing, and evaluating the historical films (Landy 2001, 13). Films and television are considered “audiovisual material”, material that reaches the senses and establishes communication through a combination of moving pictures and sounds (Sorlin 1980, 3). Sorlin believes that historians need to be interested in audiovisual material, if they want to attract the public. However, while studying the movies historians should consider the differences between the written text and the movies. Sorlin, just like Rosenstone emphasizes

that the film has a language of its own in which picture, movement, and sound plays an important role (Sorlin 1980, 5).

The interaction between history and visual media is a complex one. We need to understand the historians work before analyzing this relationship. History is an attempt to clarify what is false and what is likely to have happened. It shows the relationship between the events of the past and creates a chronology in order to define the characteristics of a period. On the other hand, history is the society's memory of its own past, and that it is identified by the situations society finds itself.

The work of historian is conditioned by the events of the periods in which they are interested. Sorlin states that most societies define their own past, and each group within society uses history for understanding the present. They look at the past to determine the conflicts between the different groups, or the purpose of these groups. If their research goes beyond the scientific problematics and tries to understand how society deals and interprets its own situation, the work of a historian becomes a part of its object sounds (Sorlin 1980, 18).

This is what history and historical film have in common. The films, just as the historians, and their critics play a role in reshaping the representations of history (Landy 2001, 5). Historians reconstruct the past in written words, while the films do it in images. Audience and filmmakers are aware that something real exist, something that happened and considered history. Films take their materials from this system of knowledge in order to be recognized as historical films. They are the reflections of the social and political concern of the period of their production (Rosenstone 2001, 51). If the period shown in the films is a part of the heritage of the audience, it is placed in the past, a past considered historical. Thus, while looking at a historical film we need to consider the audience it is intended for (Sorlin 1980, 20).

Films do not show the reality but gives a distorted image of society. They restrict and limit the social conflicts, transferring them to the individual. Historical films insist on history as the history of the individual, and offers us a simple, closed, and completed past (Rosenstone 2001, 57). They concentrate on a defined period with its beginning and its end. They put the individuals in the center of the events and seize upon some sort of climax in order to make the story more exiting. Once the history and personal fate joins, like the death of the hero or

reunion of two characters, the plot ends (Sorlin 1980, 209). However, films can never show exactly what happened. Their recounting cannot be literal. What happens on the screen can never be more than an approximation of what was said and done in the past. The film uses inventions and images to point out, summarize or symbolize, the events of the past rather than depicting it (Rosenstone 2001, 62).

## 2.1. Television and the Case of Turkey

Erol Mutlu in his book *Televizyonu Anlamak* (Understanding Television) points out that there is a mental connection between the television and the audience. This aspect requires the redefinition of the status of the audience regarding their connection with TV (Mutlu 2008, 18). Television is criticized- negatively or positively- by its viewers; and negative criticisms do not evaluate the television technology, but the socio-cultural and economical aspects of the television (Mutlu 2008, 21).

In other words, audiences criticize the programs that are made for their entertainment depending on their social and cultural expectations. The audience is a part of the process that determines the characterization of the television genres. Individual aspects are put aside, and the artists identify with the audience. This is the formulation process of the collective values and ideals, and investors who supports the production financially are a part of this formulation process (Mutlu 2008, 40-41).

The relationship between the audience and the television characters is a para-social interaction.<sup>3</sup> The audience sees these people as a member of their families and empathy overrides the identity (Mutlu 2008, 49). The people in Turkey tends to have this interaction with the characters of the films or TV series they watched. They confuse the fiction with the real. People call the actor and actresses by the name of the characters they play in the screen,

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<sup>3</sup> A term coined by Horton and Wohl in 1956 to refer to a kind of psychological relationship experienced by members of an audience in their mediated encounters with certain performers in the mass media, particularly on television. Regular viewers come to feel that they know familiar television personalities almost as friends. Parasocial relationships psychologically resemble those of face-to-face interaction but they are of course mediated and one-sided (Oxford Reference 2019).

some even attack the people reflected as bad characters in the series. Some of them are aware that what they see is fiction. On the other hand, they also believe that it was studied and constructed carefully by the writers, so that it must be true (Erdem 2019, 160).

The reason of these kind of behaviors is the domesticity of the television. In cinema and theatre; there are rituals and rules to follow. To watch a movie or play, we are required to buy tickets. We need to be silent during the shows and be considerate. Theatres intensify the experience of isolation using darkness or dim lights. Television is exempt from these rules and rituals. People do not need to go to another place to watch a drama. Television brings the drama to their homes. In other words; it internalizes the experience of watching a drama, separating it from the social rituals (Mutlu 2008, 72-73). Television is in the center of the living space of the audience. The characters seen in the television screen becomes a part of the family, and makes the audience participate in their experiences in that fictional world (Mutlu 2008, 50).

The connection between the real world and the fictional work is debated for centuries. There is a direct connection between the perception of social reality and the acquisition of knowledge about the real world that people get from the television. Television brings new aspects to the meaning of drama. It also re-defines our relationship with history.

In the following sections, I will show the connection between the real world and the fictional world using *The Magnificent Century* TV series as an example.

The first issue regarding *The Magnificent Century* TV series is historical accuracy. Are the events of the past shown in the series are real or imagined? Can we trust the depictions of the palace life? Was the life in harem represented accurately? Most importantly, Is Sultan Suleyman portrayed properly? Answers to these questions reveal another conflict: critics of the conservatives versus seculars. The scenes that show Sultan Suleyman in the harem caused an endless debate about the Ottoman Sultans and how they were in real life; or how the people thought them to be. Although the representation of Sultan Suleyman caused a lot of criticism from people who consider themselves as conservatives; there were also criticisms from people who are seculars. The debate about the portrayal of the characters in *The Magnificent Century* inevitably resulted in a conflict of opposing ideologies.

Another conflict is about the gender roles; or about the relationship of man and woman in the series as a reflection of the real life. The relationship dynamic between Sultan Suleyman and Hurrem is one of the topics that resurfaced after *The Magnificent Century*. The romance between the two characters were interpreted differently by males and females. Did Hurrem control Sultan Suleyman, taking advantage of his love? Was she behind the death of Mustafa as it is shown in the series? All these questions carry an undercurrent theme: power. Who has the power in a relationship? The audience is in consensus that Hurrem controls Suleyman in their relationship. However, she takes her power from Suleyman. Thus, we can say that the series idealizes man rather than woman (Yücel 2014, 24).

Sultan Suleyman's relationship with Hurrem is the main focus of the series, but not the only one. The life in harem, the debate about Pargali Ibrahim; whether he was married to Sultan Suleyman's sister or not, and the reason behind his death. The death of the princes: Mustafa, Cihangir, and Beyazıt are some of the issues debated after the broadcast of the series. Especially, the death of Shahzade Mustafa caused a lot of reactions from the audience; whether the peak of the dynasty would be reached if he took the throne was one of the topics discussed based upon the events in the series.

The main issue while watching the series is the interpretation of history by the audience not the accuracy of the events. *The Magnificent Century* carries a potential to reflect the modern daily life in an historical context. While many people criticized the historical accuracy of the series, the critics were mostly a reflection of the present issues. During her interview with a magazine Meryem Uzerli, the actress who plays Hurrem in the series, said that modern woman could learn a lot of things from the character of Hurrem, if woman have those kinds of strategies and skills, they can get whatever they want (Fowler 2011). Furthermore, we should not forget that this is a "product" created by the values of today, even if it is about history. For instance, the struggles of the modern woman come into existence in the series through the characterization of Hurrem. Her story resembles the businesswoman of the modern world who tries to rise in power against all opponents (Atay 2013).

The comments shows that the series fictionalized the struggles of women in an historical context. The fist episodes of the series are the proof of this: Hurrem takes Suleyman away from Mahidevran who is the consort of Sultan Suleyman. Mahidevran falls ill after learning



that Suleyman favors Hurrem. In a scene where the healer in the palace checks on Mahidevran, Valide Sultan asks if her “daughter-in-law” is okay.<sup>4</sup> In a setting where all the concubines of the sultan are slaves, including Mahidevran, the storyline seems to be arranged according to modern family units. Furthermore, Hurrem is shown as the other woman who seduces the sultan away from his “wife”, and her struggles includes her conflicts with the mother of Suleyman, and his sister.

I believe that the reason behind the modernization of the historical events was to make the audience identify with the characters, and to raise the interest for the show. Meral Okay, the scenarist of the series, commented on the fact that to ensure the continuity of the storyline she wrote the text accordingly. She said that she wanted an energetic, and rhythmic language; so that she used modern terms (Okay 2011). However, making a sovereign talk like a regular person lessens the effect of the show regarding the image of Sultan Suleyman. In the series, Suleyman sometimes speaks like a ruffian when he compliments Hurrem.<sup>5</sup> When he talks with Ibrahim about their future plans, he uses words like “so you say”.<sup>6</sup>

While discussing the series we cannot forget the fact that the series were produced for television sector which has economical concerns. The more a product is watched, the more profit it makes. In this respect *The Magnificent Century* was always at the top of the ratings and gained a lot of popularity. It also paved the way for the programs that are about the historical period and the characters shown in the series. Historical events of the reign of Suleyman was discussed in parallel with the show (Aydos 2013, 5). According to some critiques main concern of the series was to promote the products shown in the series.<sup>7</sup> Showing a figure who takes the world by storm in a popular way and creating cracks in his

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<sup>4</sup> The Magnificent Century, season 1, episode 3, “3. Bölüm”. Directed by Yağmur and Durul Taylan. Written by Meral Okay. Aired 19 January 2011, on Show TV.

<sup>5</sup> “I will cover you in honey and hazelnuts and devour you.” (Erdem 2019, 160).

<sup>6</sup> He says “diyosun yani” which I found a little funny coming from the mouth of a sovereign, and not that problematic when it is translated to English. The Magnificent Century. “Episode 2”. Directed by Yağmur and Durul Taylan. Written by Meral Okay. Aired 12 January 2011 on Show TV.

<sup>7</sup> İlber Ortaylı criticized the series saying that they had no concerns about history. They wanted to show the costumes and the jewelry instead of the historical events (T24 2012).

persona is a way to increase the income of the series. Magnificent century succeeds in this respect (Kural 2011).

The series did not only profit the producers but also the economy. Popularity of the series also invigorated the economy of the Ottoman themed products, including the book sales. The sale of the books about Hurrem Sultan rose thre-fold after the series. Furthermore, anything that Hurrem uses in the show has become a saleable product: her costumes, jewelry, accessories, perfume, and even her hair color. Hurrem Sultan colognes inspired by Sultan Suleyman's verses " my orange, pomagranate, citrus.." were offered to the market parallel to the broadcast of the series. Manufacturer of the cologne commented after the rise in the sales saying that there is no such thing as bad advertising, and the series contributes to the sale of the product in a positive way (NTV 2011). Another successful product is the hair dye inspired by her hair color: Hurrem's Caramel. Just in 8 months, it sold over one million (Haberturk 2011). Hurrem's ring broke the sales record by selling over one million (Cumhuriyet 2011).<sup>8</sup> The products used by Hurrem even changed the storyline. The jewelry sponsor of The Magnificent Century is changed after the 16<sup>th</sup> episode from Boybeyi to Altınbaş. This change in the sponsors resulted in an added story to the scenario. The producer of the series was engaged in a lawsuit with Boyboyi Jewelry after using their ring without showing their logo. In the 19<sup>th</sup> episode Hurrem lost the ring and Mahidevran found it. This was because of the sponsor change (NTV 2011b).

It is evident that The Magnificent Century enhanced the interest in history. However, it also changed the perception of history by some people. While the series is not the only production that is about the Ottomans, it is the most popular one. The popularity of the show does not end with the sale of the Ottoman related products. The number of visitors to the Topkapı Palace, the mosque and tomb of the Sultan Suleyman increased thanks to the series (Habertuk 2014). Mustafa Demir who was the Mayor of Fatih municipality commented that the Magnificent century series was a syndrome all over the country:

"There is an official history, and then there is an un-official one, if we lay aside the accuracy of the events Magnificent Century series raised the interests of

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<sup>8</sup> The emerald ring of Hurrem which was a gift from Sultan Suleyman is used as a symbol of Hurrem's power and was one of reasons between the conflict between Hurrem and Mahidevran.

people about Fatih. People ask about Hurrem when they visit the tomb of Sultan Suleyman. However, they do not realize she lies next to him.” (Ajanshaber 2018).

It is not just the tomb of Sultan Suleyman that is visited by many people after the broadcast of *The Magnificent Century*. After the episode of Mustafa’s death, thousands of people visited the tomb of Shahzade Mustafa which is in the Muradiye complex in Bursa.<sup>9</sup>(See Figure 2.1) The mayor of the metropolitan Bursa also commented on the fact that people did not know that the Shahzade Mustafa’s tomb was in Muradiye complex (Cumhuriyet 2014a). At the time the complex was under restoration and closed to visitations. People started to visit the complex due to the influence of *The Magnificent Century* series. Architects responsible for the restoration commented that two thousand people visited the tomb of Shahzade Mustafa the day after the broadcast of the episode of his death (Cumhuriyet 2014b).

**Figure 2.1.** The tomb of Shahzade Mustafa in Muradiye complex



The number of people that visited the tomb of Shahzade Mustafa shows the popularity of the character in *The Magnificent Century* series. Furthermore, reactions to the execution of Mustafa and the role of Sultan Suleyman in his death caused a lot of criticism in the social

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<sup>9</sup> Located in Bursa, Muradiye complex hosts the tombs of the Ottoman sultans and the other members of the dynasty. It was built by the order of Murad II and includes a madrasah, a mosque, a Turkish bath, a hospital, and the tombs of the dynasty members including the tomb of Murad II. The complex features 12 tombs that are added to the complex during the reigns of Mehmed II, Bayezid II and Suleiman I, as well as the graves of 40 members of the dynasty. (Daily Sabah 8 Jun. 2018.)

media. They accused Sultan Suleyman for being cruel, and not fit for the title Kanuni, meaning lawful. Mustafa on the other hand, is accepted as a martyr who faced his death bravely. In twitter #SehzadeMustafavefa hashtags were used to express the emotional turmoil the episode caused. Comments mostly focused on Sultan Suleyman's role as a father, and his cruelty toward his son. Questions such as "how could a father kill his own son? How could he sleep after watching his death? Is crying over his dead body enough? Does he deserve to mourn him?" were asked (Cumhuriyet 2014a).

It is not just on social media that Sultan Suleyman is accused of murdering his son. After the episode of Mustafa's death, H. K z, a resident of Bursa filed a criminal complaint at the chief public prosecutor's office against Sultan Suleyman, Hurrem Sultan, Rustem Pasha and the other suspects whom he wanted to be detected. He wanted them to be tried in a court for leading the public to hatred and grudge, and enthusing strangulation. K z requested the punishment of the suspects saying that Sultan Suleyman who was the tenth sovereign of the Ottoman reign executed his son Mustafa in 1553. He required the public reports of the event, the hearing of the witnesses from the Ottoman family, and an autopsy if it is necessary. K z stated in his petition that it was obvious Suleyman Osmanoglu committed strangulation with his own hand writing, and he should be punished for instigating murder. K z also added that the murderers of the Shahzade should be found and penalized. (Cumhuriyet 2014). One month later, the same person filed a petition against the broadcast of the series. He visited the tomb of Shahzade Mustafa and made a statement to the press there. He stated that a restoration of honor should be given to Shahzade Mustafa; He wanted Hurrem Sultan's descendants to apologize. He also required the disentanglement of Sultan Suleyman:

"I do not want a murderer who killed his own son to be remembered as a sovereign. Head of the states should be humanists. A person who killed his own child could kill his nation without blinking an eye."

K z also stated that Sultan Suleyman also killed Mehmed son of Shahzade Mustafa:

"I do not want to see this scene in the series, so that I filed a complaint to stop the broadcast of the series. I will show Dr. İlber Ortaylı and Murat Bardakçı as witnesses. I will also acquire the records of Iranian government and give them as proof. A crime against the humanity will never be prescribed. I will visit the tomb of Shahzade Mustafa every day until the case is over."

He added that the history books should be rewritten since they show the “official” history wrongly and deficiently. He wanted the records of the state archive to be made public, saying that they should be analyzed by the historians and released to public (Cumhuriyet 2014c).

The reaction of the viewer shows that; while the scenarist and the producers of the series asserted that it was a work of fiction, the line between the fact and imagination blurs when it comes to the representations of historical figures. Television and its place in the life of Turkish people plays an important part in this debate. We can see this when we look at the reaction of people after the death of Shahzade Mustafa in *The Magnificent Century* series. The statements of Kız show that he believed what he saw in the television. He even creates an imaginary identity for Suleyman, giving him the surname Osmanoglu.

That is why, I believe that *The Magnificent Century* changed the perception of the people about the historical events and figures. Kız obviously blames the character he sees in the series. This Suleyman writes execution orders, his crime can be determined from the archival documents, the people who strangled Mustafa can be found and punished, there are still witnesses around for an act committed in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The claims of Kız shows that some people really believe that the characters they see on the screen are part of our world, or else we are the characters of a fictional world.

One can only wonder if it was the purpose of the producers; throw the audience a curve about the reign of Sultan Suleyman with the plot of *The Magnificent Century*. Meral Okay, scenarist of the series, shows us a work that carries the essence of the present world with women in the middle. This world is full of machinations, fantasies, and games for power. Okay tries to include Sultan Suleyman in this world and that is why this series is considered as a “backhand” of Okay (Atay 2015).

In the next chapter, I will show the main source of inspiration for *The Magnificent Century* series and Meral Okay’s portrayal of the characters in the series.

### 3. DEPICTION OF THE CHARACTERS IN THE MAGNIFICENT CENTURY

One of the criticisms that is directed towards *The Magnificent Century* was its similarity to *The Tudors* TV series. When we look at the characters and the plot, especially in the first episodes, the critiques seem to be right. I will look at the similarities between the series in order to show the influence of *The Tudors* TV series on *The Magnificent Century*.

*The Tudors* TV series, created and written by Michael Hirst, was filmed in Ireland for the Showtime television cable channel in the United States (Parrill and Robison 2013, 248). The series was broadcasted from 2007 to 2010, and it has been quite popular since its first episode. The series tells the story of Henry VIII and his reign focusing on his relationship with women, particularly Anne Boleyn. *The Tudors* series has 38 episodes and consists of 4 seasons. First two season of the series focuses on Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn, how he decided to divorce his first wife Catherine, and the love triangle between Henry-Anne- Catherine. Henry breaks with Roman Catholic Church anachronistically led by Pope Paul III, and the foundation of the “Church of England” starts (Robison 2016, 5).

The infamous love story of Henry and Anne ends after she is accused of conspiracy against the king, incest and adultery. Henry uses these claims to get rid of Anne because she has given birth to a girl, instead of a son. These accusations result in her execution by beheading.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> *The Tudors*, season 2, episode 10, “Destiny and Fortune”. Directed by Jon Amiel. Written by Michael Hirst. Aired 1 June 2008, on Showtime.

In the last two seasons, we see the other wives of Henry. In the season three, Jane Seymour marries Henry and gives birth to the long-awaited heir.<sup>11</sup> This season is the shortest season, for Henry goes a little mad after Jane dies soon after giving birth (Robison 2016, 6).

Henry's next marriage is to Anne of Cleves. Their marriage is annulled after a short period of marriage, and he marries Catherine Howard, who was also beheaded for adultery.<sup>12</sup> The last wife of Henry is Catherine Parr who outlives him and manages to survive their marriage.

Henry VIII did not only behead his wives but also his councilors. Thomas More, who was a writer and humanist, was a part of the parliament and a councilor to Henry VIII in real life. He was beheaded in the second season of the series after refusing to acknowledge the divorce of Henry VIII and Catherine of Aragorn. Thomas More was accused of treason and executed.<sup>13</sup>

Another councilor who was accused of treason was Thomas Cromwell, who engineered the divorce of Henry VIII and Catherine of Aragorn. He was executed after the failure of Henry VIII's marriage to Anne of Cleves.<sup>14</sup> It is shown in the series that the decisions of Henry VIII were related to his moods. He desired a son so much so that he changed wives accordingly. After his son is born, we see that his focus changed for a companion that can stay loyal to him.

*The Tudors* series shows the character of Henry VIII as cruel and abusive when we look at his relationship with his wives and advisors, making his character worse than the real king. He is not a romantic, or a Renaissance man, nor he is a warrior. Henry VIII is shown as a shallow playboy in *The Tudors* series (Robison 2016, 50).

While Henry VIII struggles to find a woman, who can bear him a son and stay loyal to him, Sultan Suleyman finds that woman in Hurrem. However, Hurrem and Suleyman's love

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<sup>11</sup> The Tudors, season 3, episode 4, "The Death of a Queen". Directed by Ciaran Donnelly. Written by Michael Hirst. Aired 26 April 2009, on Showtime.

<sup>12</sup> The Tudors, season 4, episode 5, "Bottom of the Pot". Directed by Ciaran Donnelly. Written by Michael Hirst. Aired 10 May 2010, on Showtime.

<sup>13</sup> The Tudors, season 2, episode 5, "His Majesty's Pleasure". Directed by Ciaran Donnelly. Written by Michael Hirst. Aired 27 April 2008, on Showtime.

<sup>14</sup> The Tudors, season 3, episode 8, "The Undoing of Cromwell". Directed by Jeremy Podeswa. Written by Michael Hirst. Aired 24 May 2009, on Showtime.

remind the audience the relationship between Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn, for both women manage to control the sovereign. On the other hand, for Anne failing to produce a son results in her untimely death, while Hurrem gives Sultan Suleyman four sons.

When we look at the *The Tudors* TV series, there are ahistorical characters such as Charles Brandon who is the best friend of Henry, and Henry's sister Margaret who marries Charles. Even if there are inaccuracies, the plot lines are often dramatic and engaging, the actors are generally good, the production level is high, and the series does certain things well, for example, its depiction of court pageantry and sport (Robison 2016,3).

The similarities between *The Magnificent Century* and *The Tudors* were pointed out after the first trailer of *The Magnificent Century*. The series even was named "Turkish Tudors", and it was claimed that the series was a copy of the *The Tudors* series (Ardıç 2011). The credits of the series and the posters of advertisement are similar in their tone and structure (see Figure 3.1), thus it was mentioned that *The Magnificent Century* was a Turkish version of *The Tudors*, and that *The Tudors* series has more quality than its Turkish equivalents (Erdem 2019, 160).

**Figure 3.1.** The Magnificent Century and The Tudors



It is obvious that there really are some similarities between the two series when we look at the characters and the plot of the first season of *The Magnificent Century*. Meral Okay, the scenarist of the series, seem to be influenced by *The Tudors*. Henry VIII was a contemporary of Sultan Suleyman, and his private life, or in other words, his wives give the writers



materials to entertain people. Thus, by writing about the reign of Sultan Suleyman, Okay finds the right period to fictionalize.

While the series show the reign of Henry VIII, it mostly focuses on his relationships and marriages. *The Tudors* TV series shows his love life in an explicit way and the plot revolves around the “simplistic struggles over personal and erotic power” (Bellafante quoted in Defne Ersin Tutan 2019, 581). In January 2011, seven months after *The Tudors* series ended, *The Magnificent Century* series started its broadcast; thus, it is no wonder that the scenarist of the series was influenced by *The Tudors*, for the broadcast of *The Magnificent Century* starts just after the other series ends.

*The Tudors* series fictionalizes the events of Henry VIII reign in a sensual way, while the scenarist of *The Magnificent Century* series, Meral Okay tries to show Sultan Suleyman in such a way, she focuses more on the power aspect of the sovereignty, and what power brings out for the characters. She fictionalizes the characters of Sultan Suleyman’s court to create conflicts that are parallel with the problems we face in our daily life in order to make us identify with their dilemmas:

“As a scenarist who writes for the television industry, 16th century fascinated me with its dramatic events and heroes. The dramatic characters such as Mustafa, Mahidevran, Hürrem and her sons Beyazid, Selim, Cihangir, and Pargali Ibrahim shines like a jewel in that period. Drama is carried into effect when you empathize with their stories, showing them as human beings. It is not preferable to write about the actual history. This is not our job. “Making the history”, pursuing the psychology of the characters in that period, seeing the victories, wars, loses, and loneliness are the part that excite me. There is not enough data about these, so that you start off from its parameter just like every Turk.” (Vatan 6 Feb. 2011, My Translation)

We can assume that Okay wanted to show Sultan Suleyman not just as a sovereign who conquers lands, but as a man who struggles to manage his family and reign at the same time. The turbulent events of the 16<sup>th</sup> century and the love lives of Sultan Suleyman and Henry VIII contain a lot of drama which can be used for a soap opera. Thus, it is my belief that Meral Okay thought about the possibility of a TV series that was as sensational as *The Tudors*; and as a contemporary of Henry VIII, the reign of Sultan Suleyman was a perfect story to tell.

There is also another issue that comes to mind when we consider the similarities between the two series: characters and their relationships. The first similarity is that of the marriage between Henry VIII's sister Margaret and Charles Brandon, one of Henry VIII's best friends; and the marriage of Hatice Sultan, who is the sister of Sultan Suleyman, with Pargali Ibrahim. A friend of the sovereign marries his sister and rises in the ranks. Thus, *The Magnificent Century* series was considered as "local The Tudors" (Milliyet 2011).

It was thought by historians that Pargali Ibrahim was married to Hatice Sultan, the daughter of Yavuz Sultan Selim and the sister of Sultan Suleyman. However, recent studies show that Ibrahim was not married to Hatice Sultan.<sup>15</sup> We cannot be sure if Okay knew this fact or not, thus the development of the love between Ibrahim and Hatice is like the relationship of Margaret and Charles. Henry arranges a marriage for Margaret with the King of Portugal who is on the brink of the grave and entrusts her safety to his friend Charles Branson.<sup>16</sup> During their journey to Margaret's future country, they fall in love. However, Margaret marries the king. She finds a solution to the problem of her marriage and suffocates the king while they are sleeping; thus, she is widowed.<sup>17</sup> Afterwards, Margaret marries Charles despite his low rank. Their love is short lived because Charles cheats on her; and she dies of consumption, tuberculosis, leaving Charles behind with his guilt.<sup>18</sup>

A similar storyline is constructed for the relationship of Pargali Ibrahim and Hatice Sultan. Hatice Sultan is a widower who married young and lost her husband. Her marriage was a marriage of convenience arranged by her father; therefore, she desires to marry for love, if she marries a second time. She falls in love with Ibrahim, her feelings are returned by him.

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<sup>15</sup> İsmail Hakkı Uzunçarşılı, Ottoman historian, corrects his assumption about the marriage of Ibrahim Pasha saying that he was mistaken about the issue, and there was no mention of such a marriage in the accounts of the chroniclers. He also reveals the letters between Ibrahim Pasha and his wife. The letters show that he was not the son-in-law of the sultan but married to a woman named Muhsine Hatun (Uzunçarşılı 1965).

Ebru Turan, Professor of History at Fordham University, takes this argument forward, and analyzes the marriage of Ibrahim Pasha. She mentions that he was married to Muhsine Hatun who was the granddaughter of Iskender Pasha, Ottoman Governor of Bosnia, whose daughter was the first master of Ibrahim Pasha (Turan 2009).

<sup>16</sup> *The Tudors*, season 1, episode 4, "His Majesty, the King". Directed by Steve Shill. Written by Michael Hirst. Aired 22 April 2007, on Showtime.

<sup>17</sup> *The Tudors*, season 1, episode 5, "Arise, My Lord". Directed by Brian Kirk. Written by Michael Hirst. Aired 29 April 2007, on Showtime.

<sup>18</sup> *The Tudors*, season 1, episode 9, "Look to God First". Directed by Ciaran Donnelly. Written by Michael Hirst. Aired 3 June 2007, on Showtime.

However, their love seems to be impossible because of their rank. Sultan Suleyman arranges a marriage for Hatice with the son of grand vizier Piri Mehmet Pasha before he resigns from his office.<sup>19</sup> Pargali Ibrahim becomes the grand vizier after Piri Mehmed Pasha resigns, however, Hatice is marrying someone else.<sup>20</sup> Thus, Ibrahim decides to leave everything behind and asks Sultan Suleyman's permission to turn back to his hometown, Parga. After Sultan Suleyman learns about their relationship he calls Ibrahim back.<sup>21</sup> Sultan gives his consent to their marriage, for he has "respect for love" and he is not such a cruel man to kill Ibrahim for his love.<sup>22</sup> As oppose to Margaret and Charles who marries without Henry's consent; Ibrahim and Hatice marries thanks to Suleyman's consent, and with a big wedding.<sup>23</sup>

So far, the story is like the one in *The Tudors*. While Princess Margaret does not play an important role in the series, Hatice Sultan is one of the main characters in *The Magnificent Century*. The love between Hatice Sultan and Ibrahim Pasha is a big part of the storyline, for their relationship is a foil for Sultan Suleyman and Hurrem. Ibrahim and Hurrem are both slaves of the dynasty. While Hurrem gains power through Suleyman, Ibrahim comes to resent his situation after his marriage to Hatice Sultan. Hurrem loves Sultan Suleyman to the end, and she is loyal to him. On the other hand, the scenarist of *The Magnificent Century* takes the relationship between Margaret and Charles to heart and makes Ibrahim Pasha cheat on Hatice Sultan. This situation occurs while Hatice is suffering from the death of their child, just like Margaret who was wasting away while her husband had his fun.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> The Magnificent Century, season 1, "Episode 9". Directed by Yağmur and Durul Taylan. Written by Meral Okay. Aired 2 March 2011, on Show TV.

<sup>20</sup> The Magnificent Century, season 1, "Episode 11". Directed by Yağmur and Durul Taylan. Written by Meral Okay. Aired 23 March 2011, on Show TV.

<sup>21</sup> The Magnificent Century, season 1, "Episode 13". Directed by Yağmur and Durul Taylan. Written by Meral Okay. Aired 6 April 2011, on Show TV.

<sup>22</sup> The Magnificent Century, season 1, "Episode 14". Directed by Yağmur and Durul Taylan. Written by Meral Okay. Aired 13 April 2011, on Show TV.

<sup>23</sup> The Magnificent Century, season 1, "Episode 17". Directed by Yağmur and Durul Taylan. Written by Meral Okay. Aired 4 May 2011, on Show TV.

<sup>24</sup> I mentioned about Charles' infidelities at the beginning of this chapter. During the scene of Margaret's death Charles was cheating on her. The Tudors, season 1, episode 9, "Look to God First". Directed by Ciaran Donnelly. Written by Michael Hirst. Aired 3 June 2007, on Showtime. As for Ibrahim's situation; he cheats on Hatice with Nigar, when she leaves for a while after the death of their first child. The Magnificent Century, season 2, episode 35, "35. Bölüm". Directed by Yağmur and Durul Taylan. Written by Meral Okay. Aired 9 May 2012, on Star TV.

It is not just Hatice and Ibrahim that have a similar storyline to the characters of *The Tudors*. If we look at the characters; Mahidevran's situation is the same with Catherine of Aragon who is replaced by Anne Boleyn. In the first season of *The Magnificent Century*, Hurrem comes to the palace and becomes a favorite of Sultan Suleyman. Mahidevran Sultan who is the mother of Shahzade Mustafa and Suleyman's consort is replaced by Hurrem; as Anne Boleyn replaces Catherine of Aragon in Henry's favor. In short, we can say that Hurrem's character is like Anne Boleyn, as being the other woman. Hurrem and Anne both tries to gain the favor of the sovereign, so that they do everything to gain attention. The dance scene of Hurrem in *The Magnificent Century*, where she is selected by the sultan, is a replica of the scene of Anne Boleyn's introduction to the king in *The Tudors*.<sup>25</sup>

The scenario of *The Magnificent Century* even has a former love interest for Hurrem just like Anne Boleyn's former lover Thomas Wyatt, the poet. In *The Magnificent Century* Hurrem was engaged to Leo, her childhood sweetheart, before her hometown is attacked, and she is sold to the palace. Leo manages to survive in the attack and comes to Constantinople to find Hurrem.<sup>26</sup> Ibrahim Pasha discovers that Leo is a painter, and he is commissioned to paint a portrait of Sultan Suleyman and Hurrem.<sup>27</sup> After she sees Leo, Hurrem explains her situation and bids Leo farewell, rejecting him.<sup>28</sup> However, Ibrahim Pasha finds out their shared past, and uses it to control Hurrem.<sup>29</sup> Ibrahim Pasha does not reveal their relationship but forces Hurrem to poison Leo, and Leo is happy to die for Hurrem.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> It is with a dance Anne catches the eye of Henry. *The Tudors*, season 1, episode 3, "Wolsey, Wolsey, Wolsey!". Directed by Steve Shill. Written by Michael Hirst. Aired 15 April 2007, on Showtime. The same happens for Hurrem too. Sultan Suleyman picks Hurrem for his bed after he watches her dance. While Okay uses a different setting and a dance, it is obvious to me that she took the idea from *The Tudors* series, for showing this kind of a scene is more alluring and speculative for the audience and manages to draw attention. *The Magnificent Century*, season 1, episode 1 "Episode 1". Directed by Yağmur and Durul Taylan. Written by Meral Okay. Aired 5 January 2011, on Show TV.

<sup>26</sup> *The Magnificent Century*, season 1, episode 15 "15. Bölüm". Directed by Yağmur and Durul Taylan. Written by Meral Okay. Aired 20 April 2011, on Show TV.

<sup>27</sup> *The Magnificent Century*, season 1, episode 16 "16. Bölüm". Directed by Yağmur and Durul Taylan. Written by Meral Okay. Aired 27 April 2011, on Show TV.

<sup>28</sup> *The Magnificent Century*, season 1, episode 18 "18. Bölüm". Directed by Yağmur and Durul Taylan. Written by Meral Okay. Aired 11 May 2011, on Show TV.

<sup>29</sup> *The Magnificent Century*, season 1, episode 23 "23. Bölüm". Directed by Yağmur and Durul Taylan. Written by Meral Okay. Aired 15 June 2011, on Show TV.

<sup>30</sup> *The Magnificent Century*, season 1, episode 24 "24. Bölüm". Directed by Yağmur and Durul Taylan. Written by Meral Okay. Aired 22 June 2011, on Show TV.

The role Ibrahim plays in this situation brings to mind the machinations of Thomas Cromwell, the chief advisor of Henry VIII, about the accusations regarding Anne Boleyn's adultery. Cromwell questions Anne's former lover Wyatt and decides to release him.<sup>31</sup> Instead of Thomas Wyatt, Anne Boleyn dies in *The Tudors*. Ibrahim Pasha's role in the death of Leo, and his control over Hurrem makes him an enemy of her. Their relationship is like that of Anne Boleyn and Thomas Cromwell. Cromwell was the one who laid the foundation for Anne and Henry VIII's marriage by supporting Henry VIII's reforms. However, he is also the one who arranges the evidence for Anne's execution. Ibrahim Pasha too at first supports Hurrem when he sees Sultan Suleyman's interest in her. He is the one who picks her for the sultan's entertainment.<sup>32</sup> On the other hand, Hurrem sees him as a rival for Sultan Suleyman's affection, thus they become enemies.

It is obvious that the scenarist of *The Magnificent Century*, Meral Okay, took the *The Tudors* series as an example, and tried to find a similar situation in Ottoman history. Günhan Börekçi, one of the history advisors for *The Magnificent Century*, and *Magnificent Century: Kösem* series, is a historian whose expertise is in 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century Ottoman political culture, governing elite and palace history. He joined the team of advisors during the second season of *The Magnificent Century* series. He stated that the producers of the series determined the final decision about the episodes. They just supported the scenarists of the series, providing reading materials for them, discussing the characters, historical and fictional events, settings, and so on (Börekçi 2019, 65-66). Börekçi also commented on the fact that it was not possible to find the details in history that are necessary for the show:

“There's a lot we don't know. So, you either need to find that information in an archive, take it from another example, or make a guess. My colleagues rarely realize how difficult it is to create historical “reality” without a substantial pool of documents and secondary literature. That's where the imagination comes in. Meral Okay emphasized this. She read all that she could, but there was plenty of stuff that couldn't be found in what's available to read. Now the show is part of history and others can imitate it” (Börekçi 2012)

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<sup>31</sup> *The Tudors*, season 2, episode 9, “The Act of Treason”. Directed by Jon Amiel. Written by Michael Hirst. Aired 25 May 2008, on Showtime.

<sup>32</sup> As I mentioned Suleyman picks Hurrem after her dance during an entertainment, Ibrahim is the one who picked the girls to entertain the sultan. *The Magnificent Century*, season 1, “1. Bölüm”. Directed by Yağmur and Durul Taylan. Written by Meral Okay. Aired 5 January 2011, on Show TV.

Börekçi admits that because of the lack of documents, the plot of the series can shape the history according to their imagination. This lack of material about the life in the harem, or the fact that the scenarists of the historical TV series has minimum historical knowledge affects the storyline and the accuracy of the events. If they use the popular images to create their work, it lessens their credibility. As a result, we see a lot of anachronisms: Suleyman sits at a table, his private chamberlain Ibrahim wanders in the harem where no men were allowed, and so on (Erdem 2019, 156-158).

The imagination of Meral Okay seem to be influenced by *The Tudors* series because both series has a focus on a specific historical period which is full of dramatic events. Meral Okay's aim was to show historical figures as human beings; thus, she focused on the personal relationships and the dramatic events which occurred in the reign of Suleyman.

The plot of *The Magnificent Century* portrays Sultan Suleyman as a hero; however, it does it in a subjective way. We see the emotions and struggles behind the decisions he made. This makes the audience bond with his character (Carney 2014, 9). In this respect, *The Magnificent Century* is different from *The Tudors*. Henry VIII is portrayed as a sovereign who is impulsive and erratic. He changes his behaviors and believes impulsively; as a result, he changes the people around him. Every change in Henry's behavior brings the death of a wife or an advisor. On the other hand, Meral Okay portrays Sultan Suleyman as a dynamic and just ruler, and a loyal lover. However, he is not always just, nor he is always loyal. We can say that the storyline of *The Magnificent Century* differs from *The Tudors* regarding the portrayal of Sultan Suleyman, yet it also shows similarities because the scenarist wants to show a side of Suleyman that is human, and is apart from his identity as a sultan, as a result his two sides are always in conflict with each other.

One of the points that the critics emphasized about *The Magnificent Century* series was its depiction of Sultan Suleyman. I believe that the trailer of *The Magnificent Century*, and similarities with *The Tudors* series conditioned the audience about the depiction of the characters, and the portrayal of the events of the reign of Suleyman. I pointed out some of the similarities between the two series, and Sultan Suleyman's depiction is not one of them. Producer of the series said that the reason behind the critics were the fact that the Ottoman

Sultans were caliphs, leaders of the Islamic world, and this touched a sensitive spot for people. However, after the first four episodes, the reactions were replaced by a loyal crowd of spectators (Holdsworth 2011).

This shows that the series became a favorite of the audience in a short period; and I do not think that this would be possible if they portrayed Sultan Suleyman as Henry VIII was portrayed in *The Tudors* series. However, this does not mean that the producers did not plan to portray Suleyman as Henry VIII is portrayed. They tried, but the audience reacted to the trailer of the series, which was broadcasted one month before the start of the series, in a huge way and gave them an idea of the possible outcomes.

The production of *The Magnificent Century* came at a time that neo-Ottomanism, the policy of AKP government that promotes Ottoman legacy, was at its peak. It is not surprising that the producers of the series saw an opportunity to make this project popular. However, their attempt was considered a failure by the government who promotes the Ottoman grandeur. The world shown in the series did not match the ideas of the government. Thus, *The Magnificent Century* series was not supported by the government.

I believe that, the producers used the similarities between *The Magnificent Century* and *The Tudors* to attract the attention of both the local and international audiences and tried to show the similarities of the two dynasties using advertisements that is like *The Tudors* TV series. That is why the series was criticized by government officials who emphasized the superiority of the Ottomans over the Europeans, while *The Magnificent Century* series tried to show the similarities between the Ottoman and European palaces.

In the trailer of *The Magnificent Century* series we get a sense of sexual promise that is expected from the East. There was always a distance between the West and the East; and this distance was expressed in "metaphors of depth, secrecy, and sexual promise" (Said 2003,222). *The Magnificent Century* seems to have all the Oriental clichés: a harem, a sultan, and women as slaves. On the other hand, the show itself is different from the trailer. The life in the palace, the restriction of the woman, the struggle for throne is like that of Europe. Meral Okay points out the similarities between the palace of Suleyman and Henry in order to show that the Ottomans were not so different from their contemporaries (Youtube 2011).

When we look at the similarities between the two series there is also the fact that Okay tried to do what the creators of *The Tudors* series did: caring about entertainment more than historical accuracy.<sup>33</sup> Okay tries to show the period of Sultan Suleyman with a focus on fantastic eroticism, and harem machinations. She also tries to show Sultan Suleyman in the middle of this machinations (Atay 2015).

In this sense, *The Magnificent Century* series tries to portray the private life of a sovereign just as *The Tudors* does. All Henry cares in *The Tudors* is sex and power, and he uses politics to achieve his desires (Robison 2016, 28). On the other hand, while Okay tries to portray Sultan Suleyman's private life, she is unable to dare as much as the creators of *The Tudors*, for the intended audience of *The Magnificent Century* is national, while *The Tudors* is filmed for American audiences.<sup>34</sup> Thus, Meral Okay's characterization of the historical figures and her attempt of the portrayal of Sultan Suleyman's private life caused a lot of reaction. This was, in part, because of the similarities between *The Tudors* and *The Magnificent Century* series.

Similarities between *The Tudors* and *The Magnificent Century* does not end with the parallel storylines, the products used for advertisements, or the portrayal of the characters. *The Tudors* is an example of how a popular production about history is evaluated according to the accurate representation of historical facts (Tutan 2017, 582). The depictions of the reign of the Henry VIII did not cause any debates in Turkey about the accuracy of the historical events of the period, as oppose to *The Magnificent Century*. There were no discussions about Henry VIII amorous activities, or the execution of women. One viewer even commented about the accuracy of the costumes in *The Tudors*, while the costumes of *The Magnificent Century* has modern patterns and seams. Accordingly, the costumes seem not to be a part of that period.<sup>35</sup> On the other hand historians of the Tudor dynasty argued that the costumes of

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<sup>33</sup> Michael Hirst, scenarist of the series, commented that the first goal of the series was entertainment rather than historical accuracy. (Parrill and Robison 2013, 249)

<sup>34</sup> I mentioned in the beginning of this chapter that the series was filmed for Showtime which is an American cable. The *Tudors* was released first in U.S.A and Canada in 1 April 2007, while it started in the U.K. in 5 October 2007. The series was filmed for the entertainment for the American audiences, and Henry VIII is not a national historical figure for the Americans (Internet Movie Database)

<sup>35</sup> The series had a lot of criticism, negative or positive, in social media, and "ekşisözlük" is one of the portals that the writers still comment about *The Magnificent Century*. This comment is from there. The jacket Sultan Suleyman wears in



the characters were inaccurate; “they wore costumes from the later Elizabethan era and travelled in Victorian carriages” (Hough, quoted in Tutan 2017, 581). They belong more to the later periods (Erdem 2019, 160). This shows us that “the more distant the audience is from the history in question, or the more independent from it, the milder the objections to the adapted history” (Tutan 2017, 582). *The Tudors* TV series is an entertainment for the Turkish audience. They do not question the accuracy of the series as they did to *The Magnificent Century*. The reaction of the audience differs when it comes to a national historical figure. What then *The Magnificent Century* tells us about history to cause such reactions? If we put aside the critics and examine the *Magnificent Century* series, what does it show us about the reign of Suleyman?

The first episode of *The Magnificent Century* starts with the news of Sultan Selim’s death reaching Suleyman, and his falconer Ibrahim, during a hunt. Suleyman, now Sultan Suleyman, makes haste for the capital to take the throne. At the same time, we see Aleksandra, who is later named Hurrem. Her village is attacked, she is taken captive and brought to the capital just as Suleyman reaches there for his enthronement ceremony. We see Suleyman’s sister Hatice Sultan and his mother Ayşe Hafsa Sultan, now Valide Sultan, when he comes to pay his respects to his mother. We also see his son Shahzade Mustafa and his consort Mahidevran, who is the mother of Mustafa. Thus, the main characters of the series are introduced in the first episode. The plot of the series is created by using the relationships of these characters, and the conflicts between them.

*The Magnificent Century* series uses the “Aşk-i Derun” title as a sub-heading. The term can be translated as “the deepest love” which the series uses for describing the love between Sultan Suleyman and Hurrem. However, when we look at the plot their love story is just a facade. The main purpose of the series is to show the life of the slaves, and their perspective of the events of the past. That is why, first two seasons of the series mostly focuses on the characters of Hurrem and Ibrahim, for they are both slaves and favorites of Sultan Suleyman.

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the first episode is likened to a biker jacket (Knidos 2 Jan. 2011). Not surprisingly, I also noticed his jacket. However, for me, it was its similarity with Henry VIII’s jacket in *The Tudors* series.

### 3.1. Favorites of the Sultan

Alexandra, who is the daughter of an orthodox priest, and Theo, who is the son of a fisherman from Parga, have the same situation in the series. According to the series, they are both taken forcefully from their hometowns and become a slave to the Sultan. Theo, who is named Ibrahim, is gifted to Suleyman in Manisa sanjak. Ibrahim becomes a helpmate to Suleyman, and his position improves swiftly thanks to their friendship. We can say the same for Alexandra, who becomes the lover of Sultan Suleyman and named Hurrem by him. After meeting her, Sultan Suleyman becomes devoted to her. Thus, Hurrem's position also changes just like Ibrahim.

I will examine the characters regarding their relationship with Suleyman. Sultan Suleyman is the only character that is stable in his position and have a say in every character's life. We can say that he represents "the power" which is coveted by the other characters. Ibrahim and Hurrem both change due to their relationship with the sultan. *The Magnificent Century* series tries to show the struggles the characters face from the perspective of slaves.<sup>36</sup>

Ibrahim, who is the falconer of Suleyman at the beginning of the series, shown as a character who has inner conflicts about his identity. He is always in between two worlds: that of a slave, and that of a royal. His close relationship with Suleyman makes him question his place in society. He is obviously a slave; however, Sultan Suleyman shares his power with Ibrahim, so that he becomes confused. The rise of Ibrahim to grand vizierate is an unconventional one. From The first episode on, Sultan Suleyman shares his every plan with Ibrahim and they make plans together. Suleyman even says that he sees Ibrahim as a brother. Thus, his station rises swiftly. One of the first decision Sultan Suleyman makes when he takes the throne is to make Ibrahim Has Oda Agasi, sultan's private chamberlain.

Piri Pasha, who was the grand vizier during the last years of the reign of Selim I and the beginning years of Sultan Suleyman's reign, resigns from his position and Ibrahim is made grand vizier by Sultan Suleyman. However, there is an issue preventing him from his duties;

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<sup>36</sup> In an interview, Taylan Brothers, directors of the series, said that it was important that the scenario was written by a woman, and the period it shows was from the perspective of slave woman (Batuman 2014).

he is in love with Sultan Suleyman's sister Hatice. As I mentioned their relationship carries similarities with the characters from *The Tudors* TV series, and their secret love affair is shown from the beginning of the series. Ibrahim is so in love that he leaves everything behind and goes back to Parga, his hometown, in fear of Sultan Suleyman learning about his relationship with Hatice. He plans to forget his love for her. However, Sultan Suleyman has "respect for love", so that he summons Ibrahim and decides to marry them.

While the marriage between Ibrahim and Hatice seems like a happy one at first, it soon crumbles. Ibrahim's position as brother-in-law strengthens him. On the other hand, we start to see the cracks in his persona. He always questions his place in society, and his relationship with royal family, even his wife. Ibrahim, who is always in between, in purgatory as he says, wants to share Sultan Suleyman's power and struggles with his inner demons. Their relationship is a close one, and we can see that Suleyman values Ibrahim's decisions and tries to protect him from himself. However, Ibrahim's inner conflict about his position and his fear of death starts to shadow this relationship. The first mistake Ibrahim makes is to make an enemy of Hurrem. Both characters fight for Sultan Suleyman's affection and are in conflict with each other. Hurrem does not want to share Suleyman's love with Ibrahim. The other issue causing their fight is Ibrahim's support of Shahzade Mustafa and his mother, Mahidevran. He sees Shahzade Mustafa as the next heir and does everything in his power to support him. This is the other reason Hurrem loathes him and sees him as an enemy.

At the last episode of the first season of the series, we see that Ibrahim has changed. He makes Hurrem feed poisoned delights to her former fiancé Leo, who has come to the capital to find Hurrem. Ibrahim discovers their past and uses this situation to control Hurrem. It does not matter that Hurrem is now in love with Suleyman and the mother of his children, and that she refuses to do anything with Leo. Ibrahim uses Hurrem and Leo's past to gain power over Hurrem. Thus, he makes her kill Leo.<sup>37</sup> This event is the breaking point for both the characters

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<sup>37</sup> The Magnificent Century, season 2, episode 1 "25. Bölüm". Directed by Yağmur and Durul Taylan. Written by Meral Okay. Aired 14 September 2011, on Show TV.

of Ibrahim and Hurrem. Ibrahim chooses his own gain over the well-being of Sultan Suleyman, for at the same time an assassination attempt is made to Suleyman.<sup>38</sup>

Starting from the second season of *The Magnificent Century* series, we start to see Ibrahim's conflicted emotions affecting his relationships. His hunger for power starts to show itself after he brings the spoils of the conquest of Budin to his home: the marble statues of Artemis, Herakles, and Apollo. The public reacts to this situation negatively accusing Ibrahim of idolatry.<sup>39</sup> However, Sultan Suleyman again protects him; until he hears Ibrahim telling that all his subjects will kneel in front of his statues.<sup>40</sup> Another mistake he makes is to ask from Matrakçı Nasuh to write about him just like he writes about Sultan Suleyman: an Ibrahimname just like Suleymanname.<sup>41</sup> We can see that Ibrahim becomes over-confident and sees himself as an equal to Sultan Suleyman. Therefore, he prepares his own end by shadowing the authority of the Sultan.

One of the most foreshadowed things in the series was Ibrahim's betrayal of his wife. It is indicated throughout the series that the women in the royal family has a right to divorce their husbands. As a sister to the Sultan, Hatice has the privilege to divorce Ibrahim, if he goes astray. Accordingly, he cheats on her with Nigar, who is the head of the female servants in the harem. The relationship between Ibrahim and Nigar is the opposite of the relationship of Ibrahim with Hatice. She has the power in their relationship, for she can ruin Ibrahim by divorcing him. On the other hand, Ibrahim has the power in his affair, he controls Nigar and makes her do his bidding, even using her in his struggle with Hurrem. This means that Ibrahim betrays his wife because of his pride. He is unable to control his fate in a relationship with a royal member of a family that he is obliged to serve.

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<sup>38</sup> Victoria, who is a spy of Louis II of Hungary, goes into service of the Valide Sultan and gains her trust. She is named Sıdıka by Valide Sultan. In episode 24, she tries to kill Suleyman and her secret is revealed. *The Magnificent Century*, season 1, "Episode 24". Directed by Yağmur and Durul Taylan. Written by Meral Okay. Aired 22 June 2011, on Show TV.

<sup>39</sup> *The Magnificent Century*, season 2, episode 4 "28. Bölüm". Directed by Yağmur and Durul Taylan. Written by Meral Okay. Aired 5 October 2011, on Show TV.

<sup>40</sup> *The Magnificent Century*, season 2, episode 5 "29. Bölüm". Directed by Yağmur and Durul Taylan. Written by Meral Okay. Aired 12 October 2011, on Show TV.

<sup>41</sup> <sup>41</sup> *The Magnificent Century*, season 2, episode 13 "37. Bölüm". Directed by Yağmur and Durul Taylan. Written by Meral Okay. Aired 7 December 2011, on Show TV.

Ibrahim's downfall does not start with the discovery of his betrayal, but it starts when he loses Sultan Suleyman's trust. He is not affected by his unpopularity among the public, rumors about his religion that he is a secret Christian, or his conflict with Hurrem. What makes him fall from favor is his own acts. His close relationship with Shahzade Mustafa and his behavior towards foreign envoys is what makes Sultan Suleyman suspicious of him. Suleyman even questions him asking if he wants to take the throne or be the power behind the throne, to be the one who decides the next ruler.<sup>42</sup> Suleyman even complains to his mother that people around him uses him for his power, and that he knows how to take back the things he granted.

Suleyman advises Ibrahim to either seem as he is, or be as he seems, and warns him about his actions.<sup>43</sup> However, the hunger for power is a bottomless pit, and Ibrahim is destined to fall. His rash decisions in the East campaign and his meetings with foreign ambassadors are his biggest mistakes. He indicates that he controls the Empire, has all the power, and even the decisions of the Sultan need his approval. This shows that he sees himself as the only one who can rule the state, and that he is able to control Sultan Suleyman. During a scene when he visits Ebu Suud, a Hanafi Ottoman jurist who becomes the Shayk al- Islam, Ibrahim mentions that his pride is the pride of Ottomans. Ibrahim's sense of self-importance leads to his downfall. During his meeting with the French envoys, he indicates that he is the person who controls the sultan.<sup>44</sup> When Sultan Suleyman learns about this, we can see that he begins to see Ibrahim as a threat to his rule. Thus, he decides to execute him.

Hurrem is accused by everyone for causing Ibrahim's death. However, we see that while Hurrem questions Ibrahim's rise in the ranks and his close relationship with Shahzade Mustafa and Sultan Suleyman himself, she has no role in Sultan Suleyman's decision. She is

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<sup>42</sup> The Magnificent Century, season 2, episode 27 "51. Bölüm". Directed by Yağmur and Durul Taylan. Written by Meral Okay. Aired 14 March 2012, on Star TV.

<sup>43</sup> The Magnificent Century, season 2, episode 28 "52. Bölüm". Directed by Yağmur and Durul Taylan. Written by Meral Okay. Aired 21 March 2012, on Star TV.

<sup>44</sup> Ibrahim uses metaphors to show his power over Suleyman: "Lion, which is the most savage of the animals can only be tamed with intellect. His tamer first uses its loved ones to tame it, then by habit. There is always a rod in its masters' hand to protect themselves, or to make the lion fear them. A stranger is afraid to feed the lion. Only the person he is used to can feed it. The Lion is the Sultan, and his tamers are his viziers. Lion is the sovereign of the Ottomans. I tame the sultan, who is my lord, with the rod of justice and truth. The Magnificent Century, season 3, episode 11 "74. Bölüm". Directed by Yağmur and Durul Taylan. Written Yılmaz Şahin. Aired 21 November 2012, on Star TV.

even surprised by the event, and fears for herself and her children, after all Sultan Suleyman decides to kill a man he sees as his brother.

The conflict between Hurrem and Ibrahim plays out without the knowledge of Suleyman. He even entrusts Hurrem's well-being to Ibrahim. However, these two characters cannot seem to make peace for they are alike. This fact is acknowledged by Ibrahim when he is repeatedly defeated by Hurrem. He even asks himself whether their game of power will eventually come to an end. He knows that Hurrem is also a convert who was a slave, even if she is set free by Suleyman. Ibrahim was the person who presented Hurrem to Suleyman. Thus, he created his own devil who can rival and defeat him in Suleyman's affections.<sup>45</sup>

As I mentioned, *The Magnificent Century* TV series show the events of the past from the perspective of the slaves. Throughout the series we hear the narrative voice of Ibrahim, always questioning his place in society, trying to find himself, always in conflict. He tries to gain power by using his relationship with the Sultan. He is not the only character that uses Sultan Suleyman to gain power.

Hurrem, who is also a slave, decides to make Sultan Suleyman her own slave and wants to rule the "world". However; she also loves him and stays loyal to him. One of the reasons for her loyalty is the fact that she owns everything she has to the love they share. She gains Suleyman's love and keeps it for years. Her relationship with Suleyman is not a traditional one. Suleyman has four sons with her and makes her his wife. This makes Hurrem struggle for her love and her life at every turn. Suleyman's mother does not approve such a relationship, for it is against all traditions. Furthermore, Suleyman's sisters see her beneath themselves and try to get rid of her. The main reason behind their behavior is that despite being a slave Hurrem tries to control Suleyman and can influence him to her side.

At the beginning of the series, we see that Hurrem just tries to survive because Valide Sultan makes her life a living hell. The struggles Hurrem faces are not so different from the present life problems of a daughter-in-law. She is seen as the other woman, a rival to Mahidevran,

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<sup>45</sup> We hear Ibrahim's narrative voice after he speaks with Sultan Suleyman and learns about Suleyman's decision to marry Hurrem. He is shocked that a female adversary is more formidable than a male in this game of thrones. He acknowledges that as a convert herself, Hurrem is his creation for he is the one who supported her at first. *The Magnificent Century*, season 2, episode 17 "41. Bölüm". Directed by Yağmur and Durul Taylan. Written by Meral Okay. Aired 4 January 2012, on Star TV.

who is the mother of Suleyman's son, and she is loathed by Valide Sultan who sees Hurrem as an impudent girl. Hurrem does not act according to the rules of the harem, she wants to be the only woman for Suleyman. So that, the royal family tries to get rid of her.

We understand from the series that the value of woman increases when they give birth to a son. Hurrem successfully gives birth to her firstborn Mehmet, thus, she rises in the ranks. The policy in the imperial harem that deprived a woman who has given birth to a son from being eligible for sultan's bed does not apply to Hurrem (Peirce 1993, 43). She becomes a favorite of the sultan and gives him five children. The series show that while she tries to manipulate the sultan for power, she does it to protect her family. She does not plan Sultan Suleyman's demise or sees herself above him as Ibrahim does. She is happy to share Suleyman's power with him. However, after she eliminates Shahzade Mustafa who is executed by his father thanks to the machinations of Hurrem; she has no choice but to protect her children, even against their father.

*The Magnificent Century* series shows the character of Hurrem Sultan in a positive light. She was a slave who is taken captive against her will. Her life in the harem, and her struggles against her rivals makes the audience sympathize with her. The difference between Ibrahim and Hurrem is that Hurrem knows what she wants and has no inner conflicts. As a woman, her life in the Ottoman household is determined. She is a part of the sultan's harem, and this gives her an advantage over Ibrahim. She can become the next Valide Sultan. Thus, Hurrem's goal is clear: to make one of her sons sovereign and protect her family by becoming Valide Sultan. However, the road to the throne is a bloody one and Hurrem loses as much as she gains in this journey.

Her biggest success is maybe the fact that she made Sultan Suleyman set her free, then legally marry her. Hurrem's success broke the traditional rules: she managed to rise above the rank of concubine, she produced more than one son for the sultan, and she stayed at the palace instead of going with his son to his provincial post. She was the first slave concubine in Ottoman history to be freed and made a legal wife (Peirce 1993,58-61). The series shows that Hurrem owes her success to her loyalty. She may be a legal wife and free; however, the fate of her children is still at the hands of their father. Thus, Hurrem has no choice but to overcome the obstacles that prevents her from reaching her goal, namely Shahzade Mustafa. Hurrem

believes that Mustafa and his mother Mahidevran will try to dethrone Sultan Suleyman with the support of Ibrahim Pasha. Furthermore, she knows that she will lose all she has if such a thing occurs and commits her life to prevent Mustafa from taking the throne in order to protect her family. That is why, the death of Ibrahim Pasha is a victory for her, for Shahzade Mustafa loses his biggest support with the death of Ibrahim.

### 3.2. King's Two Bodies

*The Magnificent Century* series shows the reign of Sultan Suleyman I. As I mentioned, the story is told from the perspective of slaves, or in other words victims. You do not need to be a slave to be a victim, and if you do not have power, you are a victim. In the series, the only character who represent the power is Sultan Suleyman. Hurrem and Ibrahim gain power through him. However, Suleyman is a person too, if we put aside his sovereignty, and *The Magnificent Century* aims to show his human side to the audience.

Throughout the series, there are recurring themes: greed, hubris, jealousy, mercy, justice and innocence. Sultan Suleyman is shown as a just and merciful ruler at the beginning of the series. However, as the years pass and the sons of Suleyman grows up, Suleyman changes too. He expects his children to be like him, as he sees himself: without hubris and greed. The issue of innocence is shown when we see Shahzade Mustafa as a grown up. Sultan Suleyman says to Mustafa that they are losing their innocence while he is growing up.<sup>46</sup> The term “innocence” is encountered more than one time because Mustafa is not the only one who is growing up. Hurrem’s sons Mehmet, Selim, Beyazıt and Cihangir are possible candidates for the throne, even if Mustafa seems like to be the favourite. Sultan Suleyman recount the dream he saw when Shahzade Mehmet was born. He sees baby Mehmet sleeping on his throne.<sup>47</sup> Suleyman’s conversation with Mustafa reminds us the warnings he made for Ibrahim and the

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<sup>46</sup> *The Magnificent Century*, season 2, episode 22 “46. Bölüm”. Directed by Yağmur and Durul Taylan. Written by Meral Okay. Aired 8 February 2012, on Star TV.

<sup>47</sup> *The Magnificent Century*, season 3, episode 9 “72. Bölüm”. Directed by Yağmur and Durul Taylan. Written by Yılmaz Şahin. Aired 7 November 2012, on Star TV.



dreams he saw Mustafa with him. This indicates that the dream sequences in the series are used for foreshadowing. Suleyman's recurring dreams about Mustafa; in which he sees him on the throne and his loved ones dead in his hands, namely Hurrem and her children, he becomes to see his son as a rival.<sup>48</sup>

Suleyman's biggest fear is to become a person like his father. From the flashbacks we see that Sultan Selim I sent Suleyman a poisoned caftan when he was in Manisa. His mother prevents Suleyman when he wants to put on the caftan, instead the messenger who delivered it wears the caftan and he dies instantly.<sup>49</sup>

This episode is one of the anachronisms that makes the storyline meaningless. Sultan Suleyman was the only son, and his death could have different consequences for the Ottoman dynasty. It could have even been continued as a different one, for there would not be a surviving heir. It is with this kind of additions to the plot that we are unable to distinguish between fact and fiction. The scene of poisoned caftan is a part of the scenario and not a historical event, however, it still makes us question whether it is true or not.

The series show Sultan Selim I as a cruel man who would not hesitate to kill his own blood. However, let us not forget that Sultan Suleyman was the only son. How could killing his only heir benefit Selim I. This point is where the fiction breaks with history. The cruelty of Selim I is the building stone of Suleyman's character. He remembers how his father killed his grandfather Bayezid II.<sup>50</sup> Suleyman struggles with the fact that in order to keep the throne safe, or to just keep the throne, he needs to be cruel.

We are reminded of the fact that following the sultan's death, and sometimes before, princes can fight for succession, and only one of them successfully ascends to the throne. Furthermore, they can commit fratricide, in other words they can kill their brothers for succession (Sahin 2013, 23). This fact is what makes Suleyman anxious for the future.

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<sup>48</sup> The Magnificent Century, season 3, episode 37 "100. Bölüm". Directed by Yağmur and Durul Taylan. Written by Yılmaz Şahin. Aired 29 May 2013, on Star TV.

<sup>49</sup> The Magnificent Century, season 2, episode 34 "58. Bölüm". Directed by Yağmur and Durul Taylan. Written by Yılmaz Şahin. Aired 2 May 2012, on Star TV.

<sup>50</sup> The Magnificent Century, season 4, episode 19 "122. Bölüm". Directed by Mert Baykal and Yağız Alp Akaydın. Written by Yılmaz Şahin. Aired 5 February 2014, on Star TV.

Suleyman himself did not have any brothers, so he did not kill anybody for his throne. However, Shahzade Mustafa's situation is different from his father. He has four younger brothers, even if one of them is considered incapable of ruling. The youngest of Sultan Suleyman's children is a humpback and is not considered fit to rule. On the other hand, Shahzade Cihangir is shown as the most "innocent" of the brothers. Mustafa, Mehmet, Selim, and Beyazit are all capable to rule; thus, their growing up means that they will fight for succession one way or another.

Hurrem's firstborn Shahzade Mehmet has a close relationship with his brother Mustafa. We see that they take an oath to never kill each other. However, Sultan Suleyman is not so sure about the future. As the oldest and the most experienced son Mustafa has a superiority over his brother. He is also loved by the public and supported by janissaries. We can see that as the second son Mehmet resents the fact that he is not as popular as his brother Mustafa. However, there is his most devoted ally: his mother, Hurrem. We see Hurrem not just as the wife of Sultan Suleyman, but the mother of his children. The series make us sympathize with her struggles even if she tries to manipulate Suleyman to be wary of Mustafa, for Suleyman's other fear is to kill his own blood.

After the death of Shahzade Mehmet, we see a change in Suleyman's character because his favourite son from Hurrem dies. This is also considered by Hurrem the payment for her own sins.<sup>51</sup> The series show that Shahzade Mehmet's death was arranged by Mahidevran after Mehmet is promoted to Manisa Sanjak and Mustafa is sent to Amasya. Mahidevran sees him as a rival to her son Mustafa and eliminates him by making her spy in Mehmet's household infect him with smallpox.<sup>52</sup>

The death of Mehmet is the beginning of the game of thrones for the sons of Suleyman. Aside from Mustafa, there are two sons of Hurrem that is eligible: Selim and Bayezid. The relationship between Selim and Bayezid goes beyond sibling rivalry. Selim's character is a weak one compared to Bayezid. Selim is afraid of dying and being a failure, so that he tries

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<sup>51</sup> The Magnificent Century, season 3, episode 40 "103. Bölüm". Directed by Yağmur and Durul Taylan. Written by Yılmaz Şahin. Aired 19 June 2013, on Star TV

<sup>52</sup> Mehmet befriends a janissary named İlyas and brings him to Manisa, unaware of his connection with Mahidevran. The Magnificent Century, season 3, episode 38, "101. Bölüm". Directed by Yağmur and Durul Taylan. Written by Yılmaz Şahin. Aired 5 June 2013, on Star TV

to forget by drinking alcohol. On the other hand, Bayezid carries more similarities with his father. He is merciful and brave. However, he is impatient and comes to despise Selim because of his close relationship Sultan Suleyman.

While Selim plays the role of dutiful son, Bayezid has a rebellious side. He sides with his half-brother Mustafa against Selim. Hurrem does not approve of Beyazit's decisions and tries to turn her children against Mustafa. She succeeds with Mihrimah, her only daughter and the apple of the eye of Sultan Suleyman. Hurrem makes Mihrimah marry Rustem, who is the collaborator of Hurrem and rises in the ranks thanks to her. After Rustem becomes grand vizier, he works with Hurrem to support her sons and eliminate Mustafa. They start the rumors about Mustafa's collaboration with Shah Tahmasp, ruler of Safavid dynasty and the successor of Ismail I, to make it seem like he was planning to dethrone Sultan Suleyman. They prepare a fake letter from Mustafa to Shah Tahmasp and send it with Mustafa's seal with the help of Mihrimah, for she goes to her brother's province to steal his seal.<sup>53</sup>

There is an event that is awaited and feared by the viewers of *The Magnificent Century*: the execution of Shahzade Mustafa. Throughout the series, his death is hinted at every turn. Mustafa's conversations with his father, Suleyman's fear of killing his own child; all of these foreshadow Mustafa's demise. While we know that Hurrem and Rustem try to manipulate Sultan Suleyman to make him kill his son; the real reason behind the execution of Mustafa is not their machinations, it is the wish of Sultan Suleyman. The popularity of Shahzade Mustafa amongst the public, janissaries' support of him, and Suleyman's own weaknesses result in Mustafa's death. Suleyman is getting old, while Shahzade Mustafa becomes more popular. He fears to be dethroned by his son just as his grandfather Bayezid II. We see that his biggest fear becomes a reality when he sees the reflection of his father when he looks at the mirror: he decides to shed his own blood.<sup>54</sup>

I believe that the death of Shahzade Mustafa is the climax of the series. The storyline prepares us for this moment for four seasons. We see that while Suleyman commits a cruel act by

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<sup>53</sup> The Magnificent Century, season 4, episode 18 "121. Bölüm". Directed by Mert Baykal and Yağız Alp Akaydın. Written by Yılmaz Şahin. Aired 29 January 2014, on Star TV.

<sup>54</sup> We see Ibrahim's voice when Suleyman looks at the mirror: everyone turns into the person they are afraid of becoming. Every son carries his father inside, and every son his father. The Magnificent Century, season 4, episode 18, "121. Bölüm". Directed by Mert Baykal and Yağız Alp Akaydın. Written by Yılmaz Şahin. Aired 29 January 2014, on Star TV.

succumbing to his fears, he is the most affected character by Mustafa's death, aside from Mustafa's mother Mahidevran who loses everything she has after his execution. After the scene of Shahzade Mustafa's death, the series continues with more deaths. Cihangir, the youngest of Suleyman's son dies following Mustafa. We see that he cannot stand the fact that his father killed his beloved brother and dies from his sorrow.<sup>55</sup> The bloodshed does not end with Mustafa. The two remaining sons of Sultan Suleyman are ready to fight for succession.

In the last season of the series we see Sultan Suleyman's failures as a father. He is also aware of this; thus, he is in conflict. We see Suleyman reading Machiavelli's "*The Prince*" in episode 138.<sup>56</sup> One of the main themes of the book is how to build and preserve a base for power. Machiavelli finalizes the question of whether it is better to be feared or to be loved.<sup>57</sup> This theme seems to be the idea behind the death of Mustafa, and later for the death of Shahzade Bayezid. For the good of his subjects and to prevent rebellions Sultan Suleyman decides to kill his sons.

The case of Bayezid is more complex than the death of Shahzade Mustafa. While Mustafa is seen as a rival for Hurrem's sons and eliminated by Hurrem for the sake of power; she is unable to change Suleyman's decisions regarding Shahzade Beyazid. Hurrem tries to stop the fight between Selim and Bayezid without siding with one of them, for they are both her sons. On the other hand, Sultan Suleyman openly supports Shahzade Selim. The sickness of Hurrem and her death puts a break on the fight between the shahzades. However, after her death, there is no one on Bayezid's side except his sister Mihrimah. Shahzade Bayezid does not accept his fate like his brother Mustafa did. He rebels and raise arms against Selim. Sultan Suleyman sees this situation as a rebellion against himself and tries to punish him.<sup>58</sup> Selim is

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<sup>55</sup> The Magnificent Century, season 4, episode 22, "125. Bölüm". Directed by Mert Baykal and Yağız Alp Akaydın. Written by Yılmaz Şahin. Aired 26 February 2014, on Star TV.

<sup>56</sup> While he was reading the book, his son Bayezid was executed. We see Suleyman looking at the wall with the book in his hand. He sees his son's shadow being strangled. The Magnificent Century, season 4, episode 35, "138. Bölüm". Directed by Mert Baykal and Yağız Alp Akaydın. Written by Yılmaz Şahin. Aired 4 June 2014, on Star TV.

<sup>57</sup> *The Prince* is a political treatise written by Niccolò Machiavelli, political theorist and diplomat, published during the first half of the 16th century. One of the innovations of Machiavelli was the fact that he admitted the necessity of evil for preserving one's political life (Machiavelli 2008).

<sup>58</sup> Bayezid gathers an army to fight Selim. After learning this Suleyman sends a question to Ebu Suud about the situation just like he did with Mustafa. The answer is as expected: killing him is necessary. Thus, legitimizing Suleyman's decision.

the one who gives the comment for Bayezid's execution; however, we are aware that Sultan Suleyman knows about it and accepts this situation.<sup>59</sup> To preserve the peace in his land Sultan Suleyman sacrifices his own sons. There are two Suleyman's within him: one is a sultan, the other is a father; and they are always in conflict with each other.<sup>60</sup>

The conflict within Suleyman is the main paradox of *The Magnificent Century* series. Sultan Suleyman is a sovereign, and his role as a father comes in second. As I have shown, he is manipulated easily because he trusts the council of people around him. His devotion to Hurrem is a proof of this. By being loyal to him, Hurrem can make him listen. Thus, she manages to plant the seeds of suspicion in his psyche about Shahzade Mustafa. However, the series does not blame Hurrem for the death of Shahzade Mustafa. The blame and the regret lie on the shoulders of Sultan Suleyman because not even a leaf does not drop without him knowing about it.<sup>61</sup>

The last season of *Magnificent Century* shows Sultan Suleyman as the all-knowing sovereign of the dynasty that is aware of the manipulations around him. His orders regarding his sons are about protecting the peace within the empire, and as a sovereign he thinks about his subjects first, his family second. However, that is not all we see when we look at his decisions. We also see a character that is in agony, who is also wasting away.<sup>62</sup>

Suleyman who sleeps on the ground in order to stay humble; turns into a sovereign, who kills his own sons in order to keep his power, who buries his consciousness along with his

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The *Magnificent Century*, season 4, episode 33, "136. Bölüm". Directed by Mert Baykal and Yağız Alp Akaydın. Written by Yılmaz Şahin. Aired 21 May 2014, on Star TV.

<sup>59</sup> As I mentioned in the previous footnotes, Sultan Suleyman sees the reflection of Bayezid's execution on the walls of his room while he was reading Machievelli's *The Prince*.

<sup>60</sup> In episode 125, Suleyman converses with Cihangir who is on the brink of death. He admits that he has never knew the love of a father and took an oath to never become like him; however, he was defeated by his own devil. The *Magnificent Century*, season 4, episode 22, "125. Bölüm". Directed by Mert Baykal and Yağız Alp Akaydın. Written by Yılmaz Şahin. Aired 26 February 2014, on Star TV.

<sup>61</sup> In episode 130, Hurrem goes to a soothsayer in order to learn her sons' future. The soothsayer says that not even a leaf falls down from a tree without Sultan Suleyman knowing about it, and that one of her sons will be already death before the other takes the throne. The *Magnificent Century*. "Episode 130". Directed by Mert Baykal & Yağız Alp Akaydın. Written by Yılmaz Şahin. 5 January 2011.

<sup>62</sup> While many people condemned the character of Suleyman for killing Mustafa, we should also remember the scene where he cries over Mustafa's dead body just after his execution. The *Magnificent Century*, season 4, episode 21, "124. Bölüm". Directed by Mert Baykal and Yağız Alp Akaydın. Written by Yılmaz Şahin. Aired 19 February 2014, on Star TV.

innocence.<sup>63</sup> *The Magnificent Century* Series shows us that the sovereignty changes Sultan Suleyman, and that the power also defeats the powerful as we see in the case of Suleyman (Atay 2014).

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<sup>63</sup> After the Battle of Mohacs, Suleyman orders the soldiers to dig a grave and sleeps in it; praying to God to preserve him from hubris. *The Magnificent Century*, season 2, episode 2 “26. Bölüm”. Directed by Yağmur and Durul Taylan. Written by Meral Okay. Aired 21 September 2011, on Show TV. Just before Suleyman decides to kill Mustafa he buries the journal of Ibrahim which he always keeps around and reads. The journal consists of the inner thought of Ibrahim and plays a role in the storyline, because what Suleyman reads is just like a part of his consciousness, or this is what I get from watching the series. They seem to use it as a device to reflect consciousness. *The Magnificent Century*, season 4, episode 18, “121. Bölüm”. Directed by Mert Baykal and Yağız Alp Akaydın. Written by Yılmaz Şahin. Aired 29 January 2014, on Star TV. And when in episode 130, Suleyman asks Hurrem whether she played a role in Mustafa’s death or not, she answers saying that she is his shadow. What he does, she does. She is not innocent, but no one in the palace is innocent. Anyone who has anything to do with power has no innocence. *The Magnificent Century*. “Episode 130”. Directed by Mert Baykal & Yağız Alp Akaydın. Written by Yılmaz Şahin. 2 April 2011.

#### 4. REACTIONS TO THE MAGNIFICENT CENTURY

On 5 January 2011; the first episode of *The Magnificent Century* was aired. Complaints about the series started long before its broadcasting date. Even before watching the first episode people started to show sensitivity about the series. Until January 6, %93 of the complaints made to RTUK, the official watchdog, was about the show; and most of them were before the show was broadcasted. While the series started on January 5, the trailer of the show started to be shown after December 11. In the meantime, 74.911 complaints were made about *The Magnificent Century*.

What was in the trailer that people complained more than they did about the other programs and series? When we watch it, we see women dancing to an oriental music, Sultan Suleyman waiting in his room with a woman in his bed, arrival of Hurrem and the enthronement of Sultan Suleyman followed by woman bathing in a Turkish bath and so on. People reacted to these scenes by complaining to RTUK. Most of the complaints were about the disrespect shown to the history and the misinterpretation of the Ottoman Empire.

Head of RTUK at the time, Prof. Dr. Davut Dursun explained that the reason behind the reactions was the sensitivity of the public regarding the Ottoman Empire. People were not so keen to accept a series that contradict their ideas about the Ottoman sultans (RTUK 2011). The idea that the show reflects an Ottoman sultan negatively was one of the main concerns of the critiques. Sultan Suleyman who is known by his success in battlefield and his just rule was shown in the harem, spending time with women. Thus, the audience responded to these scenes which shows Sultan Suleyman differently than their imagination.

I use the term imagination; because historical figures in the past differs from the ones in our minds. People who complained about the representation of Sultan Suleyman in this series

imagine him according to their ideologies. While the Islamists emphasizes the role of the sultan in spreading the religion and following the doctrines; Nationalist-Conservatives lay emphasis on the Ottoman Empire as a force which brought the world to heel (Aydos 2013,7). *The Magnificent Century* shattered this image of Suleyman and caused a lot of debates.

Ali Murat Güven, a journalist who wrote for the *Yeni Şafak* through the broadcast of *The Magnificent Century*, and whose comments about the series were applauded by conservatives; points out that in Turkey, people who are sensitive about the religious and historical values do not read the religious and historical records bawdily. The private life of Kanuni Sultan Suleyman is nonessential just like the life of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. He blames the scenarist and producer of *The Magnificent Century* for degrading the historical figures to the characters of a soap opera whose only concern is carnality. According to him the reason behind the conflict is their disrespect towards the makers of the history (Güven 2011).

According to Ahmet Simsirgil, professor of history at Marmara University; Hurrem and Pargali Ibrahim are shown as the agents of the Christians, and this is a big mistake. Simsirgil criticized the scenarist Meral Okay by stating the mistakes shown on the first episode:

“The palace life seems to be in turmoil all the time. The depiction of the Harem, daily life in the palace, costumes are all portrayed inaccurately. Scenarist of the series mentioned that *The Tudors* TV series was an inspiration for the series. This seems to show in every aspect of the *The Magnificent Century* “(Simsirgil 2011, My Translation)

Yavuz Bahadiroglu, journalist and writer, also stated that the series were like *The Tudors* TV series. He said that *The Magnificent Century* series was the ruination of the traditional values (Bahadiroglu 2015). Bahadiroglu criticized the series at every turn. His books about the characters in the series started to be in demand after the broadcast of the *Magnificent Century*. He believed that the reason behind the increase in the sale of his books was the inaccuracy of the events shown in the series; thus, his books were a way to learn the truth about the events (Haberturk 2011b). Bahadiroglu emphasized that *The Magnificent Century* shows a corrupt version of history and it is not real, adding that history cannot be learned from the television series. He also claimed that people need to read the works of national writers to understand the history correctly (Haberler 2012).



As it is seen, the comments about *The Magnificent Century* series revolve around the values and traditions that define the identity of people. The past shown in the series is the opposite of the version of history that is shaped by the Nationalist- Conservative values. The critiques about the series has become another tool to express one's own ideological believes.

Another critique, Şamil Tayyar, a journalist, author, and deputy of AKP since 2011, does this by comparing the Magnificent Century series with the movie *Mustafa*. The same kind of criticism was directed towards Can Dündar, who is the director of the movie. He was blamed for showing Mustafa Kemal as a smoker, and a lonely person. According to Tayyar, “they” couldn't stand the image of Mustafa Kemal in the movie; and, now are talking about breaking taboos when it comes to Kanuni Sultan Suleyman. He believes that Suleyman is shown as “gay” and a “porn star” in the series, and this kind of heresy is hidden behind the term “fiction”. According to him The Magnificent Century series carries the orientalist point of view and tries to replace the neo-Ottomanism with porn -Ottomanism (Tayyar 2011).

Who are “they” that Tayyar talks about? “Mustafa” movie came to the theatres in 2008 and was directed by Can Dündar. The movie was criticized by Kemalists and seculars, including the members of CHP, for its representation of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. The same kind of criticism directed to *The Magnificent Century* occurred after the premier of “Mustafa”. Audiences blamed the movie for targeting the secular republic and poisoning the subconscious of the youth by shattering the image of Mustafa Kemal (Soydan 2008). Dündar wanted to show a different side of Mustafa Kemal in the movie. However, his representation was interpreted differently by the audience. CHP member Bülent Baratalı was concerned about the image of Mustafa Kemal in the minds of young generation:

“The children who watched the movie decided that Mustafa Kemal would live longer if he did not smoke three packages of cigarettes. They thought that his brother was eaten by jackals; he smoked and drank a lot.” (Haberler 17 Nov. 2008, My Translation)

Another criticism to the movie came from Turgut Özakman, Turkish writer of the bestseller “Şu Çılgın Türkler”. He said that Dündar was interested in the branches instead of the tree, he did not see the overall picture. He added that Dündar's understanding of Atatürk was

different from the real Atatürk. According to Özakman “Mustafa” offends the memory and prestige of a national hero, Atatürk in the movie is not the real one (Ozakman 2008).

When we look at the criticism about the movie “Mustafa” and *The Magnificent Century* TV series, Şamil Tayyar’s comments makes sense. They both face the same kind of criticism from different people. In case of “Mustafa”, it was seculars who criticized the movie severely. Kanuni Sultan Suleyman has the same prestige in the eyes of the conservatives, thus they criticize *The Magnificent Century* series.

Tayyar’s comments is evidence of the fact that *The Magnificent Century* becomes another issue to debate for two opposite ideas: secular and conservative. People who consider themselves conservative criticized the accuracy of the show and the portrayal of the sultan by pointing out the fictional elements in the scenario such as the harem scenes and the relationships between the characters. The life in harem is one of the topics that is speculated through centuries because of the lack of historical records. In the Western world, harem is a myth “constructed around the theme of Muslim sexuality” and it is in the center of the oriental tyranny imagined by Europe (Peirce 1993, 3). According to the conservative critics of *The Magnificent Century*, the events are shown to the audience from an Orientalist perspective.<sup>64</sup> All the critiques of the show came to this conclusion after watching the trailer of the series.

Reactions after the broadcast of the trailer, and the first episode of *The Magnificent Century* created some conflicts among the viewers. After the broadcast of the first episode, RTÜK issued a warning to the series claiming that the necessary sensitivity regarding the private life of a historical person was not shown. In an NTV newscast Hasan Fendoğlu, member of RTÜK, supported the idea that the series has an oriental point of view. He added that showing the private life of a sultan was not appropriate even if it was not real. Deniz Türkali, actress, argued that “dramas have their own realities and privacy”. She also pointed out that while there is an institution such as harem, it would be wrong to say that the sultans were not womanizers.

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<sup>64</sup> Here the term is used to show the historical definition of the Orientalism; that is the point of view that sees the East as inferior to West, and a style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over Orient. See: Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Penguin Books, 2003).

Another member of RTUK, Hulya Alp said that if the trailer of the show was considered all the criticism was well-deserved. However, she also said that Sultan Süleyman's image in the first episode was that of a just ruler who stood against the discrimination of the minority groups, a man who is full of emotion during the executions he decreed, an artist who creates jewelry, a democrat who gives opportunities to a convert against the traditions, a man who is about to fall in love; not a lustful one. These were her thoughts on the first episode of the series when she watched it. So that, we can say the trailer and the first episode portrayed the characters of Sultan Suleyman differently (Youtube 2011).

As I mentioned in the previous chapter, the series used advertisements to promote its similarity to *The Tudors* TV series. The trailer plays an important part in this because of its sensual content which shows women dancing on the harem, shadowing Sultan Suleyman, and bathing in the Turkish bath. This sensuality is the reason the public reacted so much to the trailer saying that the show was disrespectful to Sultan Suleyman. Hulya Alp, who was the only member of RTUK to vote against the penalty regarding the show, was able to distinguish the fictitious elements from the facts. Thus, she watched the series as a female who saw the character of Suleyman as a charismatic man, rather than the historical person himself.

Fatih municipality organized a symposium about the era of Sultan Suleyman with the title 'Muhteşem Kanuni Asrı' Sempozyumu. It was held on February 5, 2011. Meral Okay, scenarist of the *Magnificent Century*, and Avni Özgürel, scenarist of the movie "Mahperker Kösem Sultan" which came out in 2010, also attended (Fatih Belediyesi 2011). In the last session of symposium moderated by İlber Ortaylı, Erhan Afyoncu, who was the history advisor of the series and who is also a historian and Rector of the National Defense University, talked about the sources of the reign of Sultan Suleyman and mentioned that the producer of the series supported the translation of the reports belonging to foreign envoys.

İlber Ortaylı mentioned in his introduction that Turkish cinema is not on a level that enables them to get the right information about history. He lays the blame on the historians "who does not know about the ceremonies and protocols of the palace and the daily life". However, what the series of Meral Okay and the movie of Avni Özgürel make the people think about resulted in the organization of such a symposium, and they legitimize *The Magnificent*

*Century* series by including its scenarist in a symposium which was full of professional academic historians.

Meral Okay pointed out in her talk that the series was a drama, that there is a power game in which Hurrem becomes a partner of the throne. She added that she preferred to make Hurrem and Suleyman arrive to the capital at the same time, that it was more dramatic and powerful for the plot. Okay also added that they could listen to the criticism if they prove it with documents. However, she said, when it comes to fiction, that is the end where nothing can be said; because the data they had, belonged to the world of men and had no voice for woman (Youtube 2012).

From the remarks of Okay we get the sense that she planned to construct the plot of the series according to her ideas. Where there are no documents about history, there are possibilities, and Okay uses fiction to shape the story in order to reflect her thought and ideals.

#### **4.1. Is It Fiction or History?**

Kumru B.E. Çetin, Newton International Fellow and research assistant at Hacettepe University, argues that Turkish TV series starts to deal with the contemporary political issues. Some are trying to convey political messages to people, while the others become a means to express political concerns. She uses the term “politicization” to point out the change in media market and the political institutions in Turkey, especially the regulation and control of the media. Four trends can be seen in the politicization of television dramas: (1) dealing with contemporary political issues, (2) settling accounts with the past, (3) neo-Ottomanism, and (4) piety and the Islamic worldview. The comments about the show and the reactions of the audience confirms that *The Magnificent Century* series is “politicized” (Çetin 2014, 2467). I think that the politicization of *The Magnificent Century* fits these trends. While the series itself does not give a political message, after its broadcast the series created a new debate around history which is put forward by opposing political ideas. Furthermore, it made the

audience question their relationship with the past which is defined by their ideologies. In this respect, *The Magnificent Century* created a perspective in the eyes of the audience.

A real or imagined past plays an important role in shaping the identity. To know who we were in the past shapes our present. Visual media is important for learning the values that shape our sense of identity. The past we see in cinema and television is a subjective one, rewritten for the purpose of connecting the past with the present. Thus, it is no longer a history (Koçak and Koçak 2014, 74). Fictional works of history changes our perceptions and creates a new structure in our minds regarding the historical events and personas. *The Magnificent Century series* is one of the TV series that managed to influence the audience in this respect. For the viewers, this is not just a series or a film, it is imprinted on their memories. When you explain the events in history they organize a new structure in their minds (Kaya and Günel 2015, 29). This especially effects the image of the historical personas. Image of Sultan Suleyman in particular is shaped after watching *The Magnificent Century*. A survey shows that *The Magnificent Century* series affected the young generation's understanding of history. All the participants agreed that Sultan Suleyman was a womanizer. They disagreed with that in the reign of Suleyman the people lived in peace and harmony (Kaya and Günel 2015, 39). The shows effect on the youth was one of the reasons that the conservatives criticized the series. *The Magnificent Century's* portrayal of the past and Sultan Suleyman made Recep Tayyip Erdogan criticize the series at every turn. He called the series disrespectful and aiming to show the history in a negative light to the younger generation. People began to protest more about the broadcast of the series after the comments of the politicians that showed the series as a threat to history. Dozens of egg-throwing protesters chanted "God is great" outside the Show TV studios (Bilefsky 2012). The reason behind these protests was the criticism made by Recep Tayyip Erdogan during his talk in the opening of an airport in Kutahya on 25 November 2012:

"We know our responsibilities. We will go everywhere that our ancestors went on horseback, we will take an interest in all those places. But I think some maybe thinking of our ancestors as they are shown on the television screen in that *documentary*, *Magnificent Century*. We do not have ancestors like that. We do not recognize that Suleyman. He spent 30 years of his life on horseback, not in the palace like you see on the TV series. You really need to know and understand this. I condemn the directors and the owner of the channel before our nation." (Hurriyet 25 Nov. 2012, My Translation, emphasis mine)

Before we look at the responses to Erdogan's criticism of the series, I would like to point out the word Erdogan uses for the series. He says "documentary", when he mentions *The Magnificent Century*. One can only wonder if it was just a slip of the tongue or used deliberately. Does Erdogan think that the series tries to show the historical facts despite the claims of the producers that it is a works of fiction? Or does Erdogan believe that they are trying to tell a different kind of history from the version he wants to be known? Looking at Erdogan's comment can we say that the difference between the fact and fiction is clear for him?

The producers responded to the threats regarding the discontinuing the broadcast by adding scenes and adjusting the costumes of the woman. After Erdogan's comments a prayer scene is shown in the episode 78. Sultan Suleyman was poisoned and falls ill. Hurrem Sultan is shown praying for his recovery.<sup>65</sup> This is the first prayer scene of Hurrem in the series (CNNTURK 2012).

Erdogan's comments about the series came at a time when Turkey stepped up for the Gaza ceasefire, and after the request of NATO Patriot missiles to protect Turkey's border with Syria. His critique of *The Magnificent Century* was a response to the critics about the government's dealing with the affairs of Iraq, Syria, and Gaza (Bilefsky 2012). Erdogan's talk indicates that *The Magnificent Century* is watched and admired internationally. The popularity of the series goes beyond the borders of Turkey; and it also changes the perspective of the foreigners about the Ottoman sultans. It seems that Erdogan realized the popularity of the show and expanded his argument against the series. It just not only effects the national audience, but also the global audience.

Yusuf Halaçoğlu, former president of the Turkish Historical Society, criticized Erdogan's comments about the series; reminding us that the series has been broadcasted for 3 years. According to him, Erdogan was trying to change the agenda by criticizing the series instead of leaving it to the hands of RTUK (Haberturk 2012). The fact that Erdogan made a comment about the series after 3 seasons is a reason for his opponents to criticize him. *The Magnificent*

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<sup>65</sup> *The Magnificent Century*, season 3, episode 15, "78. Bölüm". Directed by Yağmur and Durul Taylan. Written by Yılmaz Şahin. Aired 19 December 2012, on Star TV

*Century* TV series showed a different version of history that opposes Erdogan's vision of history and what it means to be a part of it.

*The Magnificent Century* represents the historical understanding that highlights the individuals rather than the concepts, which is subjective and versatile (Bilis 2013,32). This is one of the reasons of Erdogan's criticism. He supports the "one nation, one flag, one country, one state" notion that is a part of 2023 vision. *The Magnificent Century* series opposes this notion by humanizing the historical characters. According to Erdogan and AKP "our ancestors" are fearless and brave. They are the conquerors of Europe and the East. *The Magnificent Century* plays a role in changing this myth by creating a new point of view.

The main concern of the critics is the fact that the sense of identity which claims the Ottomans as a political and cultural legacy is questioned after the broadcast of *The Magnificent Century*. The longing for traditional values and bonds that are no longer present in our lives, and the obsession with the past is a result of globalization (Koçak and Koçak 2014, 74). The concerns of the government are that the series will shake the foundation they built for years, and make the audience question their own past. The past AKP created and Erdogan promoted is a different past from the one shown in the series. While the government tries to demonstrate the Ottoman grandeur, *The Magnificent Century* series shows the failures of the characters shattering their image. Sultan Suleyman in the series is different from Sultan Suleyman that Erdogan introduces. The reaction of the public to Erdogan's comments shows that the series makes the audience question the past.

In Konya, Ömer Faruk Bildirici, who is a tourism professional, filed a criminal complaint at the chief public prosecutor's office against the directors of the series claiming they ridicule history and bend the truth. He said that Sultan Suleyman was shown as a lecherous man. He blamed the directors of the show for misrepresenting Sultan Suleyman and disregarding historical values. Bildirici also mentioned his daughter who questioned the accuracy of the series:

"My daughter said that they learned history differently at school, so she asked which one is true: Magnificent Century TV series or their history lessons. After Erdogan mentioned that the scenario of the series is immoral and untrue my daughter concluded that they learn the truth at school. After Erdogan confirmed

that the series is full of lies and a work of imagination, I felt the need to file a criminal complaint against the director of the series to enlighten the public and stop the broadcasting of *Magnificent Century*.” (Haberler 30 Nov. 2012, My Translation).

His wife also filed another complaint to support her husband saying that she wanted people to know that *The Magnificent Century* deeply wounded them as a Turkish citizen by showing Sultan Suleyman in a disgraced way, and that they considered the series as a magnificent scandal. Istanbul Chief Prosecutor’s Office declared to proceed no further claiming that an offence of libel about a dead person cannot be prosecuted, and a complaint can only be made by the relatives of the deceased. The couple had no authority to file a complaint (Haberler 2012b).

The reaction of the public, especially the supporters of Erdogan and AKP government, shows that *The Magnificent Century* becomes a reference for “proper” history with regards to “what history must not have looked like”. The personal life of the sultans, and depictions of the harem is not considered as proper history by Erdogan and AKP officials. Authenticity of the historical figures were questioned by public. Thus, governments’ perception of the history also changed after the broadcast of the series (Ergin and Karakaya 2017, 57)

Erdogan’s criticism of the series reflects the ideas of the conservatives regarding the representation of history. On the other hand, many people support the series and the depiction of the harem. Altan TAN who was a representative of Peace and Democracy Party<sup>66</sup> at the time criticized Erdogan’s reaction to the series. “Why did your ancestor build the harem? Was it a school of religious education for girls? Why were there no Muslims in the harem? Why did the Ottoman Sultans oppose marriage? (Internethaber 2012). It is evident that the series became a tool for opposing parties to criticize each other. Umut Oran, a member of CHP, made a parliamentary question regarding Erdogan’s comments. He asked that if controlling the scenario of the TV series was amongst the duties of the Prime Minister according to the Turkish Constitution:

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<sup>66</sup> Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) was a Kurdish political party from 2008 to 2014. It changed its name to Democratic Regions Party (DBP) in 2014. The same year, members of the parliament belonging to BDP became a part of HDP (Democratic Party of the Peoples).



“Did you organize a team to follow all the series that are broadcasted, and for warning and condemning the producers, scenarists, and the directors? Are you informed by the channel owners, and directors before the broadcast of the programs about their content? Are you responsible for supervising these programs? How many programs did you inspect in this way? Your words contradict with the regulation in the 138<sup>th</sup> clause of the constitution titled “independence of the courts”: “Judges are independent in their duty, they judge by their own personal conviction in accordance with the constitution, legislation and law.” Does your statement not violate the separation of powers?” (Sabah 27 Nov. 2012, My Translation)

The answer to these questions came after the expiration date of the proposal.<sup>67</sup> It is indicated that, it was not possible for the prime minister to watch all the TV series because of the workload of the office. However, it was not possible to remain unresponsive to a topic that created a lot of debates in public opinion. Thus, it is stated that the prime minister used his own right to express an opinion and criticized the series. This was not related to the separation of powers (TBMM 2013).

Vahap Seçer, another member of the parliament, also questioned Erdogan’s criticism of the directors and the producers of *The Magnificent Century*. Halit Ergenç and Meryem Uzerli, the main characters of the series, played in a TV commercial for Turkish Citrus as Sultan Suleyman and Hurrem. The broadcast of the film was cancelled after Erdogan’s comments.<sup>68</sup> Seçer blamed Erdogan for creating a new agenda by using *The Magnificent Century* TV series (Mynet 2012). He added that the government needed to focus on supporting various sectors including Turkish Citrus.

Reaction of the opposing parties to Erdogan’s comments show that the series became a part of the political debates. Erdogan used the series to change the agenda, and his opponents used it to criticize Erdogan and the policy of the government. It is evident that the content of the *Magnificent Century* conflicts with the visions of Erdogan and AKP. They see Ottoman Empire as a part of national identity, claiming the empire as a cultural and political legacy

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<sup>67</sup> According to the byelaw of TBMM, written questions are supposed to be answered within 15 days. Government can detain answering for a month to compile the required information.

<sup>68</sup> Turkish Citrus Promotion Group decided to film the commercial after they realized the popularity of the series. They planned to air the commercial in 26 countries including Russia to promote Turkish Citrus (Radikal 2012). They started to air the commercial in 2013, a year after Erdogan’s criticism of the *Magnificent Century*. (Radikal 2013).

(Koçak and Koçak 2014, 82). Thus, Ottoman grandeur is promoted and re-invented to distinguish from “Republicanism and secular Kemalism” (Çetin 2014, 2471).

The term Ottomanism is used to describe this nostalgia for Ottoman grandeur, territorial expansionism and an attempt to reintroduce Islam into Turkish politics (Grigoriadis 2007, 18). The rise of Ottomanism is in parallel with the rise of AKP. After AKP came into power, they promoted nostalgia with an emphasis on Ottoman multiculturalism, cosmopolitanism, and tolerance. This longing for the past showed itself with Ottomania which is the cultural aspect of the obsession with the Ottoman past (Ergin and Karakaya 2017, 8).

As a result of Ottomania, anything that includes an Ottoman emblem and tradition is consumed by the public; whether they are household decorations, kitchen utensils, jewelry or Ottoman themed entertainments including henna nights, weddings, and circumcision feasts. Fadi Hakura, associate fellow and Turkey analyst at Chatham House, said that Ottomania is sweeping Turkey, with Ottoman soap operas, Ottoman movies all giving a certain colour to the past imperial legacy of the Ottoman Empire; in order to outshine the dominance of Ataturk in modern history (Pollard 2014).

The broadcast of *The Magnificent Century*, not surprisingly, came at a time Ottomania was at its peak. The series became a favorite after a couple of episodes, regardless of the criticisms, thanks to popularity of the Ottomans. Erdogan’s comments about the show, which came during the third season of the series, emphasize the popularity of the show. *The Magnificent Century* became so popular that even Erdogan made a comment about it. However, his criticism of the show is full of messages which are directed to his opponents.

Yavuz Bahadıroğlu, journalist and writer, supported Erdogan and made a suggestion to him:

“I’m calling out to the prime minister, you cannot accomplish anything by shouting about it. There are opportunities for the government. I don’t like Gadhafi, I curse him at every turn; however, there is something he did I’m thankful for: that is the movie “The Message”.<sup>69</sup> What did he do? Who is the best

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<sup>69</sup> The Message, directed by Moustapha Akkad, was released in 1976, in both in English and Arabic version. The film depicts the life of Prophet Muhammad. During filming, Akkad lost his sets and locations due to Saudi pressure. They moved the filming to Libya with the support of Libyan leader Moammar Gadhafi. (Greene 2016)

director, scenarist, actor...? Let them come. Our government can do something like this. They can sell their production even to the Arabs.” (Milliyet 27 Nov. 2012, My Translation)

Bahadiroglu’s suggestion is that the government should use their power to create a production according to their point of view. Ilber Ortayli also hinted at the same idea. He reminded the criticism of Bulent Arinc<sup>70</sup> saying that they could direct the scenario using money (Milliyet 2012). TRT tried to rival *Magnificent Century* by creating a new project named *Nakş-ı Dil Sultan* which was supposed to focus on Abdulhamid I and his reign aimed to show that beauty, power, and grandeur is not enough for happiness. However, the popularity of *The Magnificent Century* caused the project to be dismissed (Haber7 2011).

#### 4.2. After the Magnificent Century

In 2014, six months after *Magnificent Century*’s final episode, TRT started to broadcast a new series named *Resurrection: Ertugrul*. The story is set in 13th century Anatolia where Ertugrul Bey, the father of Osman Bey who is the founder of the Ottoman Empire, tries to establish his homeland.<sup>71</sup> *Resurrection: Ertugrul* shows the Muslim nationalism expressed by President Erdogan. The popularity of the *Resurrection: Ertugrul*, and Erdoğan’s support of the series is more about the ambitions for prestige and national claims against enemies. *Resurrection: Ertugrul* shows a flattering foundation of Turkish glory. The themes of the series are parallel to the vision of Erdogan who claims that Turkey is fulfilling a sacred destiny under his presidency, returning to its historical role as a regional leader and global power (Armstrong 2017).

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<sup>70</sup> Bulent Arinc was one of the first names that criticized the *Magnificent Century*’s representation of Sultan Suleyman. He reminded that there was a law that considered the insults against Atatürk as a crime. He added that it was not possible to validate this law for other historical figures; however, anything that humiliates the important figures in history needed to be punished. (Milliyet 2011b)

<sup>71</sup> The series promotes the Muslim and Turkish identity with a different approach to Turkish history. The theme of fighting for the homeland is to remind the national elements such as homeland and land (Elitas and Kir 2019, 54-55).

The events seen in the *Resurrection: Ertugrul* series can be an example for the populism of AKP. Populists identify with the idea of a homeland. Homeland, or mother land is a construction which makes the line between the real and imaginary blur. The imagined land is the mother land of the desired virtues which are lost. These nostalgic interest in the lost motherland is a characteristic of nationalist and extremist right wing. Media and popular culture play a role in producing and re-producing these ideas. Narratives which remembers and reminds the grandeur of the past enveloping the popular culture, and historical narratives which sever their ties to history to show the concerns of the present politics are a part of this populist belief.

The populism of AKP finds its meaning in its leader, namely Recep Tayyip Erdogan. The main logic of this populism is the fact that the people has a sole common will which can only be represented by the true leader of people, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. However, Erdogan's people and nation carries Sunni-Muslim Turkic characteristics which does not include Alevids, Kurds, liberals, seculars, and all the opposing groups.

*Resurrection: Ertuğrul* is full of Turkic-Islamic fantasies and narrates an ahistorical point of view. All the good characters in the series are identified as Sunni-Muslims, and Ertugrul is a figure who will unite the Islamic world, and the Turks under his leadership. This narrative parallel the diplomacy of AKP which aims to unite the Islamic world and become a power in the Middle East. According to the series, being under the threat of the foreign and domestic enemies requires a state of emergency, again in parallel with the present politic situation adopted by AKP (Özçetin 2019, 41-42).

According to Erdogan *Resurrection: Ertuğrul* was an important project. He believed that the series helped the youth to gain confidence in themselves. Another project was *Payitaht: Abdülhamid* series which is about Sultan Abdülhamid. He gave Payitaht series as a reference for learning history. In one of his talks he addressed the youth:

“We have become smaller, from a land of 18 million square kilometers to 780 thousand square kilometers, who we were and who we have become. Let us remind this. We should know our history. Do you watch Payitaht series? You see there. They are still trying to take something from us.” (Youtube 2018, My translation).

*Payitaht* series show the present situation in a historical setting. Abdülhamid is represented as a politician who travelled to past from the present world. He takes his power from the people who loves him and in exchange he works for the people, thanks to this love. In the series, they discuss a railroad project just like Marmaray, British envoy is slapped, and political messages are sent to CHP, Abdullah Gül<sup>72</sup>, and USA. They also show economic concerns not related to that time. Abdülhamid says that the reason behind the rise of the prices of meat and bread is foreign powers and suggest a sale of foodstuff by a municipality to regulate the prices, just as Erdogan does (Dağlıoğlu 2019, 49):

“While we are facing with terrorist activities, they talk about the prices of potato, tomato.... George, Hans want to target us, and opposing parties support them. We have won this conflict to this day, and we will continue to win. If necessary, we will set up sales by municipalities.... our concern is something else. We love this nation, we are suffering for the people, do not believe this kind of cheap games.” (Takvim 8 Feb. 2019, My Translation)

Erdogan shows that the scenario of the TRT series parallels the problems of current political situations. This indicates that the government uses television to create a historical consciousness that reflects their ideologies.

As a TRT production *Resurrection: Ertugrul* managed to capture the audience that criticized the *Magnificent Century*. *Resurrection: Ertugrul* can be considered the foil of *The Magnificent Century*. It shows the visions of history shared by the government and conservatives.

AKP ex-deputy Kemal Tekden, who is one of the producers of “*Resurrection: Ertugrul*” TV series, stated that the cinema industry was a late discovery for the conservatives. Tekden mentioned that the people who are a part of the nationalist thought should be encouraged, and government should support this. He also mentioned *The Magnificent Century*:

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<sup>72</sup>In the 85<sup>th</sup> episode of the series Abdülhamid uses a metaphor that can be seen as a direct message to Abdullah Gül who was the 11<sup>th</sup> President of the Republic of Turkey, and who is planning to found a political party as a rival to AKP: We water the rose tree, but the water benefits both the rose and its thorns. If the people around us aim to become thorns, we will eventually cut them.” *Payitaht: Abdülhamit*, season 3, episode 31, “85. Bölüm”. Directed by Emre Konuk. Written by Osman Bodur and Uğur Uzunok. Aired 10 May 2019, on TRT.

“There were productions which narrated Kanuni as if he was in a Byzantine palace. Resurrection: Ertuğrul showed the historical truths and appealed to our hearts trying to unearth the hero within the audience. The public adopted the series which cleared the way for them after all the failures they faced. They saw the heroic deeds, and ideal hidden in themselves. Important historical figures of our history are included in the series. “(Koçak 6 Jan. 2017, My Translation)

According to Tekden, the philosophy which created the Ottoman dynasty is the philosophy of *Resurrection: Ertuğrul*. He also mentioned that we need to protect our youth and children, and this can only happen if more projects like *Resurrection: Ertuğrul* is produced. He also indicated that the government should dominate the social media to see the type of programs young generations follow, that we need to learn what our children need and try to be on the same wavelength with them. In order to do this, some alternatives are needed, and Tekden says that is what they did with *Resurrection: Ertuğrul*. He said that instead of complaining about *The Magnificent Century*, he and his partner went into the cinema sector and created a more powerful production than *The Magnificent Century* and it groveled on the ground (Koçak 2017).

The goal of the government seems to be shaping the thoughts of the young generation. A character of the *Payitaht* series, Ömer, who saved the sultan from an assassination, represents the youth that sustains the state:” I will not question the traitors, will not carry them to court, I will execute when I see a betrayal.”. With his remarks, he shows that he does not recognize the superiority of law. According to the series foreign powers try to change the youth against the state. In order to take down Abdülhamid, they plan to change the nation and the youth that supports him (Korucu 2019, 56-57).

That is why, Erdogan and the members of AKP claim that the events in *The Magnificent Century* series were inaccurate; because *The Magnificent Century* showed a different side to history that can affect the young generation negatively. Their concerns about the popularity of the series made them see the potential of the television industry. The success of *The Magnificent Century* opened new opportunities for the government even though they criticized it. This criticism shaped their ideas of what “proper history” should be like, and *Resurrection: Ertuğrul* was the result of this debate that surfaced during the broadcast of *The Magnificent Century* series. Looking at the support it gained from the government, we can

say that *Resurrection: Ertugrul* shows the “proper” history that is promoted by Erdogan and his supporters.

In his talk in 3<sup>rd</sup> National Cultural Assembly, Erdogan mentioned the plan of the government regarding social media and television:

“We cannot overlook the negative effects of the internet, television and social media on our culture. However, we need to try and find ways to transfer our culture to the new generation using these opportunities. We remember the effects of the series such as *Osmancık* and *Kucuk Aga*, which tells us the history of the Ottomans, on a generation, and the series that narrates the War of Independence. Now, *Resurrection: Ertugrul* appeals to the audiences in our country and beyond. If my 6 and 12-year-old grandchildren watch this series not just on the day it is broadcasted but also its re-runs; it means that our goal is accomplished. In that case, we need to include these(series) more in our investments.” (TCCB 3 Mar. 2017, My Translation)

Erdogan’s remarks show that the government found a way to influence the youth by using the media and television. He sees the popularity of *Resurrection: Ertugrul* among the young generation as a success. As I mentioned above, producer of the *Resurrection: Ertugrul* series was a deputy of the AKP. His remarks show that they were disturbed by the popularity of *The Magnificent Century* series, and worried about its effect on young generation. Thus, they tried to create alternatives for *The Magnificent Century*, and succeeded in *Resurrection: Ertugrul*. However, let us not forget that the series started after *The Magnificent Century* series finished. We will never know who would grovel, if the two series were broadcasted at the same time.

In his talk in 3<sup>rd</sup> National Cultural Assembly, Erdogan also mentioned that they needed to be careful about the works that is incompatible with “our “culture. He also stated that they spend 176,4 million dollars to the film industry.

According to the reports of the Cinema, Radio and Television Council, Turkish TV Series sector is needed to be used for promoting, endearing and supporting Turkish Culture and civilization, and Turkish brands. The sector also should be inspected in terms of the contents of the series; whether they conform to universal human values or not. The reports from the assembly and Erdogan’s opening talk points to a new approach that aims to use the TV series

sector for power. *The Magnificent Century* is the project that made the government see the potential of the TV series industry.

Why did the government decided to use the TV for influencing the other countries? The answer lies in the fact that TV series including *The Magnificent Century* has been quite popular in the regions that the AKP government is trying to have power. At this point, another question comes to mind: What kind of power can the TV series have?

I mentioned above that the report for the 3<sup>rd</sup> National Cultural Assembly emphasizes the need for promoting Turkey as a new brand internationally, and this promotion activities are based on the cultural and historical values including the language and literature, archeological assets, art, architecture, cousine, traditions, believes and so on. One of the ways to introduce all of this is to use the TV series. While the government did not support the TV series sector, they realized their potential for influencing the international audiences. *The Magnificent Century* plays an important part in this discovery. The series that are broadcasted abroad did not interest the government as much as *The Magnificent Century*. The reason for this attention was the conflict the series created about the vision of Erdogan and AKP government. The series has become a part of the popular culture domestically as well as internationally despite all the criticism. Thus, *The Magnificent Century* series was considered a tool for soft power.

### **4.3. Soft Power of the Magnificent Century**

Soft power is a term used by Joseph Nye. According to Nye, a state may achieve the outcomes it prefers in world politics because other states want to follow it or have agreed to a situation that produces such effects. In other words, Soft power is the ability to attract rather than coerce. A state can use its culture, ideology, and institutions to change the political outcomes to its favor (Nye 1990, 153-71).

The “soft power” and “public diplomacy” were two core concepts used by AKP in foreign policy. A countries soft power capacity defines the success of its public diplomacy, thus public diplomacy is a platform for practicing soft power (Kalin 2011, 10). Ahmet



Davutoğlu's "zero problems with neighbors" policy which draws from Turkey's historical, geographic, and cultural ties to nearby states was the first step of soft power. Davutoğlu stated that the unique combination of history and the geography of Turkey brings with it the responsibilities of a peace maker and intermediary. Turkey's attempts in public diplomacy aimed to create new spheres of influence (Kalın 2011, 7). Basis of this influence is the cultural and historical values of which comes from the origins of the country. It seems that Turkish soft power derives its appeal from the Ottoman heritage. Turkey's descent from the Ottoman experience results in genuine familiarity with a large geographic area extending from the Balkans to the Middle East (Kalın 2011, 10). At this point a new tool enters the stage: TV series or soap operas.

Soap operas became an important aspect of the Turkish soft power. The success of the series such as *Gümüş* (Silver), *Kurtlar Vadisi* (Valley of the Wolves), *Aşk-ı Memnu* (Forbidden Love), and *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* (The Magnificent Century) opened the eyes of the politicians to the potential of these entertainment products. Turkish TV series, which are currently aired in more than 150 countries, have achieved great success by reaching export figures of over \$350 million per year (Daily Sabah 2018). The final episode of the series *Silver* (Noor in Arabic) was viewed by 85 million people throughout the Arabic Geography (Vatikiotis and Yörük 2013, 2364) *The Magnificent Century* was the most watched drama in Bosnia Herzegovina. It is the most exported Turkish TV series (Sozcu 2018).

The massive export of Turkish soap operas is one of the reasons that caused a rise in Turkey's cultural prestige and attractiveness (Jabbour 2017, 150). According to Jabbour, whoever dominates the soap opera industry and exports their series to the region can to a degree spread their worldview, and values to the Arab audience and build cultural prestige. In this regard, Turkish soap operas became a major player in the Arab soap opera market.

*The Magnificent Century* is one of the series that helped to promote the image of Turkey as an ideal type of society that Muslims and Arabs long for. Khulud Abu Hommos, executive vice president of the OSN network, states that this series is a real phenomenon, it is also a kind of fairy tale, mixing romance with history, but it has political relevance in the Arab world where people are frustrated with the political situation, it gives them pride in Muslim history - it portrays Muslim leaders as just and fair" (Channel24 2013).

It is obvious that the series plays an important part as it portrays the Ottoman Empire as a legitimate power and a perfect representative of the interests of Arabs and Muslims worldwide. It is also noted that the series does not portray any negative encounter regarding the Arab states. It even does not portray any Arab characters in the show. In this regard, the series is a work of historiography—in the sense that it promotes one vision and one interpretation of Ottoman history (Jabbour 2017, 153).

The producer of the series mentioned in an interview that his main objective was to create a series that everyone could relate to. Turks would be attracted by the rediscovery of their past; Muslim and Turkmen populations in the Arab world, in Central Asia , and in the Balkans would identify with the story as they share the same identity, history, and values as Turkey, while other minorities in the neighborhood will at least be attracted by the setting, the sound and light effects, and the expensive costumes and accessories (a budget of \$70 million). (Jabbour 2017, 154).

While the Turkish government did not help the producers, even criticized the series they also used them to their advantage. Bülent Arınç, who was the Vice Prime Minister at the time, criticized the series by saying that he was concerned and saddened by the fact that a person like Sultan Suleyman, whose period is named as magnificent and who is renowned not just nationally but globally, is shown as a man who is fond of alcohol and woman and who acts in his relationships in a way that he had not the hearth to say. He also stated that they will begin a legal process against the series (Radikal 2011).

Two years later during his visit to Bosnia Herzegovina he praised the series saying that he saw the billboards and adding that we have good series which will continue (Haberturk 21 February 2013). In another event he stated that the series is not a documentary but a fiction. Adding different plots is a necessity. In a documentary, fidelity to the history, identity, and the historical figures is a must. However, Tv series or films are exempt from this rule. The decision of the RTUK is a right one in this regard. They decided that this series is a fiction and it is not right to intervene with it (Cumhuriyet 2013).

The account of Arınç shows that politicians were aware of the influence of the Turkish TV series on the countries that played a part in their public policy, namely Balkans and the Middle East; territories that was once part of the Ottoman Empire.

The popularity of the series goes beyond the expected, thanks to its worldwide success. It became popular not just in the Middle East and Balkans but all over the world. The owner of the Global Agency İzzet Pinto stated that they exported Turkish series to more than a hundred countries. *The Magnificent Century* is the series that brings the most income. It gained the title of the most exported tv series. It was exported to nearly a hundred countries (Aksam 2018).

In Chile, the series was named “El Sultan” and gained a lot of attention. Its success can be found when we consider the comments of the viewers. A dedicated viewer of Turkish dramas says that the Turkish productions are very high quality and do not have the Hollywood clichés and stereotypes, adding that when she started to watch these dramas, she realized how tired she was with all the violence and sex of American TV (Tali 8 2016) The series is not only popular in South America, but in North America too. MundoFox broadcasts the series as Suleiman- El Gran Sultan, for the Spanish speaking viewers. *The Magnificent Century* also broadcasts in Italy, Spain and even Japan (Milliyet 2014).

*The Magnificent Century* series started airing in Bangladesh under the name “Sultan Suleiman” in November 2015. Harem scenes were criticized by people stating that it undermines family values. The series also made an impact on the local industry causing half of the studios to shut down due to lack of work (Vatan 2017). While the reactions of the audiences who are not familiar with the Ottoman history tends to be positive, the audiences from the countries who has Muslim population tends to be more critical. Harem scenes and the portrayal of a Muslim ruler is problematic for the viewers in Islamic countries. They criticized the way Sultan Suleyman is portrayed as a womanizer. However, as the series progressed and Suleyman went into the battlefield Muslim audiences’ reactions too changed. Ottoman Empire was the super power of Islam, and the Turks the soldiers of the faith (TurkishCelebrityNews 2016). On the other hand, Christian viewers are mesmerized by the costumes and accessories that the characters wear, the attractive theme songs, as well as the beauty of the actors and actresses, in particular, Meryem Uzerli playing the role of Hurrem (Jabbour 2017, 153).

Comments about the series shows that the show was appreciated by most thanks to the actors and the production. Most of the foreign viewers realize that this series are not historically

accurate. However, this does not change the fact that they get some information about history of the Ottomans through this series. Some viewers also stated that they learned about the Turkish language thanks to this series (Youtube 2015). While the audiences from overseas like the series and are aware that it is for entertainment purposes, viewers from the countries that had a common history with the Ottoman Empire is not that understanding. The line between the fact and the fiction blurs for the viewers. A viewer who identifies himself as a descendant of Vlad Tepes accuses Turks for being barbaric and brutal, saying that only good Turk is a dead Turk (Youtube 2014). Macedonian Information and Society Minister Ivo Ivanovski said that 500 years of Turkish servitude is enough for Macedonians. Their own programs are broadcasted after midnight because of series like *Magnificent Century*. Thus, Macedonian government banned the broadcast of Turkish programs (Hurriyet Daily News 2012a). Another account comes from the Thessaloniki Metropolitan Bishop Anthimos who accuses the Greeks who watch the series of surrendering to Turks (Hurriyet Daily News 2012b). Despite the critics *Magnificent Century* preserved its popularity. Macedonian channels dubbed the series, Greek audience finds the series more successful than Greek ones. The series also shows the similarities between the two cultures. In addition, fans of the series started to learn Turkish by watching the series and enrolling in language courses (Dabilis 2012).

Looking at the comments, we can assume that *The Magnificent Century* opened the eyes of the Turkey's neighbors to the similarities between the cultures. Most people who follow Turkish soaps in Bosnia, Macedonia, Kosovo and Serbia say that they admire the family relations depicted in them, as well as cultural similarities (Hamzic 2013). It was indeed the reason behind the promotion of the series. Izzet Pinto who distributes the series to other countries pointed out that they were showing the beautiful scenery, lifestyle and the traditions of "our country". So that we have great influence on people through soft power (Williams 2013).

The series are both criticized and loved universally. Fans of the series goes to extreme degrees to show their support. *The Magnificent Century* was broadcasted in Kirghizstan longer than any other TV series (21 October 2013- 21August 2016). After the third season, its broadcast was stopped. People reacted to this by sending letters to the channel and

threatening that they were going to burn themselves publicly (Sydygalieva 2017,62). The broadcast of the series in Kirghizstan was part of the Culture and Tourism Ministry's plan to promote Turkey in foreign countries. The success of the series in the Middle East and Balkans and the number of tourists that came to Turkey thanks to this series showed the government that soap operas can be used for influencing the countries in favor of Turkey (Ağırseven and Örki 2017, 849).

Producers of *The Magnificent Century* seem to follow the political agenda of the government to promote the series worldwide. In his speech about the effect of TV series on Turkey, Izzet Pinto stated that an increase of 350% in number of tourists coming from the Middle East was observed in five years. He claimed that Turkey managed this thanks to the TV series and even concept parties were organized on *The Magnificent Century* (Ağırseven and Örki 2017, 849).

At this point, while the government criticized the series within the borders of Turkey, they were unable to do so in foreign countries, especially the ones they were aiming to influence using soft power. The success of the Turkish soap operas made the government see their potential. Since the public diplomacy focused on the Ottoman and Islamic heritage, *The Magnificent Century* fits with the political agenda. Jabbour analyzes the script of the series and shows that the scenario plays into the hands of politicians:

“An in-depth analysis of the script shows that Muhteşem Yüzyıl portrays the Ottoman Empire—and, by inference, Turkey—as a legitimate power and a perfect representative of the interests of Arabs and Muslims worldwide. Hence, by emphasizing the historical ties between Turks and Arabs under the Ottoman Empire, and by portraying Turkey as heir to the Caliphate—an institution that defended Muslims and spread the word of Islam, Muhteşem Yüzyıl attempts to appeal to Muslims in the Arab world, who have long suffered from a lack of credible leadership. It is noteworthy that the series underlines the positive side of the Ottoman past, and ignores its “dark side” and the oppression the Sultan-Caliphs practiced over Arab territories.” (Jabbour 2017, 153)

We can see that the plot of the series was created considering the today's issues. Critics believe that the success of the series lies in its being modeled on today's practices. Hürrem who is a favorite of the audience, enters the Harem as a slave and manages to succeed to become the Sultan's wife. Her story could be that of any woman living in a modern society

who is offered the possibility of “empowerment” at work or family life only through competing with and defeating other women (Kaynak 2015, 241-242). Hurrem Sultan’s portrayal seem to gain her the support of the audience. Even her role in the death of Mustafa did not diminish the love of the viewers. Most of the commentators on YouTube accused Sultan Suleyman who killed his own son saying that he was a murderer. The reason behind the negative comments was mostly about the deaths of Shahzade Mustafa and Bayezid. Surprisingly, all the commentators stated that if Mehmet, Mustafa or Bayezid took the throne, Ottoman Empire would continue to be a great power. Selim was the last candidate for everyone who watched the series (Youtube 2016). All of this shows that the plot of the series leads people to think about the history and Ottoman Empire considering today’s norms. It is not surprising that *The Magnificent Century* was the most exported series of Turkey, for it contains stories everyone could relate to no matter their religion, nationality, and ethnicity.

Regardless of the success of the series and its appeal to the Middle Eastern audiences, Tayyip Erdogan still criticized the series. The reason behind Erdogan’s remarks was the reactions to the Turkish foreign policy. Opposing parties’ questions about Turkish government’s meddling in the affairs of Gazza and Syria were the starting point of Erdogan’s criticism of the series. He said that it is unseemly for the government to sit back and watch the cruelties of the Syrian government and added that it was history that made them responsible for the affairs of Lebanon, Iraq, Kosovo, and so on (Hurriyet 2012). His mention of *The Magnificent Century* series during his talk was related to these issues, and he was accused of changing the political agenda (Toksabay 2012). Erdogan knew the popularity of *The Magnificent Century* in foreign countries, however, his image of Sultan Suleyman conflicted with the image created by the series. It seems that the line between the truth and reality blurred for the politicians too, if we consider the criticism of Erdogan.

The success of the series was in part related to the characterization of the historical figures. While the popularity of the Magnificent Century was rising, Turkish foreign policy started to fail. Thus, using the soap operas for soft power seemed to be in vain, for they did not gain Turkey any political favors. Turkish foreign policy in fact, affected the soap opera industry

negatively.<sup>73</sup> Arab Spring affected the prestige of Turkey in the region. Thus, the Turkish products were boycotted. People in the Middle East did not change their political opinions after they watched Turkish soap operas. What they did was to stir the curiosity of the Arab and Muslim populations about Turkey. This “soft power” has succeeded in building a certain “brand” image of Turkey (Jabbour 2016, 19).

As mentioned earlier, regardless of the reasons behind the success of soap operas and Turkish governments’ soft power agenda; soap operas created an image of Turkey in the eyes of the foreign audiences, while the soft power itself failed, especially in the Muslim world. This shows that cultural popularity and power of any form does not follow each other (Vatikiotis and Yörük 2013, 2374-2378).

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<sup>73</sup> During a UN meeting Erdoğan refused to sit with Sisi at the same table, after this event Turkish soap opera broadcasts were stopped in Egypt. (Tur 2015, 80).

## 5. CONCLUSION

*The Magnificent Century* TV series can be considered the most successful historical series in the Turkish television sector. The series cost 130 million Turkish liras in total. Since January 2011, from the first day it is broadcasted, the series remained at the top of the rating list for each episode. Supporting cast through four seasons were 50.000. The costumes for the series were designed from 50.000 meters of fabric. 5.000 costumes, 4000 quilted turbans, and 1000 swords were produced. They also used 100.000 meters of fabric for the decorations. They built 5 Ottoman Palaces for the show, preparing 10 different locations for each episode (CNNTURK 2014b).

The representation of the historical characters and event in the series caused a lot of debates and criticism. When we examine the series, we can see that for some of the audience, the perception of history changed. Starting from the broadcast of its trailer, the audience was attracted to the possibilities it represented. It was a work of fiction which the audience can empathize with. The characters started from a nuclear family, Suleyman-Mahidevran-Mustafa- Ibrahim-, and became a power of their own. While the story evolved, characters were also affected by the changes in their lives: Suleyman became a Sultan, Ibrahim a grand vizier, and a new character came to the capital who would become the biggest player of all: Hurrem.

The scenarist of the series was free to construct a world around Hurrem, because there is not enough data about the life of women in the palace. Okay used her imagination, which is a little present-centered, to combine history with fiction. However, from their costume to the tools they used for dinner, the series did not use the 16<sup>th</sup> century materials (Haberturk 2019). Its predecessor *The Tudors* series was more successful in reflecting the court life and using



appropriate materials, except the costumes and carriages which belonged mostly to the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Erdem 2019,160).

I believe that the scenarist of the series wanted to show the similarities between two courts when she decided to write a scenario. *The Tudors* series was a source of inspiration for Meral Okay. The similarities in the storyline is an indication of her intend. She wanted to include the Ottomans in the power game. Thus, she wrote about the era of Sultan Suleyman who was named as “Suleyman the Magnificent”.

Another reason for choosing the reign of Suleyman was to dramatize the life of the historical figures seen as national figures, in other words: private life of Sultan Suleyman. *The Magnificent Century* series carries the same tones with *The Tudors* in terms of the plot structures and storylines, at least at first. I mentioned some of the similarities between the two series in the previous chapters. However, the trend of humanizing and portraying the private life of a sovereign does not only belong to these two series.

*The Tudors* series was not the first popular historical TV series. Before its broadcast, series such as *Rome* (2005-2007) and *Spartacus* (2010-2013) gained a lot of attention from the audience. In recent year; series such as *Reign* (2013-2017) which focuses on the struggles of Mary the Queen of Scots, and *The Crown* (2016- ); on Elizabeth II has been quite popular. Let us not forget about the popular series *Outlander* (2014-), *Game of Thrones* (2011-2019), and *Vikings* (2013-) which are also historical.

The broadcast of *The Magnificent Century* is in the middle of this popular period of historical TV series. It seems that the producers of *The Magnificent Century* saw an opportunity to promote the series with its historical setting, and dramatic storyline, and they used its similarity to *The Tudors* TV series in order to interest the audience, or they intentionally created similarities, we can only guess.

How did this popularity was reflected in the Turkish televisions? After the broadcast of *The Magnificent Century*, Ottoman themed series were started to be made. However, most of these productions were short-lived. *Fatih* (2013) was aired for 5 episodes, while *Mehmet the Conquerer* (2018) lasted for 6 episodes. Both series were about Mehmet II. There was also a

parody written by Gani Mujde just after the broadcast of *The Magnificent Century*, named *Harem* (2012).

There are also alternative series that are produced by TRT, Turkish National Television, *Once Upon a Time Ottomans: Kiyam* (2012), which lasted only 2 episodes, *Filinta* (2014-2016), and two other series which I mentioned before *Resurrection: Ertugrul* and *Payitaht: Abdülhamid*. It is obvious that the Turkish television channels wanted to catch the same success as *The Magnificent Century*. In case of TRT, it was also a way to find an alternative to undermine the success of *The Magnificent Century*, for the series aired in TRT is supported by the government and they would support, and they did, such a project if we look at their criticism of *The Magnificent Century*.

*The Magnificent Century* created a debate about the fiction and history. The government emphasized that the events seen in the series were all fictitious, and that the representation of the characters were wrong. Although, the critics were mostly from the conservative groups, there were also many seculars who criticized the series. However, this debate inevitably turned into a debate of “we” and “you”: the seculars and conservatives. Looking at the reaction of the people from different ideologies we can say that *The Magnificent Century* “becomes a fictional point of reference in terms of what history must not have looked like” for the people who consider themselves as conservatives (Ergin and Karakaya 2017, 57).

I do not think the scenarist, or the producers of the series tried to teach history or wanted to popularize it or were concerned about questions about the accuracy of history. Their focus was on the dramatization of the events. They just wanted to keep up with the trend of historical films and TV series which I mentioned above. Unfortunately, Meral Okay passed away due to cancer during the second season of the series. Afterwards, the storyline had some changes. Another change occurred when Tuncel Kurtiz who played Ebu Suud, passed away. Instead of finding a new actor, they used letters to show Ebu Suud’s role in the plot, such as his approval of the execution of Suleyman’s sons Mustafa and Bayezid.

The change in the scenarist cracked the fictional world Meral Okay planned. In the last season; the directors of the series, Yağmur and Durul Taylan, stopped directing, opting to support Mert Baykal and Yağız Alp Akaydın who became the directors. I think these changes

was a result of the producers' effort to satisfy the demands of the government, and the critics. The criticism about the series lessens in the last season, we can say that they succeeded in this respect.

The series was an eye-opener for the government because they realized the potential of the cinema and television industry. The TV series produced in Turkey is exported to more than 150 countries. Thus, the sector plays an important role in the cultural and economic progress of the countries. In 2002, the number of the national films was 9 in Turkey; in 2017, it was 148. The number in the audiences has risen from 2 million to 40 million. Turkey is on the top of list in the Europe for watching national movies with a percentage of %56 (TBMM 2019). The reason behind these improvements is the support of the government. They support the series, films, and project that parallels the ideas of Tayyip Erdogan, such as *Resurrection: Ertuğrul*, and *Payitaht: Abdülhamid*. *The Magnificent Century* series was not supported by the government; however, it still changed the image of Turkey in the foreign countries.

In January 2019, a proposed law regarding the cinema and television sector passed from the parliament (Yenisafak 2019). They changed the word fiction to fictional in the definition of the cinema film. The law proposes to form "support" councils for determining the projects that the government will support. They will organize a Commission of Supporting Foreign Movies and TV series. The commission will evaluate and rate the films and series produced in Turkey in order to show them. If they are found inappropriate for displaying, they will not be shown, or be a part of the commercial circulation. Another change is that, for filming a commission for coordinating filming will be formed. They will determine the price list, and the permissions for filming they are responsible for (TBMM 2019).

This law means that the government will be able to control the film and television sector however they want. They can ban the series like *The Magnificent Century*. In other words, they will show the series infused by the ideas of the government.

The success of *The Magnificent Century* resulted in the production of the TRT series I mentioned above. Since the Gezi Park protests of 2013, government officials defy global powers and international media, sending mixed messages about the position of Turkey towards the West about government's Islamic solidarity or emphasis on the Ottoman legacy

also does not work in a regional neighborhood that is in constant change after the Arab Spring (Cevik and Seib 2015, 227).

On the other hand, production of *Resurrection: Ertuğrul* and *Payitaht: Abdülhamid* points to a new effort to influence the masses whether they are local or international. The government uses these series to plant their ideas in the minds of young generation which they plan to bring together under “one nation, one flag, one motherland, one state” which is far from the Ottoman legacy. Instead they turn to the roots of the Ottoman Empire, to that mythical period of foundation in order to inflict their populism. With the power of the youth they can stay in power and implement their other ideas which we are not aware now.

I mentioned that the line between the fact and fiction blurs even for the government. If we remember Erdogan’s criticism about *The Magnificent Century* TV series and its portrayal of Sultan Suleyman who Erdogan names as “our” ancestors. As I pointed out Erdogan uses the term documentary while talking about the series. I wondered if it was just a coincidence or not. Does Erdogan believe that the series are accurate, even after the producers said that it was a work of fiction, but tries to keep it from the public, or does he think that it is fictional, but the producers are claiming that it is a documentary?

The people in Turkey has an obsessed relationship with history. They do not have any knowledge about it, they do not care, when their children want to study history, they refuse them, yet when someone says something about their history indicating that they have no idea about it, they act like they care (Erdem 2019, 55-56). I think looking at the comment Erdogan makes we can say that he is at this turn. The Sultan Suleyman he imagines and accept as his “ancestor” is a fictional character just like the character in *The Magnificent Century* series. That Suleyman spends 30 years on horseback conquering all the lands he can, spreading the grandeur of Ottomans and so on. At this point while trying to differentiate the fact from fiction, Erdogan himself confuses the real with the imagined.

In this thesis, I tried to show the thin line between the fact and fiction using the case of *The Magnificent Century* series as an example. The relationship between history and fiction has been debated for decades and the one thing we know is that, history uses fiction in order to complete its stories.

I mentioned Hayden White's thoughts on history in the introduction. He believes that history is a narrative discourse and it is as much as invented as found. However, historical narrative is different from the fictional narrative and we should not understand White's remarks as fictional narrative. Historians use facts to create their own narrative. They use documents and if there are gaps in these documents, they use fiction in order to give some meaning to the document, for without a flow it would stay dormant. Thus, they re-create the story they see in the document, inventing their own narration.

In a way, *The Magnificent Century* TV Series too gives us this sense. It is, clearly, a work of fiction, it does not aim to teach history or has any claims of accuracy; however, we see different outcomes when we look at the reactions.

The different language of television and cinema reshapes the history on screen. Television is a part of our daily life and is in the center of our homes. This gives the audience a sense of intimacy. Audiences see the characters they watch on the screen as member of their family and emphasize with them. The father becomes Suleyman, the mother Hurrem, the daughter Mihrimah, and so on. This can change the perception of some people regarding history. It can also reshape their ideas about the historical figures.

*The Magnificent Century* manages to change the image of Sultan Suleyman in the minds of the audience. Most of the viewers see him as a father who killed his son, while the others see him as a man who sacrificed a lot to keep his power.

This was one of the criticisms that was directed towards *The Magnificent Century*: its effect on the mind of the audiences, that it would change the image of Sultan Suleyman as it did. However, Thanks to this series the critics also know what they wish to show to the audience, and what is the proper history. If the success of the series *Resurrection: Ertugrul* and *Payitaht: Abdülhamid* continues, they can impose the ideas of the government using similar methods. There is already one series on the way: *Resurrection: Osman*.

Can it be said that there will be more TV series with ahistorical narratives, anachronisms, fictitious elements; as much as historical settings, costumes, kings, and queens. The *Magnificent Century* started the game of thrones, and who will continue this dangerous power game?

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