KADİR HAS UNIVERSITY

SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES

PROGRAM OF CINEMA AND TELEVISION

TURKISH TELEVISION SERIAL PRODUCTION PROCESSES: LIMITATIONS ON CREATIVE PRACTICES IN THE DIGITAL ERA

AYŞE YÖRÜKOĞLU

SUPERVISORS:
ASST. PROF. ELİF AKÇALI
ASST. PROF. İREM İNCEOĞLU

MASTER'S THESIS

ISTANBUL, JULY, 2019

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MASTER'S THESIS

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies of Kadir Has University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master's in the Program of Cinema and Television

ISTANBUL, AUGUST, 2019

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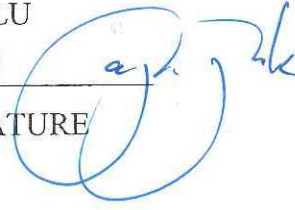
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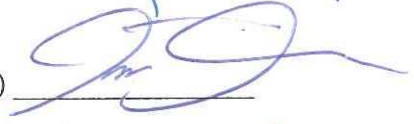
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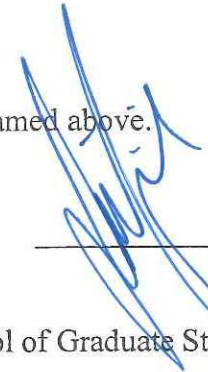(Assoc. Prof. Melis Behlil)   (Kadir Has University) _____

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ABSTRACT

Turkish television serials form a great part of the media industry of Turkey. This study focuses on the production practices of Turkish television serials that changed in the last decade due to the expansion of Turkish television serial industry and the newly emerged online streaming platforms. Serial production practices are affected and pressured by several factors within the media industry which I call external limitations; media monopolization, control mechanism RTÜK, financial concerns of television channels and producers and increasing rating competitions. These limitations affect production practices, directly and indirectly, shaping the content of productions. The establishment of three VoD platforms, Netflix Turkey and BluTV, emerged an alternative creative environment for Turkish serials. New platforms follow a different path in terms of production, adopt different business models than traditional television channels in Turkey and the ways these new platforms face with governance differs from the traditional channels' encounter. The limitations on the creative practices lessened, changed or shapeshifted but did not disappear. This thesis investigates effects of limitations on creative production practices and the reflections of those limitations on creative crew.

Keywords: VoD, online streaming, television serials, Netflix, BluTV, limitations, creative processes, production practices.

TÜRKİYE TELEVİZYON DİZİSİ YAPIM SÜREÇLERİ:
DİJİTAL ÇAĞDA YARATICI PRATİKLER ÜZERİNDEKİ KISITLAMALAR

ÖZET

Son yıllarda dijital televizyon ve internet üzerinden yayın yapan platformlar gittikçe yaygınlaşmaktadır. Türkiye'de yayın yapan üç dijital platform, Netflix Türkiye, BluTV ve Puhu TV'nin orijinal içerikler üretmeye başlamasıyla Türkiye dizi sektöründe yaratıcı süreçler anlamında değişiklikler yaşanmıştır. Yaratıcı süreçler dışsal sınırlamalarla kısıtlanmakta, dışsal faktörlerin etkileri televizyon yapımlarında kendisini göstermektedir. Medyanın tekelleşmesi, RTÜK gibi kontrol mekanizmaları, televizyon kanallarının ve dizi yapımcılarının maddi kaygıları, artan reyting rekabeti gibi kısıtlamalar hem yaratıcı süreçleri hem de yapılan dizilerin içeriğini belirgin bir şekilde değiştirmektedir. Tektipleşmiş hikayeler, benzer karakter ve konular ana akım televizyon kanallarını sarmış durumdadır. Dijital platformlar, ekonomik yapıları, içerik beklentileri ve yaratıcı süreçler bakımından farklılık göstermektedir. Bu çalışma VoD platformların Türkiye'ye girişi ile değişen yaratıcı süreçleri incelerken sınırlamaların dizi üretim pratikleri üzerindeki etkisini araştırmaktadır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: VoD, dijital platformlar, televizyon dizileri, Netflix, BluTV, sınırlamalar, yaratıcı süreçler, üretim pratikleri, prodüksiyon süreçleri.

To infinity and beyond

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AGB	Audits of Great Britain
A-VoD	Advertisement Based Video on Demand
IPTV	Internet Protocol Television
ITU	İstanbul Teknik Üniversitesi (Istanbul Technical University)
OTT	Over the Top
RTÜK	Radyo Televizyon Üst Kurulu (Radio Television Supreme Council)
SES	Socio Economic Status
S-VoD	Subscription Based Video on Demand
TMSF	Tasarruf Mevduatı Sigorta Fonu (Savings Deposit Insurance Fund)
TV	Television
T-VoD	Transactional Based Video on Demand
VoD	Video on Demand

1. INTRODUCTION

The constant evolution of broadcasting and narrowcasting systems have been transforming content production and aggregation styles, creating in its wake alternatives to what is generally referred to as traditional television. This is most clearly charted in relation to the recent establishment of online streaming platforms in Turkey, which not only affect the content consumption practices but also alter the production practices and kind of content that is created. In this sense, the establishment of three online streaming platforms in Turkey, respectively Netflix Turkey, BluTV and Puhu TV, can be examined with regards to forming a window of opportunities for TV serials by producing original content in alternative styles, genres and forms.

In order to understand these emerging alternate styles and forms, this thesis asks the following questions and seeks to understand the production processes of Turkish serials from a new perspective. How do the newly emerged online streaming platforms in Turkey alter the content and production processes of serials? What has changed with their establishment in terms of production processes and creative practices for people who work in the making of these serials?

The worldwide shift to online platforms as outlets for audiovisual media occurred in the last decade. It is significant because this new outlet brought many novelties; the production, distribution, financing and consumption practices are altered. Since this shift happened in the last ten years, there is a limited amount of study conducted on this topic. In 2017, with the establishment of local streaming platforms Blu TV and Puhu TV and the activation of global streaming giant Netflix's Turkey branch, the discussions about television serials flared up. Several conferences and panels were organized investigating production and consumption practices of online media and streaming. Galatasaray University Communications Faculty organized a conference named "Digital Transformation in Television Broadcasting", Istanbul Foundation for Culture and Arts (IKSV) organized several panels on this digital transformation of serials.

There is presently a collection of data and research which has been carried out about the serial industry of Turkey (Dağtaş, 2008; Selin Tüzün Ateşalp, 2016; Yanardağoğlu & Karam, 2013; Yörük & Vatikiotis, 2013) but those studies do not cover the newly emerged online streaming platforms and their original serials. In case of studies about

Turkish online streaming platforms, there are only a few theses (Aral, 2018; Dönmez, 2019). Previous work only focused on the convergence of television and online streaming platforms and the consumption practices of the online platforms. However, there is still a need for a study that focuses on the industrial practices of newly emerged online streaming platforms. This thesis aims to fill the literature gap by taking the topic of online streaming platform and their original serials and focusing on creative industrial practices. The aim of this study is to evaluate the setbacks that creative crew face during production processes of online streaming original serials.

In this thesis, I argue that in Turkey, serial production practices are affected by several factors within the media industry, which can be grouped into two categories as external and internalized limitations. In my thesis I have found that the external limitations for traditional television emerge from four major sources which can be categorized as such: RTÜK and Radio Television Law, media monopolization in Turkey, a traditional TV channel's economy and the rating system in Turkey. On online streaming platforms there are different practices and a different comprehension about the platform. Creative crew saw online streaming as a much more liberated media outlet. Yet, the external limitations are still effective on creative crew who work for online platforms. RTÜK is not yet effective on online platforms but there are production habits that are shaped by limitations and internalized by the creative crew, there is a lack of monopolization but still a few options since there are only a few platforms, different economical concerns, a lack of rating anxiety but still an effective audience quantity anxiety. In this sense, it can be said that, the creative limitations mentioned before are lessened, changed, shapeshifted but they are still effective. In the light of these differences it can be said that there seems to be a different creative environment for creative crew who work for online streaming platforms. It is true that these new platforms opened a door for new possibilities by allowing content to differentiate from the traditional television productions, but online streaming platforms still bear their own dilemmas.

This thesis tries to understand the creative environment and production processes that changed with the introduction of online streaming platforms in Turkey. However, the data acquired by previously mentioned conferences, panels and studies were not sufficient to the extent of this thesis. Since this study is an industrial research which investigates the production practices, relies on a theoretical framework of production studies supported

by interviews that were made with people who work for this industry. 14 semi-structured in-depth interviews were made with scriptwriters, producers, directors and with a head of content of an online platform. The interviewees were asked the same set of questions and some extra questions were asked depending on the profession of the interviewee.[1] The interviews were done in Turkish then translated into English. Most of the interviews were conducted face to face but some of them was conducted via Skype or a phone call due to the tight schedules of interviewees.

The preference of interviewees is based on several factors. All of the interviewees had a position in production process and worked for at least one traditional television serial or an original serial on a VoD platform. The interviewees were chosen among producers, scriptwriters and directors since they are the decision makers. The interviewees were responsible from the development the main story, and they are the ones to have the power to interfere with the end product more than any other one in the crew. Although during my qualitative research I conducted face to face interviews which provided me with significant data, it should be also taken into consideration that the data obtained from semi structured in-depth interviews are based on the experiences of the individuals spoken with. It is possible that, there are different experiences and different views on the recounted issues. Even though 14 interviews are enough to reveal the big picture, there may be a need of more interviews, to be able to make a more general and solid comparison.

This thesis embodies three chapters besides introduction and conclusion. In the second chapter a brief history of the broadcast in Turkey and the media outlets that stream television serials will be reviewed. This brief history will cover three stages that have an effect on broadcasting in general and serials to be more specific: single channel TRT period, the period of private channels and the period that starts with the emergence of online streaming platforms. In the third chapter the external limitations on the creative production practices of television serials will be presented. In the fourth chapter the effects of these limitations will be evaluated with the support of the interviews that have been made with people who work for the serial industry.

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[1] See Appendix D for the interview questions.

1. A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF TELEVISION IN TURKEY

Broadcasting in Turkey has gone through several phases and looking into these phases can actively illustrate the changing media industry and its practices. In order to overview broadcasting in Turkey, three eras that affected serial production will be explained briefly: single channel TRT period, the period of private channels, and the newly introduced period of internet television. Each era has different characteristics as well as different approaches to the content and production. Since this thesis investigates the changing production practices, it is necessary to understand the milestones of broadcasting in Turkey.

2.1 Single Channel Television and The Establishment of Private Channels

Turkey's broadcasting journey started in 1952 with Istanbul Technical University's biweekly trial broadcasts. These broadcasts were limited to a certain region due to the technical conditions at the time. On May 1, 1964 Turkish Radio Television Corporation (TRT) was established as an autonomous legal entity with a private radio television law. TRT was responsible to conduct television and radio broadcasts on behalf of the Turkish state as stated in the law. Four years after its foundation in 1968, TRT Ankara Television started its regular broadcasts only for several hours every day ("TRT Tarihi," 2019). In 1968 TRT Ankara Television broadcasted 453 hours and 56 minutes of content. The majority of this content was local productions. (Cankaya, 1993, 224)

Until the emergence of private television channels in the 1990s, TRT was the only broadcaster that broadcast in Turkish language. In 1990, the first private television channel of Turkey, Star 1 by Magic Box was established, and with its first broadcasts the channel got the public interest immediately (Aziz, 1999, 103). Star 1's success and popularity lead the way for others: In 1992 other private channels like Teleon and Show TV established, followed by several others and the first pay-TV channel Cine5. With the launch of private channels, audiences have experienced more channel and content diversity than they have ever seen before. (Şeker, 2016) Star 1 and many other private channels broadcasted from out of Turkey through satellite and were considered illegal

until 1994, which marks the date for the Radio Television law No. 3984. This was a major influence on the programming of the private channels.

State-owned TRT's approach to broadcasts was shaped by laws; TRT followed state policies and aimed to educate citizens. In 1982, one of the main goals of TRT broadcasts was to care about the importance of "necessity" and "usefulness" principles and to choose outsourced content in a way that does not contradict the traditions and customs of our society and the understanding of morality. (Cankaya, 2003, 185) Thus, in its first years, TRT's programming schedule was filled with educational programs and the channel broadcasted almost nothing entertaining. Star 1 and other private television channels approached programming in a different manner, since they were free of laws and regulations when they were first established. These channels aimed not to educate citizens, but to entertain them. With this approach private channels created an alternative against the monotonous and monophonic TRT programming with their content.

In their first years, private channels are adopted a programming strategy that differentiated from the rigidness of TRT, but one major obstacle was to fill their daily flow. Private channels' search of content resulted in different practices such as adopting old Turkish films or importing shows and various content from foreign countries like USA and India. The radio television law no 3984 enacted in 1994 obliged channels to broadcast local content at a certain rate, concerning the responsibilities of the broadcaster. (Kishalı, 1998) Consequently, in the earlier years of private broadcasting in Turkey, private channels purchased thousands of Turkish films from Yeşilçam's dominant production companies such as Erler Film and Arzu Film in order to fill their daily programming schedules (Erus, 2006).

In the middle of 1990's old Turkish films and foreign shows and serials dominated private channels' weekly schedules. In the following years, starting from mid-1990s a more profitable television genre, Turkish television serials became the dominant television genre in Turkey progressively. Producing original content became one of the strongest weapons of a network to differentiate from their rivals. Ultimately, television serials became one of the prominent assets of a network to compete for higher ratings.

The very first Turkish television serial *Aşk-ı Memnu* (1974)*,* an original production adapted from a novel was produced and broadcasted by TRT 1 in 1974 (Aziz, 1999, 45). After producing its first television serial in 1974, TRT started to outsource its content, co-

producing television dramas with several local film and advertising companies in 1983. A year later they co-produced 72 episodes of 26 local television dramas; in 1987, this number increased to 171 episodes of 40 television dramas per year (Aziz, 1999, 79). After the establishment of private channels, the number of television serials increased continuously. So, it can be concluded that the local television serials/dramas have a past of almost 50 years in Turkey. In this period of 50 years, the significance of television serials has changed. In the last decade, Turkish serial industry became a huge global business and local serials became the second most watched content in Turkey after the news (*Televizyon İzleme Eğilimleri Araştıması*, 2018). The importance of original and local productions began to become clear with the increasing success of television serials in the last decade.

Today, there are four major segments of media outlets which stream or broadcast serials in Turkey, these are:

- Traditional and national television channels like ATV, Star, Kanal D, Fox TV etc.
- Video sharing websites like Youtube, where the channels or individual users share television shows and serials along with their original content.
- Illegal video sharing websites like Dizibox, Dizimag, etc.
- IPTV's that are divided in three subsections including platforms that need an external device like Tivibu, VoD services that work with OTT[2] applications and online streaming platforms like Netflix, BluTV and Puhu TV. Traditional channel's websites that stream serials are also in that category.

This segmentation for streaming media of television serials can be closely inspected in the figure 2.1 the media outlets broadcast/stream serials.

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[2] IPTV stands for internet protocol television, meaning a digital television service only available through a dedicated internet network of its own that can be used through televisions and computers. OTT stands for, over the top, this term covers online video on demand streaming platforms' applications.

Figure 2.1 The Media Outlets Broadcast/Stream Serials.
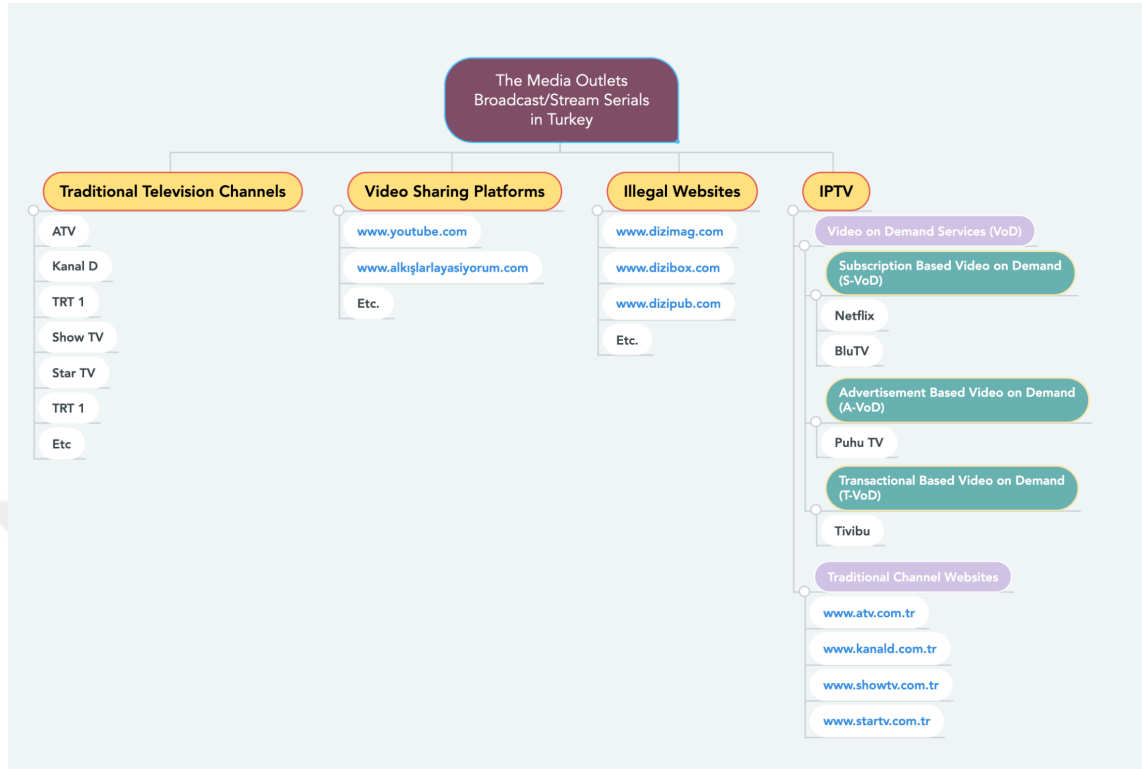
Even though there are four different segments where we can reach serials, this study focuses on VoD platforms underlining the shift from a more traditional media of television to internet platforms and the effect of this shift on production practices. Because of that reason in the following section the global and local development of online streaming platforms will be examined in a more detailed way.

2.2 The Global Development of Online Streaming Platforms

In recent years, internet television became a huge part of the worldwide shift in production and consumption of audiovisual content. The establishment of online platforms affected the production and consumption practices globally and locally. As Amanda Lotz states, "Television content was freed from the TV set in the living room" (Lotz, 2009, 56). Viewers can watch television content via multiple screens, smartphones, tablets, smart TVs, and computers, and the creative crew of online platforms are triggered to produce content accordingly. The industrial and audience practices have changed with the post-network era that Lotz describes (Lotz, 2007). With the emergence of alternative outlets, the usual production practices have changed.

Scholars looking into depicting and clarifying this new media of online streaming mostly approach these platforms with a focus on their production, distribution, financing and consumption practices. Mareike Jenner investigates the connection among TV and Video-on-Demand (VoD) platforms concentrating on production and distribution (Jenner, 2016). She further investigates the re-invention of television in the context of this new medium (Jenner, 2018). Furthermore, various researchers are distressed about the working conditions and impact of these new online streaming platforms (Hill, 2014; Usborne, 2018; Johnson, 2019; Lobato, 2019). Like these scholars' work, this thesis attempts to understand and explain the tools and novelties of online streaming platforms and the effects of the new platforms on industrial practices especially in Turkey.

2.3 Structure and Business Models of Online Streaming Platforms

In this research I have found that the business model of a medium determines its limits, the business model affects the approach to content, the way a platform or a channel produces the content. Hence, it is necessary to know the different business model of online streaming platforms in Turkey to be able to analyze them, their content and production practices more thoroughly.

VoD services adopted original programming strategy that they borrowed from Quality TV Channels[3] such as HBO and started to produce original content. In Turkey there are three platforms that produce original serials. Since this thesis focuses on the original productions of VoD platforms, only these three platforms, Netflix Turkey, BluTV and Puhu TV will be covered in this study. Global giant Netflix is the most prominent SVoD platform which has excessive subscribers. The platform actively streams and produces original content across the globe for several years. According to CNN, Netflix had more than 130 million users worldwide by January 2019 (Fiegerman, 2019)

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[3] Robert J. Thompson argues "Quality TV is defined by what it is not. It is not regular TV", it was "better, more sophisticated and more artistic than the usual network fare."(Thompson, 1996) Quality TV, differentiates itself from the traditional television by its cutting edge content and relies on the original programming. (McCabe & Akass, 2008) In the following years, quality Television discussions spread to Turkey and some scholars focused on the quality in Turkish Television (Ateşalp, 2016).

In the 2010s internet became a huge part of daily life; reaching content through internet brought many novelties for consumption and production practices. With the evolution of online streaming platforms, different media have converged and intertwined; and this evolution further complicated and broadened the audiovisual landscape both locally and globally. Traditional media forms and new platforms are now linked, and they have started to interact with each other, the boundaries between different media blurred. The content started to flow across multiple media platforms; television content became available on online platforms, and IPTV (Internet Protocol Television) and OTT (Over the Top) services became other outlets for media industries besides traditional media.

IPTV and OTT services are evolving day by day, gaining a larger local and global audience. These services give the audience the freedom of stopping, rewinding, recording and rewatching; basically arranging their own "flow" that differs from classical television flow. Tivibu established in 2010 by Turkish communication company Türk Telekom, is an example for IPTV televisions in Turkey. Video on Demand platforms, on the other hand, enable users to reach the content via open networks. OTT applications in Turkey include hybrid platforms as well as VoD platforms. Youtube is an example of a hybrid platform since it enables individual users to both upload and consume content.

VoD platforms are divided into three groups; SVoD, AVoD and TVoD platforms. There is a slight distinction between these platforms, arising from their different industrial and economic structures. Subscription-based Video on Demand (SVoD) platforms, require the user to subscribe to the service and pay a fee for a certain timespan. One of the biggest sources of income for the SVoD services is the monthly fees paid by its users. Advertisement Based Video on Demand (AVoD) platforms do not require a subscription or a monthly fee; their business model relies on the advertisements meaning their major source of income is the revenue that comes from the advertisements. Transactional Based Video on Demand (TVoD) platforms adopt a business structure that consumers pay a fee per view and the users can purchase singular content. TVoD platforms gain revenue through the fee that has been paid by the consumers. The new kind of broadcasting of VoD platforms creates a major economy on its own. The revenue of OTT TV and video services escalated to nearly 50 billion dollars in 2017 and expected to rise above 80 billion dollars in the upcoming 4 years.

In the last couple of years, Netflix started streaming in many countries, including Turkey as a result of its aggressive expansion policy. By March 2019, Netflix was available around 190 countries worldwide ("Netflix Nerelerde Mevcut?," 2019). In terms of business model, Netflix adopts a subscription-based video on demand model that requires the user's subscription to the platform. Once the users subscribe to the platform, they choose among available membership plans then start paying a monthly fee to access the content whenever they want through different devices.

Netflix produces original content as a strategy to differ from its rivals. Until now, Netflix's has hundreds of original productions involving different television genres: serials, films, documentaries, cartoons and so on. In order to integrate the audience in the countries it streams, Netflix started to produce local originals in the target countries own language. Up until 2019, Netflix produced local content in more than 17 countries, Turkey is one of them. Local original content, like *Dogs of Berlin* (2018) from Germany, *Narcos (2015-2017)* from Colombia and *Hakan the Protector (2018-...)* from Turkey, aimed for a global audience as much as they aimed for a local audience. *Hakan: The Protector* (2018-…) is the first local serial that Netflix produced after becoming active in Turkish market in 2016. According to the press releases from the platform they are currently producing the second one, *Atiye: The Gift* (TBA). These productions are co-produced with Turkish production companies in the Turkish language with a partly Turkish crew.

Other VoD platforms that function in Turkey BluTV and Puhu TV are local investments. BluTV was established in 23rd of January 2016 as an enterprise of Doğan Media Conglomerate which also owns many other media outlets such as Kanal D. But in the liquidation process of Doğan Media in 2018, BluTV reestablished as BluTV Communication and Digital Broadcasting Services Inc. This enterprise adopts a business model like Netflix. BluTV, as an SVoD platform that requires its users to subscribe to the platforms in exchange for a monthly fee[4]. The channel's major source of income is subscription fees gathered from its subscribers. BluTV actively streams and continuously produces televisual content such as serials, docu-dramas, and documentaries. BluTV, in the time span of 3 years after its establishment, has produced and streamed eight original

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[4] In the process of making corrections for this study BluTV started to rent individual content for nonsubscribers.

serials. First original serial BluTV produced and streamed was *Masum (2017),* a crime story by playwright and director Berkun Oya adapted from his own play, directed by Seren Yüce, one of the auteur directors of New Turkish Cinema. This first original from BluTV showed different characteristics than traditional television serials by means of narrative and narration; its main story, genre, editing and the features of its characters was distinctive. Original serials produced after *Masum* shows this similar edgy quality. The writers, directors and most of the crew of these serials were chosen from the people who fork for film industry not for television. BluTV produced eight original serials until June 2019 and according to Sarp Kalfaoğlu, the head of content for BluTV, the platform is currently seeking its new projects.[5]

Puhu TV was established in 2016 as an enterprise of Doğuş Media Conglomerate. This platform adopts a different business model than Netflix or BluTV. Puhu TV is an AVoD platform, the major source of income of this platform is the advertisement revenue. The platform does not require subscription or a monthly payment, instead gathers the necessary funds through advertisements. Since VoD platforms do not have a flow like traditional television, the types of advertisement and the way these advertisements appear differ. Even though Puhu TV is active since 2016, the platform stopped production after the production of three original serials: *Fi-Çi* (2017-2018)*, Dip* (2018)*,* and *Şahsiyet* (2018).

Original content, especially serials are significant for online streaming platforms as much as they are important for traditional television channels. The production practices of serials in Turkey are affected and changed with the shift from traditional television to online platforms. There are limitations on the creative production practices in Turkey affecting both traditional media and online platforms and in the following chapter I would like to focus on these limitations examining their effects on the creative processes of people who work for serials. I categorize these limitations as external and internalized limitations and I argue that these limitations have a strong effect on content. In the next chapter, before delving into the limitations, some institutions and structures within the industry that create limitations will be examined.

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[5] (S. Kalfaoglu, personal communication, December 10, 2018).

2. THE LIMITATIONS ON THE SERIAL PRODUCTION PRACTICES

Broadcasting is a very complex business where a lot of different things are intertwined. In a way, the alteration of one factor affects the whole system. It is actually difficult to distinguish a solitary explanation for the method of things. A lot of things within this industry or on the outside of it affect the production processes. There are some boundaries and restrictions on the creative industries of Turkey which I call limitations. I group these limitations as external and internalized limitations. I suggest the external limitations are setting boundaries for creative people and limit the content in different ways. These limitations arise from various sources and sets different limits to the creative products. External limitations arise from these sources: governmental institution RTÜK and its sanctions, the radio television law and its very vague clauses, monopolization of media outlets in Turkey, a television channel's economy, advertisements, changed rating measurement system and the exportation of serials.

The external limitations lead to limitations that are internalized by the crew that work for TV, in other words, external limitations trigger limitations to be internalized and manifest themselves as self-censorship mechanisms. External limitations affect the production practices, directly and indirectly, shaping the content of television productions. I believe the television serials are one of the most effected televisual content by these limitations since they are among the most profitable products of channels. It can be observed that there is an increasing uniformity in the content of serials in the last decade and non-individual pressures have a great role in this uniformity. I find Zygmunt Bauman's argument is very useful here; he divides pressures into two general categories. First of them is external constraints. He states:

> "External constraints are the elements of which individual intentions can be applied and unrealistic, and that individuals want to achieve through action are also highly likely and far less likely. The individual still pursues the goals he freely chooses; but his well-designed efforts collapse as he collides with the hard rock, power, and insurmountable wall of class or compelling instruments (Bauman, 2015, 12)."

External constraints originate from external sources and surround the individual in a way that limits the individual's freedom despite her efforts and actions. The second concept is

about the regulatory forces that tend to be internalized by the individual. According to Bauman:

> "The individual's sole motivation, expectation, hope and ambition are shaped in a special way by education, exercise and information, or just by the people around him, so that his directions cannot be said to be accidental from the beginning. This kind of de-randomization is accepted by the concepts of culture, tradition and ideology." (Bauman, 2015, 12-13)

According to Bauman, human actions are regulated by apparently external or seemingly internal influences. To the extent of this thesis, I refer the concepts that Bauman suggests as the external limitations and the internalized limitations. I think the external limitations that originate from extrinsic factors transform into internal limitations by influencing the individual and limiting her freedom and reveals in self-governance and self-censorship mechanisms. The creative industries where the individual relies heavily on her imagination, certain limitations at present affect the creative processes. One of the most important influence on the media content, a strong limitation, comes from a governmental institution RTÜK, in the next section RTÜK and its extent of power will be assessed.

3.1 The Institution of Governance: RTÜK and Its Extent of Power

In Turkey, the broadcasted content is under the governance and control of state institutions like in many other countries. Since its emergence in 1994, three years after the introduction of private channels in Turkey, Radio Television Supreme Council (RTÜK), is the most prominent institution which has power on the broadcasted content. RTÜK was established under the Law No. 3984 as a legal authority in order to regulate and supervise the television and radio channels in Turkey, and it has been effective on audiovisual content since then. Radio television law and regulations that followed law no. 3984, especially with the 2011 dated Law no. 6112 and the following omnibus bills that include televisual regulations, RTÜK's domain have expanded; thus, RTÜK's effect on broadcasters increased severely. The Radio Television law has questionable clauses regarding what can be screened on TV and it forms a major external limitation. RTÜK's extent of power and the governance style affects the channel economies and their approach to content. RTÜK's responsibilities can be described as to organize and supervise the radio and television events carried out by public or private broadcasters at
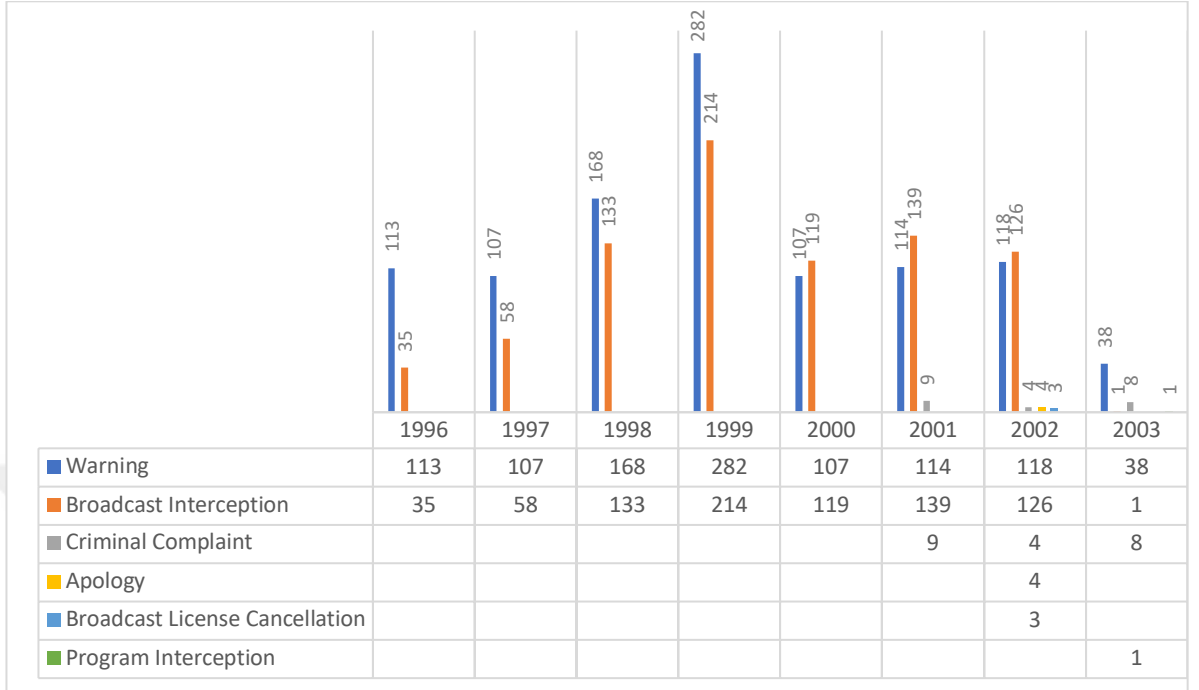
national, regional and local levels. In this sense RTÜK is the major authority in Turkey that is responsible for frequency planning, licensing and permitting the radio and television establishments, establishing the rules for private broadcasters to follow, monitoring and governing private channels and applying punishments such as canceling the licenses, giving fines, etc.

In 2011, the radio-television law no. 3984, have been replaced with the law no. 6112. This new law was enacted within the framework of European Union compliance, and it extended RTÜK's domain and range of power. Since, the change in the Radio Television Law in 2011 and acceptance of this very prominent new Radio Television Law No. 6112, the television content has adjusted itself gradually. With that comprehensive new law, with the redefined set of rules and regulations, the boundaries of broadcast content were re-established. More limits were introduced, and it set the new standards for the televisual content.

A report about the new radio television law states that the new law positions RTÜK as an inspection and censorship institution. With the additional edits the authority of RTÜK president expanded, new expert definitions were added and the employees are forced to hide information after they are disconnected with RTÜK. In this sense, RTÜK is getting far from being a transparent organization (Sümer & Adaklı, 2011). There is also an ambiguity in the law, in the 8th article 8 subparagraph of the law it is stated that, the broadcasting services "… cannot be against the national and moral values of society, the general morality and the principle of family protection" (Radyo Ve Televizyonların Kuruluş ve Yayın Hizmetleri Hakkında Kanun, 2011). The lack of definition of general morality and the moral values of society results in different punishment practices in television broadcasts.

The quantity of RTÜK penalties between 1994-2003 can be examined in the Table 3.1 RTÜK Penalties 1996-2003.

Table 3.1 RTÜK Penalties 1996-2003[6].

	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
■ Warning	113	107	168	282	107	114	118	38
■ Broadcast Interception	35	58	133	214	119	139	126	1
■ Criminal Complaint						9	4	8
■ Apology							4	
■ Broadcast License Cancellation							3	
■ Program Interception								1

According to the data, there were only two types of penalties, warning and broadcast interception until year 2001 and RTÜK's penalties increased without cease until year 2000. In 2001 a new type of penalty was added: criminal complaint. In the following years other new types of penalties were added and the amount of penalties given to the television channels decreased. Even though it seems like the total quantity of penalties decreased relying on the data, there were fines and penalties that was not included in this data because they were given to the channels without applying authorities. (Taş, Karaca, Avşar, Buran, & Güleryüz, 2004)

The table 3.2 RTÜK Penalties 2011-2013 indicates the data concerning RTÜK penalties between 2011-2013.

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[6] Data acquired from the book Cumhuriyet'in 80 inci Yılında Türkiye'de Radyo ve Televizyon Yayıncılığı (Taş et al., 2004)**.**

Table 3.2 RTÜK Penalties 2011-2013[7].

	2011	2012	2013
■ Warning	351	692	911
■ Program Interception	6	3	2
■ Fine	116	322	2679
■ Total	473	1017	3592
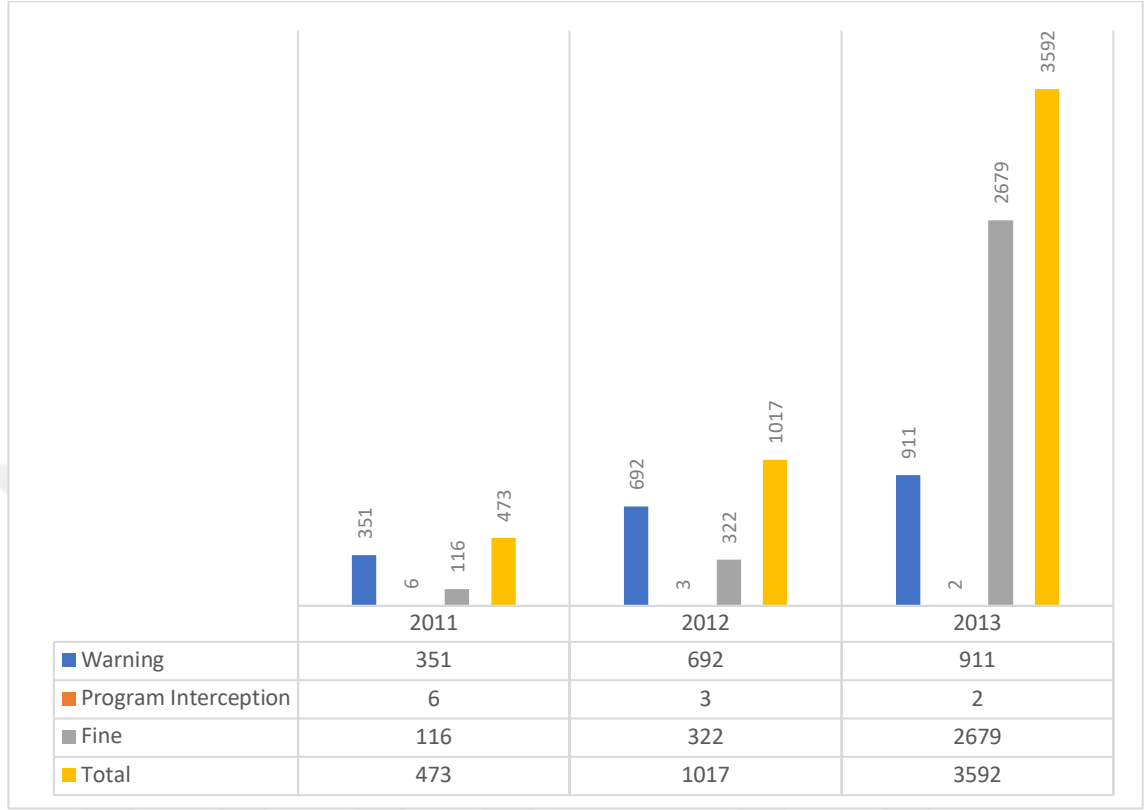
There is a visible increase in the amount of penalties between 2011-2013. Between 2011-2013 the fines given to the channels continuously increased. There were 1,507 sanctions in 2017 (RTÜK Strateji Geliştirme Dairesi Başkanlığı, 2017) and 1,183 sanctions given by RTÜK based on the radio television law no 6112. (RTÜK Strateji Geliştirme Dairesi Başkanlığı, 2019) Production companies and television channels face punishments deriving from the ambiguous clauses of The Radio Television law. The channels and production companies had to pay serious amount of money to RTÜK. Due to the business models of television channels and the political economy of television distribution in Turkey, RTÜK's sanctions, directly and indirectly, affect channels. The production processes and the televisual content are constantly altered to meet the demands of RTÜK in order to avoid fines that have the power to damage a channel's or a production companies' economy.

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[7] Data acquired from a yearly sectoral report of RTÜK. (RTÜK Strateji Geliştirme Dairesi Başkanlığı, 2014)

Even though it seems like there is a more liberated environment in online streaming platforms for creative people because there is no direct RTÜK control or censorship yet[8], the penalties given by RTÜK in the previous years for television content already shaped the expectations of channels and production companies. Moreover, the internalization of this external limitation led to self-censorship reflexes that affected the content for online streaming content.

3.2 Monopolization of Media Industries in Turkey

The government's control over the development of television and broadcasting in Turkey is reviewed in the previous section. Now, I would like to elaborate on the media monopolization. I argue that media monopolization is effective on the content and creative processes especially on the fictional content and television serials. In the following section the media structures in Turkey will be examined to support the argument of this thesis and the effects and the limitations of monopolization.

In Turkey, the media is structured as an oligopoly (Bulunmaz, 2011). A great part of major media outlets, newspapers, television channels and such are owned, controlled and run by certain conglomerates. This monopolized media ownership structure has an effect on media products (Bulunmaz, 2011; Y. D. D. B. Dağtaş, 2008). Like many other media products, television productions are highly affected by who produces them (production company & production crew) and where it is broadcasted or streamed (channels and platforms). Currently the total number of television channels in Turkey is 196, the number of national channels is 19. (RATEM, 2019) This indicates there is a limited number of channels that reach the total audience in Turkey. Today there are six major channels in Turkey which have a nationwide range, broad audience coverage and programming strategies that broadcast serials multiple days of the week: TRT 1, ATV, FOX, Kanal D, Star TV and Show TV. Since this thesis considers the production processes of television serials produced in Turkey, the number of relevant channels can be narrowed down to these six channels.

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[8] On 01.08.2019 RTÜK enacted a new regulation that enables it to involve online streaming platforms active in Turkey. With that regulation it is stated that, online streaming platforms have to get a license from RTÜK in order to continue streaming and RTÜK can intervene the content of these platforms.

A large part of the private television channels in Turkey is established and owned by conglomerates.[9] Almost all of the channels handed over to another establishment in the last decade. It can be said that after the proliferation of private channels in Turkey and the transformation to a media oligopoly, the relationship with power and governmental tools has changed. This change transformed television content by affecting the channel economies. Six leading television channels of Turkey passed into other hands in the recent years. We can also see that three channels, Star TV, ATV and Show TV passed in the hands of TMSF (Savings Deposit Insurance Fund) before they pass into their current owners. Four out of six channels owned by a Turkish conglomerate, ATV is owned by Turkuvaz Media Group since 2007, Kanal D is owned by Demirören Conglomerate since 2018, Show TV is owned by Ciner Media Conglomerate since 2013 and Star is owned by Doğuş Media Group since 2011 and Fox TV is owned by the American company Walt Disney since 2017.

Bulunmaz, who has worked on the monopolization of Turkish media, points out that "Monopolization in the media is, above all, a formation against pluralism in thought and expression. Collecting mass media in one hand restricts freedom of thought and expression. The number of people working in the media decreases and the media is generally directed towards monotony" (Bulunmaz, 2011). One of the reasons behind the monotonous content that is visible on television arises from lack of alternative media outlets in Turkey. This deficiency leaves creative crew with limited options to exhibit their work. There are several active channels in Turkey, but the content expectations of those channels show similarities because essentially the expectations stem from similar sources.

Essentially, the content broadcasted on television channels are determined by the executives and affected by their relationship with the power structures. The ways and the amount of governance channels confront is also affected by their ownership structures. According to the data obtained from RTÜK, there is a visible change in amount of punishment a channel gets after it is handed over to another. For example, in the examination of the punishments given by RTÜK to the serials of ATV in 2011-2012 it can be observed that the channel was fined eleven times. After the channel passed on to

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[9] The ownership structures of these six prominent television channels that broadcast serials multiple days of week can be examined in the appendix.

its current owner at 2013, the punishments from RTÜK lessened. In 2013 the channel's serials only fined two times and in 2014 the serials on the channel only fined once.[10]

3.3 A Television Channel's Economy

A television channel's economy and its broadcasting policies form another major external limitation. A channel's economy has a considerable influence on most of the things visible on the screen, it is also effective on the production processes; since it has a major effect, a channel's economy, its income sources and their effects will be investigated in the following section. Like in any other business firm, a channel's ultimate goal is to gain money, increase its revenue. In order to do that, channels plan their flow and arrange their content.

A network's income sources can be gathered into two subgroups; advertising and communication revenues that can be breakdown to advertising, product placement, tele-shopping, sponsorship and other. According to the RATEM's sectoral report published on 2018, the revenues of commercial communication of televisions in 2017 can be inspected in the Table 3.1 Revenue Sources of a Channel in 2017 (RATEM, 2019).[11]

Table 3.3 Revenue Sources of a Channel in 2017.

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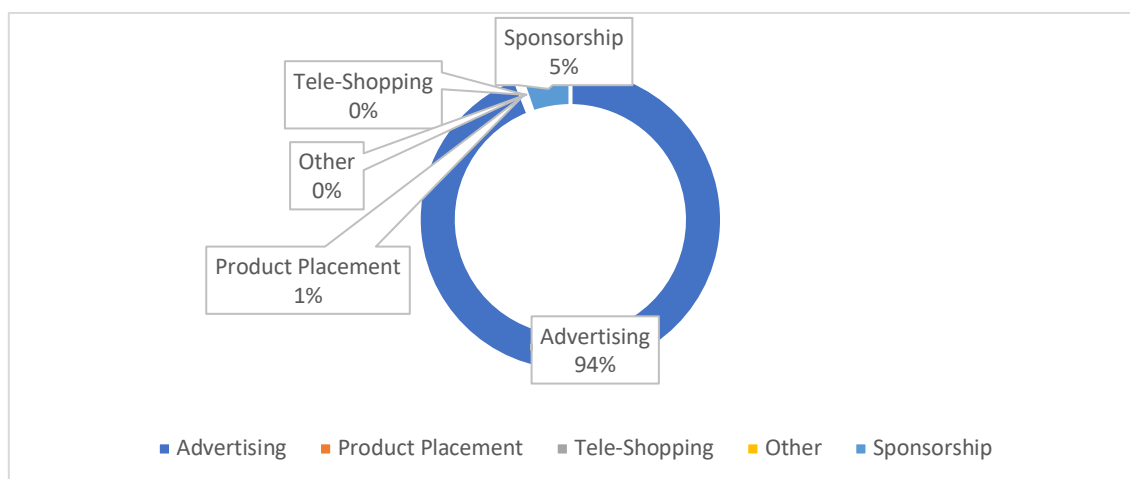
[10] Data obtained from a RTÜK executive via personal correspondence.
[11] For detailed information see appendix B.

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According to this sectoral report on television and radio, it is evident that private channel's major source of income comes from advertisements. In 2017, the advertising revenues of national televisions had a share of 94% in total commercial communication revenues. As seen on the report the advertisements are a major factor that affects a channel's economy and because of that reason becomes determinant. The influence of advertisements appears in two ways. It has a power to change the programmed flow and also it has an influence on the content itself. Channels organize their flow in order to arrange the length and duration of advertisements.

The advertisements are an important effect on the altered television flows in the last decade. With the transformation of broadcasting in the 1990's in Turkey, the programmed flow shifted into something different than it used to be. In the 1990s, TV slots were divided into several slots such as daytime, primetime 1, primetime 2, etc. Primetime was divided into two subsections as primetime 1 from 20.00 to 22.30 and primetime 2 from 22.30 to 00.00. These two slots differentiated by the programs broadcasted. As evident in the daily schedules of channels in the 90s, a television show (for example a game show) followed a serial or two serials broadcasted in a row. With the transformation of Turkish TV programming, two separate slots merged into a singular slot and the channels started broadcasting only one serial or a television show in that slot. Since the channels try to get the biggest income with less expenditures the number of serials broadcasted halved. This further limited the opportunities of a show being broadcasted. The competitive environment escalated and brutalized because of the lessened options, the televised content monotonized and uniformed.

One of the main goals of a channel is to get the biggest portion of advertisements in order to develop their economic status. This leads to competition with other channels which try to get the same advertisements for their own channel. Advertising fees of channels are determined by several factors. The time of broadcasting, the form and length of advertising effects the price. This price majorly depends on the ratings that the certain channel gets. The more rating a channel gets, the pricing for advertisement increases. Because of this reason, ratings become a huge part of the channel economy.

Table 3.4 Media Investments in 2018 indicates the leading position of television among other media outlets.

Table 3.4 Media Investments in 2018[12].
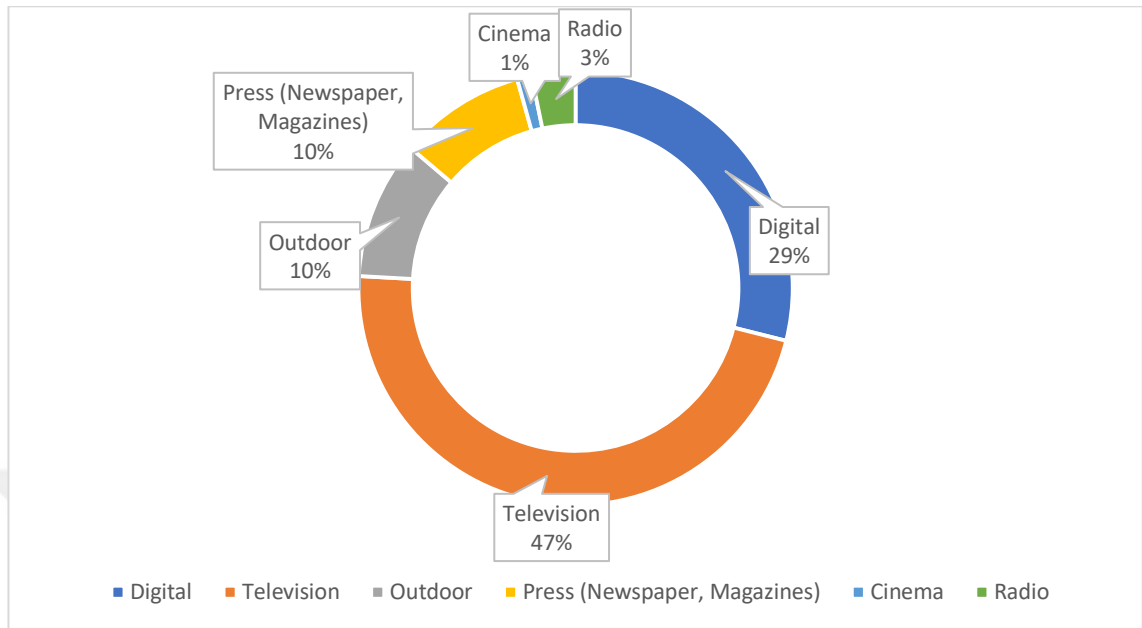
In 2018, total amount of media and advertisement investment is 11.002 million dollars. (Reklamcılar Derneği & Deloitte, 2018) In 2018, a bigger amount of money invested in television compared to other media but in the sectoral reports of Advertisement Association & Deloitte, as indicated in the Table 3.5 The Change of Investments 2017-2018, other media outlets are increasing more rapidly than television. (Reklamcılar Derneği & Deloitte, 2018)

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[12] Data acquired from 2018 Advertisement Sectoral Report. (Reklamcılar Derneği & Deloitte, 2018)

Table 3.5 The Change of Investments 2017-2018[13]

	Digital	Television	Outdoor	Press (Newspaper, Magazines)	Cinema	Radio
■	14,80%	1,10%	5,90%	-19%	4,80%	5,60%
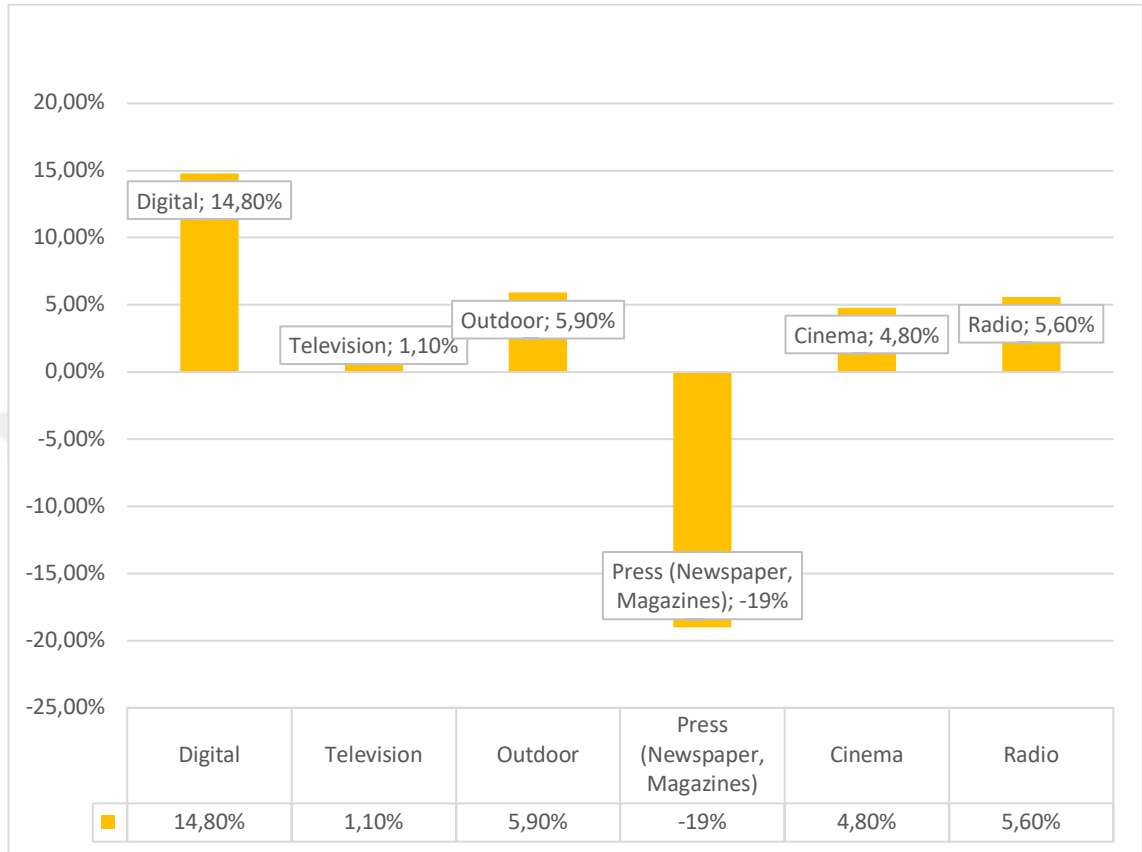
Another important source of income is the exportation of Turkish serials to foreign countries. Exportation provide a great profit for channels and also effective in shaping the content of the serials. In the last decade, the Turkish television industry has been receiving global attention through its endeavors in the market, one of the most important reasons of this attention is that Turkish television serials' export rate. According to the data gathered from several media sources, export revenue of Turkish serials increased 10 million dollars to 350 million dollars in the range of 2008 and 2016. If the targets set for the year 2023 are realized, the export figures are expected to surpass $ 1 billion ("Türk dizilerinin ihracat karnesi," 2018). The regions that import Turkish serials the most are Middle East, North Africa, South America, Balkan Region, and Eastern Europe and Central Asia yet it is conceivable to state that Turkish serials are being watched all around the globe. As

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[13] Data acquired from 2018 Advertisement Sectoral Report. (Reklamcılar Derneği & Deloitte, 2018)

indicated by the industry reports, Turkish serials were exported to 50 countries in 2012 but this number increased to 142 countries in 2017. Episode sale prices increased from 500 dollars to 50-600 thousand dollars bringing a greater income in the last 10 years (Bozkuş, 2017). The president of Istanbul Chamber of Commerce Şekib Avdagiç states that Turkey is among the top five television and online streaming serial exporters (Acar, 2018).

Television shows, serials, and any other content marketed to foreign countries since 1986. Through this course, Turkish serials became the key televisual product that marketed abroad. There is already a body of literature that focuses on exportation Turkish television content to foreign countries and the effects of this content in different parts of the world. Some scholars focused on the reception of Turkish serials in Arab Peninsula (Yanardağoğlu & Karam, 2013; Yörük & Vatikiotis, 2013). According to Zafer Yörük and Pantelis Vatikiotis between 2005 and 2011 more than 35.000 hours of content was exported to 76 countries. (Yörük & Vatikiotis, 2013a)

Since it is a major economical factor for channels and producers, foreign sales shape a great part of the channels' content expectations. The expectation of target countries and their taste of stories blend into Turkish serials, at times dominating the creative field, turning it into something else by forcing creative crew to certain type of stories and characters. Turkish serials seen as a "soft power" especially in Arab sphere which has the ability to shape the others preferences and the impact of the serials abroad studied by scholars. (Rousselin, 2013; Yanardağoğlu & Karam, 2013; Yörük & Vatikiotis, 2013b). I argue that, there is a reciprocal relationship with the foreign cultures that we sell content to. Our serial industry is affected by foreign cultures as much as it affects them. The cultures or content expectations of target regions permeate into Turkish serials' productions often limiting the creative crew into stereotypical storylines. Channels' start to think on behalf of the target regions' audience and approach the content with this perspective.

The economical anxieties form one of the most influential limitations for creative people. The television programming and content are shaped concerning the economical anxieties. Nonetheless, economical anxieties are also effective for online streaming platforms since the target of both platforms are to gain money. The influences of the limitation that arises from economical anxieties will be examined in the following chapter.

3.4 Rating Measurements in Turkey

"One of the most dramatic changes transforming broadcasting in post-industrial societies has been the growth of commercial competition." (Holtz-Bacha & Norris, 2001) Rating measurements emerging from the commercial competition between television channels have a vital role on a channel's economy. The advertisement fees are determined according to a channel's ranking in the rating charts. Ratings are effective on channel economies, all the same time it is a powerful limitation on the content during the production processes. How much and what the audience watch is determined with the rating measurements. The rating a certain channel gets set the advertisement fees of that channel. For the reason that the ratings determine the quantity and the pricing of its primary source of income of television channels, advertisements, ratings' effects on the channels content becomes visible.

Until 2012 rating measurements in Turkey were conducted by AGB Nielsen research company which measures ratings for many other countries in Europe. According to different news outlets in the late 2000's 1100 out of nearly 2500 house with people meter devices, a device used for rating measurements, were revealed and the residents have been bribed and convinced by producers and channel employees to watch their channel or shows ("Bir Dizi Yapımcısından Ailelere Reyting Rüşveti," 2009). After the increasing news about rating measurement fraud, some major channels' withdrawal from the rating measurement system and TRT's official complaint about TARC and AGB; the 22-year-long agreement with the AGB measurement company was canceled. In 2012, after the criminal complaints to TİAK and AGB, the rating measurement system renewed.

The entire rating measurement system was altered in 2012 because of this system failure. Today TİAK is still responsible for supervising rating measurements in Turkey and since 2012 Kantar Media is the company responsible for rating measurement in Turkey.

In 2012, not only the rating measurement company has changed but also the method of rating measurements is altered. The sample groups used for rating measurements are divided into certain SES (social economic status) groups; A, B, C, C1, etc. This rating data collected by the research company shows the television watching habits of the audience by measuring sample groups for different social economic groups. In the new SES designation that is effective since 2012, the profession played a more important role than education unlike before; this contributed to the integration of the economic factor

(TÜAD, 2012). With this new approach, revenue of the individuals in the panel became the main criteria for determination of SES groups. The change of rating system consequently altered the demand for content in television.

I argue that from this moment on, with the alteration of rating measurement system in 2012, the monotonous programming and uniformity of content increased, more basic storylines and typical characters in serials preferred, spread and eventually dominated television content. For example, melodramatic stories centered around poor victim uneducated women protagonists were preferred by channels and producers: *Paramparça* (2014-2017), *Kadın* (2017) and so on. Stories centered around heroic soldiers were started to appear on the screen: *Söz* (2017-2019), *Savaşçı* (2017-…), *İsimsizler* (2017) and so on. Ratings are an important concern for traditional television channels since it is directly linked with the advertisement expectation of a channel, therefore ratings are effective shaping the content. Online platforms are not included in the rating system but they measure the audience themselves via their own servers since they work online. The audience measurement of online platforms is not open to public access unlike traditional television so the rivalry among traditional television channels that based on rating do not exist for online platforms. Yet, online platforms earn income directly from the subscribers, another form of audience quantity anxiety emerges.

There are several external limitations for traditional television channels' creative production processes. I argue that even if online platforms seem like they are fully liberated from the external limitations that exist for traditional television channels, these limitations are still effective in a shapeshifted way, because after all both TV and online platforms are under similar conditions and both of them aim for the same thing: money. In the next chapter the reflections of limitations on creative crew will be evaluated.

3. REFLECTIONS ON LIMITATIONS

In this chapter, the production of television serials and online platform originals will be assessed. This comparison will cover the limitations that arise from media ownership, channel economies and rating anxieties and altered radio TV law that explained earlier, opinions on production practices acquired from writers, producers and directors through in-depth interviews and will be debated through examples.

To make a comparison between various platforms' and channels' production practices, fifteen minutes to one hour long in-depth interviews were conducted with 14 people who worked/are still working in the making of online streaming and traditional television serials. The interviewees were chosen among the writers, directors, producers. All of the semi-structured interviews were conducted in Turkish and translated later on. Some interviews could not be conducted face to face due to the tight schedules of interviewees and done via phone calls and Skype. All of the interviewees were asked the same set of seven questions regarding their position in the production and their opinions about the production practices and the limitations they have faced during this period. During the interviews some additional questions were asked.

4.1 The Production Process of a Television Serial

How is a television serial produced, what are the stages that a serial went through before it is aired? In the next section three different production journeys will be explained from the data gathered from the interviews. Workflows of crews who work for traditional television, online streaming platforms BluTV and Netflix Turkey will be compared. The workflows explained below are just exemplary, it may show differences according to the project, channel, production company and etc. There are lots of variables and intricate details that can change the flow, but the workflows depicted more or less show the circumstances in the industry. Since the online platforms are pretty new, they do not have a standardized workflow and this is also a problem with crews that work for traditional television.

The production of a television serial involves several different phases; pre-production, production and post-production. These phases are followed by broadcasting or streaming.

Pre-production phase covers everything that happens before the production; budgeting, planning for shooting, casting etc., production phase covers the shooting, post production phase covers editing, color grading, audio mix, music, FX and etc. All of these phases are affected by certain factors, external and internalized limitations and these limitations set the limits of creativity in different ways.

But how does the journey of a television serial start? There are two ways as Gülden Çakır, a television serial scriptwriter who is in this business since 2005 and author of the book *Professional Serial Writing (2015),* states: "Either you go to the producer with your own story or you can write a story that comes from the producer."[14] After deciding any of them, the main story and the theme of that story is determined. Scriptwriters start to work on building characters and the main storyline. Following that, she explains, the producer demands the general story and the storylines for the episodes. With the careful work of a writer team of writers or an individual writer, a project folder is created. This project folder involves the general story, character biographies, the extensive summary of first three episodes and the first season's storyline. The project folder is delivered to the producer after its written. When the project is accepted by the producer the first episode is written by the scriptwriters with different versions and presented to a channel. The channel gives feedbacks, the script is revised and several versions are written before the scriptwriters write second and third episodes. The channel demands several completed episodes before the start of the production. When the pre-production begins, the cast is selected by the director, musicians and art directors get involved. Sometimes pre-production goes parallel with the writing, while the scriptwriters are working on the completion of several episodes, the producer and the director choose the cast[15], choose shooting locations and other arrangements are done. So, the production team starts to work. When the consensus is reached on the scenarios, reading rehearsals take place and shooting starts. Çakır says, this process before the shooting may be a period of a year or a period of three months. She says it changes according to the production company and the urgency of the project. During the production and broadcasting, scriptwriters continue to write continuously, trying to reach 150 minutes of script every week. After the start of

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[14] (G. Çakır, personal communication, December, 16, 2018).

[15] People who choose the cast changes depending on the project; sometimes the final decision is producers' to make, sometimes scriptwriters write the script with a certain actor or an actress in their minds.

the shooting, different production phases overlap with each other. Writers continue to write new episodes for the season when the production crew were shooting the previously written episodes. Especially after the writers run out of finished episodes that they stock up, they rush to complete the week's episode. It is almost the same for the people on the set and people who work for post-production: everyone tries to meet the deadlines. During this process, channels and producers demand revisions, and the crew make the changes and alterations according to the feedbacks. The production process gets very hard because of the frequent deadlines and lack of extra time.

So, what has changed with the introduction of online platforms? Some interviewees claim that the establishment of online platforms have changed the production processes of serials severely. They claim depending on the platform, the workflow and the methods of production differs. Each platform has different workflows and production styles.

Binnur Karaevli, the showrunner of Netflix's first Turkish original, *Hakan: The Protector* (2018-…), explains the writing process of the original and the working conditions of Netflix. She states that, Netflix follows the American studio system in the making of its originals. After a project is accepted, a writer's room is set like in American studios. In this writer's room, all of the writers (the number of writers varies depending on the project) gather and discuss the main story and side stories of each episode. When the main story and the side stories are decided, writers start to write treatments[16] for each episode together. The writers split episodes and everyone writes their own episode. Karaevli states, "So the actual reason for this is that, this medium is quite collaborative, this means that people work with each other."[17] She says that is how the streaming platforms work. There is always a writer's room and there are one or two people in charge of the writer's room, called showrunners like in U.S.A.

According to the writers who work for Netflix, they work nine to five, five days a week until all of the episodes for a season are written. According to Binnur Karaevli, they had three revisions for treatment and three revisions for each episode's script. She says it is "Much more, much more revisions than those in Turkey".[18] Furthermore, since the company is remotely controlled from its headquarters and the writer's room for *Hakan: The Protector* (2018-…) had foreign writers, translation becomes a major issue. Karaevli

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[16] A treatment is a design that involves each scene in detail, a long summary of the whole script.
[17] (B. Karaevli, personal communication, January, 04, 2019).
[18] (B. Karaevli, personal communication, January, 04, 2019).

states, everything that they wrote had to be translated into English and she says "…for example, Jason wrote a chapter. But we were translating what he wrote into Turkish. After that everything is delivered Netflix, to be approved. Our process was very different." Although Netflix seems to have a very systematic structure because of its working hours principle on the contrary of the usual working hours in this industry that exceeds 15-16 hours in most cases, is it really that systematic and admirable? Of course, Netflix's system has its own failures and setbacks like any other system. Translating everything into another language to get approval and getting feedbacks on the translated content has its own problems. Even from a simple overview it can be observed that the dialogues in *Hakan: The Protector* (2018-…) seems very artificial, while the show is located on İstanbul, Turkey and has Turkish characters; they do not sound natural.

BluTV tries to separate production phases just like Netflix. Kalfaoğlu states that if they were producing a season of eight episodes, scripts of all eight episodes are completed before the production begins. They lock the episode scripts and do not change the scripts after they are locked. When the scripts are completely done, they move on to shooting. He says, "This also help us reduce the budget and allows us to think more about the project."[19] He compares the writing process of BluTV originals with traditional television channels' serials and says "On the one hand, you think about and write the script in one week, while on the other hand, we have a scriptwriting process for 3-3,5 months. Sometimes this process can last up to 4-5 months. You are thinking about the script for 5 months. After the various scenario meetings, you say that this is the end and you move on to shooting." Director of BluTV original *Bozkır* (2018), a detective story takes place in rural Turkey, Bahadır İnce, states they had the scripts of all ten episodes before they started shooting. He says on a free channel they used to have the script in the middle of the night and the next day they shoot that script. He states, "I could imagine every episode when I first set foot on the set".[20] In that sense online platforms provide a tremendous liberty for who work for its originals compared to the people that work for traditional channels. Knowing every detail of the upcoming story enables adding details that nurtures the story in other phases of production.

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[19] (S. Kalfaoglu, personal communication, December 10, 2018).
[20] From the panel 04.06.2019 dated "Dizilerin Dijitale Dönüşümü" organized by Meetings on the Bridge of IKSV.

According to the statements above online streaming platforms BluTV and Netflix Turkey separates the phases unlike traditional television serials. Due to the fact that the seasons and episode lengths are way shorter than traditional television serials this kind of arrangement seems applicable. But in fact since the platforms are brand-new in Turkey and trying to apply a novel approach, sometimes problems occur in the process. For example, on of the originals of BluTV, *Dudullu Postası* (2018), the overlapping that is seen on the traditional television productions occurred; when the first four or five episodes were available on the platform the shooting and writing for rest of the episodes continued. The negative feedbacks of the subscribers resulted in the alteration of the story.[21] Due to the negative feedbacks the rest of the episodes are rewritten and planned accordingly. Looking at the episodes after the fifth episode the alteration of the storyline becomes visible.

There are also alternative views on the workflow of online streaming and traditional television. Müge Turalı, who worked for traditional television channels for many years both in executive and creative positions who also worked as a producer for two original serials for online streaming platform BluTV, states the production process is much or less the same in digital platforms and mainstream television. She says the main difference is the time, episodes of BluTV originals are 45-50 minutes while traditional television serial episodes are 120-130 minutes. The preparation is not so different, she states, the same team is gathered, the same labor is spent for production design. Turalı explains that "…both have an average preparation time of 1.5-2 months. There is no difference in that sense." Since the episode numbers are limited in digital platforms, they shoot all episodes simultaneously. She further explains:

> "We had eight episodes for *Masum* (2017), 1.5-2 months preparation period, but we finished shooting in 2, 2.5 months and then we edited and delivered it. The difference of the series from the digital is that you have to take 140 minutes every week for 5-6 days, edit all week and mix the last day and deliver it to the channel. There is only a time difference, but after you start shooting, it's not in preparation. Both are undergoing the same process." [22]

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[21] (S. Özgür, personal communication, December,02,2018).
[22] (M. Turalı, personal communication, January, 29, 2019).

According to this statement both media productions go through the same stages. Only difference is the time and duration differences. Whether the workflows are similar or distinct the end product of these two different media shows different content qualities. Writer of BluTV original serial *Bozkır* (2018), Levent Cantek states "There are conditions set by the medium"[23] like many other people who work for this industry. The different distribution, production, financing and consumption styles of online streaming platforms affect the content of the serials. In the following section, the effects of the limitations mentioned before and the effects that came with the introduction of online streaming platforms will be discussed.

4.2 Internalization of Limitations

Through the production of a serial there are certain setbacks that creatives face which I call external limitations. For a traditional channel's serial, these limitations are shaped mostly by channel's expectation and by its broadcasting policies that aim to gain the highest revenue with the minimal expenditures. To be able to get their project sold, scriptwriters internalize these restrictions stemming from external limitations, a self-censorship mechanism starts to form in the minds of the creative people. Scriptwriters start to limit their creativity and follow certain formulas.

Gülden Çakır, portrays the internalization of external limitations, and the emergence of self-censorship while working for traditional television channels with these words:

> "You write in line with the taste of the public. You try to write in line with the moral values of the people. That is something that kills the story. There are some stories that you cannot tell on Turkish television. You cannot talk about politics. Then there are some unwritten rules that you should be careful with. There is self-censorship in cheating and extramarital affairs. Because Turkish people are sensitive to these issues you need to be careful. You can't show sexuality much, but you can imply. Self-censorship comes in here. To speed things up, you do not write it automatically because you already know that your script will be declined from the producer. It's like you start thinking with the audience's codes. With the moral codes of the Turkish audience, self-censorship comes into play when you start thinking about what

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[23] From the panel 04.06.2019 dated "Dizilerin Dijitale Dönüşümü" organized by Meetings on the Bridge of IKSV.

they like and what they want. Because they promise that freedom in digital, you are writing without those thought patterns. Like we did in the old years." [24]

Pınar Bulut, one of the two writers of cult television serial *Ezel* (2009-2011), says after spending some time trying to develop projects for traditional television she embarked upon some setbacks. She says these setbacks and declines of channels and producers, transform the individual's thinking mechanism and become a reflex if she is not careful. She explains the process of the mindset transformation, the internalization with these words:

"After a while you constantly hear this won't do, this won't be, you start not to do that. When your idea was a seed, a core, you take it out of your mind because you think they won't accept it anyway. In this sense, you will turn to more standard, more ordinary, more in-line material. As long as you can realize it, no problem, but it will ossify after a while. One of the reasons I ran away from TV is that. I tried several things, sent stories to people and I always get the same answer: 'Yeah, that is great, but bring us a little simpler.' I even heard that. 'It doesn't have to be so beautiful.' I heard that from the producer. He was a man I loved a lot, but it's very dangerous when you start practicing self-censorship, which automatically becomes your reflex after a while. In fact, on the one hand, the dark times of crisis and repression ignite creativity very much. Because when you are surrounded from all sides, you have to come up with an idea that will not come to the mind of a more original, more creative person than usual. When you put the self-censorship mechanism on the other side, this pressure and darkness start to take you out. You are no longer able to produce creative material. I wish this will not happen in the digital…"[25]

Both statements exemplify the emergence of self-censorship mechanism, the dangers it brings to the creativity, the transformation of thinking process with this emergence and the approach to the content. On the one hand it is something that enables creativity by pressuring the individual but on the other hand it is a threat and a way that leads to monotony in content. Both interviewees see online platform different than the traditional television, they are hopeful about the opportunities it may bring.

There is a transformation of production practices and content that became more visible in the last decade. This transformation in industrial practices and the end product stems from several external limitations. In the following sections these external limitations and their

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[24] (G. Çakır, personal communication, December, 16, 2018).
[25] (P. Bulut, personal communication, January, 9, 2019).

effects will be discussed starting with one of the most prominent external limitations: RTÜK and the altered radio television law.

4.3 Critical Opinions on RTÜK's Effect

The ambiguity in the Radio-Television Law no. 6112 and the regulations in force that mentioned in the previous chapter, form an external limitation for the crew, restrain creative processes especially for scriptwriters, forcing them to build self-censorship mechanisms. In the interviews with people who work in the serial production industry, the effects of the law and the governmental institution RTÜK and reactions of people becomes visible.

One of the interviewees Gülden Çakır, acknowledges RTÜK as a control mechanism. She explains that RTÜK does not directly affect them "…but the channel and the producer who conducts that mechanism of control. They are like its eyes. Our RTÜK is them, producers and the channels."[26] Even if RTÜK do not directly affect the crew, its eyes, the people who conduct its business for them are effective on the crew. The revisions to make the serial more appropriate for RTÜK standards affects the content. Besides that, the control mechanism leads to the development of a self-control and a self-censorship mechanism. Creative crew who work for serials start to regulate their behavior often limiting themselves; holding back from producing alternative and unconventional projects. The effects of this institution on the content create uniform, monotonous, similar and "safe" media products. The ambiguity in the altered radio television law, ensures that the clauses are all-inclusive so that the punishments and fines can be justified anyhow and also at times they can be unexpected. In this sense, executives and gatekeepers in the serial industry (producers, channels etc.) become sentinels of this governmental institution, closely inspecting the crew and the products.

Pınar Bulut, explains the shade of RTÜK and the approach of the gatekeepers with an example with these words:

> "No project I have written have received RTÜK penalties, but the shadow of the RTÜK
> falls to every project, of course. One of these projects we have written had a gay character.
> It's been there since we first handed over the project to the production company. It was

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[26] (G. Çakır, personal communication, December, 16, 2018).

already written, it was known. It was going to be revealed in the 15th episode because of the story. We have written 15 episodes accordingly. Then when the 15th episode came, we wrote the scene where it finally revealed, and he told his friends. Then this came from the production: 'let's not make him gay, it is going to be a trouble' We said it's been broadcasted for a year. We wrote everything for this. It is not something like: 'I have changed my mind right now so I can make a female character a man' This is something we have built everything on top of. Then came the channel; 'why do we need it, let's not do it…' This pressure is not about RTÜK but this was the most external censorship I had. We did not change the character being gay but we changed the way we say it. We have found a middle way. It was five or six years ago."[27]

Even if RTÜK did not directly affect the content, the shade of it reveals itself by the acts of its sentinels. Producers and channels, the gatekeepers within the industry, interfere with the content often taking off specific scenes, characters and lifestyles, preventing the alternatives being visible on mainstream media.

Müge Turalı says they were freer seven or eight years ago. She states "RTÜK has been a severe pressure for the last three or four years."[28] She says "We're developing a self-control for ourselves even when we're reading the script. The idea of 'we cannot broadcast this' started to form in our minds, unfortunately." RTÜK does cover online platforms right now and have not gave any punishments to any original serial on online platforms yet. So, nobody is sure about the extent of power of RTÜK on online platforms but still the similar concerns with the traditional television endure for online platforms. Turalı says that "we cannot do it" idea started to form for online platforms too. She states "I'm reading scenarios with the concern that if we publish it on such a platform, we will get a penalty for sure. Inevitably, we develop a self-control and that prevents us from flying."[29] The idea of governance and control contagious; what is learnt from working for mainstream media shows its traces in another platform. After all it is the same industry the people work in, even if the change of platforms gives a feeling of freedom to the creatives, former concerns about broadcasting is transferred to this new medium. It can be said that the concerns and the approaches are ingrained into the creatives' minds.

Sarp Kalfaoğlu, head of content for Turkish online streaming platform BluTV, states his stance about the new radio television law and RTÜK's extent on televisual content:

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[27] (P. Bulut, personal communication, January, 9, 2019).
[28] (M. Turalı, personal communication, January, 29, 2019).
[29] (M. Turalı, personal communication, January, 29, 2019).

"The framework of it (the law) is still unknown. Because it (the law) does not pass a list (of things can't be done). It presents a very open clause. It says that it is against the general morals of society for example, we do not know what that is. These are open ended stuff. RTÜK works a little like that. You do something, you get a fine, then you learn what you should not do. So, some things pass by untried. You say to yourself that they (RTÜK) do not allow it and you have to take it out of the story. Things we have not seen. But you are saying that if I do it, I will get a fine. There is also self-censorship, not just censorship in this business."[30]

Penalties from RTÜK sets the boundaries of the content, in a way creatives accept their powerlessness. After some point they do not even try to exceed the limits. They Show signs of learned helplessness. Getting fines from RTÜK is an important issue for channels and producers, because the amounts given by RTÜK affects channel economy and the channel's goal is to earn more money after all.

Tolga Karaçelik, the director of BluTV original serial *Bartu Ben* (2018), a self-reflexive comedy, explains the setbacks he faced during the production process of the serial. He states there was no pressure coming directly from RTÜK during the production of *Bartu Ben* (2018), but there was another thought in his mind. He says, something he wanted to do, more specifically a scene he wanted to add to an episode could not be in the final version. He says "they (producers) said something like 'let's not underline something we have already given, in order not to block the continuation (of the medium)' and to me it is clearly self-censorship"[31] He says the scene was a very little detail in the huge thing that they have done with *Bartu Ben* (2018). Due to the anxieties of being punished, self-censorship mechanisms arise. He states that, producers are afraid of punishments and they narrow the environment down. He claims, as an artist he tried to broaden the creative environment with showing characters with their sexual lives and their sexual identities. He says his aim as an artist is to create the alternative. Inspecting *Bartu Ben* (2018), we see alternative characters that is actually hard to see on a traditional television production; LGBT-I characters are depicted in daily life unlike their stereotypical representation on traditional media. The serial depicts and mocks with the traditional television industry through its main character Bartu, an unsuccessful actor who tries to hold on to his acting

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[30] (S. Kalfaoglu, personal communication, December 10, 2018).
[31] (T. Karaçelik, personal communication, March, 01, 2019).

career. Overall *Bartu Ben* is a criticism of this industry and shows the alternative, what could have been done if this industry is liberated.

However as evident in Karaçelik's statement, there is an ongoing fear about this new medium; people who work for it wants and needs this platform to stay alive and try to play safe not to attract any attention of governmental institutions. The sensitivities are different between two media, internet and television, but the reflexes are somehow similar. There is still a self-control and a self-censorship but the reason behind this self-censorship is the attempt to protect this alternative media outlet. Obviously, the creatives do not want the eye of the governmental institutions on them that's why they govern themselves. Even if it is a scene that is cut off from the final version, it is a compromise. The creatives are not fully liberated, but they believe they work in a more liberated platform than traditional television.

4.4 Lack of Alternatives in a Monopolized Media

The economic growth of the serial sector in the last decade in Turkey led to the monopolization of some major production companies and with that monopolization uniformities of local television dramas became more visible day by day. This uniformity of the content; characters, plots, and genres of television serials bears several reasons behind. One of the reasons behind the uniformity is the monopolization of media outlets and production companies. The media in Turkey is structured as an oligopoly as mentioned in the previous chapters. Majority of media outlets in Turkey are owned and run by a handful of conglomerates. There are six major national channels that broadcast serials several days of a week and all of these channels are owned by conglomerates. The monopolization of media is not limited with channels actually, there are also a handful of production companies which produce television serials.

Tunç Şahin, director of BluTV original serial *7Yüz* (2017), explains the monopolized environment of Turkish serial industry with these words:

> "If you look at the production companies of the Turkish series, you will see the same companies mostly. There are small firms that make daily serials and bigger firms like Pastel Gold, O3 and Ay Yapım. Their singularity and scarcity also create a vicious circle because they emerge from the same decision-making mechanism. So, you have three or four channel managers. Maybe not individual people, there are three of four channel management, there

are 15-20 production companies that combine each other trying to do business with each other."[32]

This picture depicted in the statement of Şahin, shows an important reason behind uniformed content on traditional television. Today in Turkish television there are a handful of alternative stories, characters and settings. The lack of alternative channels and production companies is one of the reasons behind this creative drought.

Traditional television channels' expectation of content, their approach to serials and projects and their target audiences are similar. The content shapes according to the expectations of the handful of channels that broadcast serials. The creative field is very narrow because of the lack of alternative channels who has different expectations from the content.

It is almost the same for online streaming platforms. Still there are limited platforms that a scriptwriter can present her project to. Since Puhu TV does not produce any projects after its three works, scriptwriters can only present their work to Netflix or BluTV.

Even if there are channels with different concerns, those channel's ratings are not as high as the others. Economical setbacks are also effective on the content. To this extent, in the making of serials a channels economy creates another external limitation. In the next section the effects of a channel's economy will be discussed based on the interviews.

4.5 Effects of Economical Concerns

According to this research, one of the most effective reasons behind the uniformity in the television serials is the increasing demand for quantity over quality. The rivalry for rating shares affects the channel programming strategies and also program contents. Some program types such as game shows, talk shows, reality shows and such vanished or nearly became extinct because of the popularity of serials even though the production costs of that kind of shows are lower than serials, only a few channels like TV8 produce and broadcast such television genres. In this extinction of another type of programs and the transformation to a more uniform channel programming schedule the channel revenue sources play a vital role and as explained before a channel's most important revenue source is advertising.

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[32] (T. Şahin, personal communication, December, 2, 2018).

Since the rating share is the key factor that determines the advertisement revenue, the higher the channel's rating is the more revenue a channel gets. According to the RTÜK audience research 2018, in Turkey "The peak time of watching television during weekdays is 18: 00-21: 00 (75.7%) and 21: 00-24: 00 (65.1%) respectively. This time zone, which covers a large part of the audience, is the time period in which the rate of view, called Prime Time." (*Televizyon İzleme Eğilimleri Araştıması*, 2018) Therefore, the revenue a channel gains through the commercials in the primetime slot is the highest. In order to get the highest budget from advertisers, channels pursue different strategies. The most profitable time slot is usually dedicated to serials and TV shows.

Thus, the channel executives plan their flow accordingly. According to the interviewees, the shift in channel flow in the last decade relies heavily on budgetary reasons. In the last decade the content broadcasted on the primetime zone formally changed because of the competitive media environment of Turkey, most evidently the durations of serials seriously increased and TV genres other than serials became nearly extinct. To fill out their flow channels demanded longer episodes that exceeds three hours of screen time along with episode summaries and commercial breaks.

Gülden Çakır states that ratings are an important stress source and because of the changing ratings, some stories cancelled and a lot of people from executive positions interfere with the story. She says: "Ratings shape the story, in this sense, the confidence in the scriptwriters decreased. When the rating is high, there is no intervention, but if it continues to decrease, when the rating is below a certain point, the script is immediately intervened."[33] For traditional televisions rating is determinant for creative content. If a serial loses its rating shares, channels and producers interfere the content often changing and squeezing the storylines. In that process some stories lose their core. Sometimes if a serial does not get enough ratings to compete with serials on other channels, the channel executives decide to terminate the serial. On the other hand, an interviewee from BluTV explains "They (people who work for serials) know that the show will not be cancelled."[34] Further he continues saying that, for example the actors know that their character will have a transformation in the seventh episode from the beginning and they are able to adapt

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[33] (G. Çakır, personal communication, December, 16, 2018).
[34] (S. Kalfaoglu, personal communication, December 10, 2018).

to their role better. This is also valid for other people who work in making of serials. They are more liberated with their work.

We can also talk about an impact on the content that originates from the expectations of advertisers. According to the interviews, it is evident that advertiser's demands and expectations shape the televisual content. To be able to get a higher advertisement revenue, channel executives and producers interfere content.

Onur Saylak, director of *Şahsiyet* (2018) who is also an actor for Turkish television serials for almost 15 years, explains the influence of advertisements on traditional television with an example about product placement saying:

> "Car sponsors usually give their ads to this kind of scenes: at the dramatic moment, the car falls off a cliff, and the man or woman comes out of it. Hero. You're saying as a carmaker that if you fall down with my car, you get rid of this accident. They have a rationale. You can't find a car here in the accident scene. They would say my car wouldn't make an accident."[35]

Onur Saylak summarizes the understanding of advertisers abroad and compares them with the ones in Turkey. The understanding and the approach is completely different than what it is like abroad. That is one of the reasons the advertisers interfere with the content. Sarp Kalfaoğlu, states that when a channel or a platform's main revenue source is advertisements, the advertisers became decisive on the content. He states "No car company would want the bad character to use their car." and he adds in order to draw advertisers they must follow a stereotypical storyline. He says, "When we say that two characters are in love, their love should remain clean for example. So the love between the leading actor and actress must remain clean and they must be very well committed to each other. But external forces prevent them from being together."[36] The advertisers influence on the story limits the creative field, creatives are forced to build two dimensional characters and familiar storylines. The products that placed in the serial become eclectic, they do not blend in the story harmoniously.

As the primary source of income for television channels, ratings have an effect on the televisual content. Tunç Şahin, summarizes the channels approach to content in relation with rating and advertisements with these words:

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[35] (O. Saylak, personal communication, March, 05, 2019).
[36] (S. Kalfaoglu, personal communication, December 10, 2018).

"The free channels and national channels have something like a segmentation. There are men serials, some women serials, some serials aim the total audience and some serials aim the AB audience. But in fact, what a national channel want is to be watched by all of the market. Sky is the limit. Because of the advertisement agreements are done based on the rating, the higher the rating, the more money the channel will earn. Eventually, these (serials) are commercial products. When you want that, you want to be watched by everyone in the country as much as possible. When you target everyone in the country, the story you tell and the way you communicate changes. There are people who love Porcini mushrooms, but if you sell one thing to the whole country, you target standard mushrooms. There are also those who love Porcini mushrooms in the whole country but standard mushroom is more suitable for the price as well as the palate of the country. You would think you have only one business and you plan that business to aim the mass."

Since a channels main target is to gain the most revenue from advertisements, it aims standard works that could be watched and understood by the whole country. Most of the channels' content expectations shaped by this pattern. Channels expect and order standard projects, like a serial that started this year *Leke* (2019), centers around a story that was popular ten years ago *Binbir Gece* (2006-2009). The main character's conflicts and the main story archs are basically the same. When a scriptwriter has an alternative story that differs from the monotonous content on the television, the possibility of getting rejected increases. Sema Ali Erol, who has been in the serial industry as a scriptwriter for over 15 years, states that her stories been rejected on the grounds that they were not stereotypical. She gives an example that she wrote a project involving a Russian woman as a protagonist. She explains that kind of a character is usually expected to be an antagonist, a villain or convert to Islam in the context of the serial but because the hero was not any of that her project got rejected. She mentions another serial she wrote which is also rejected. This time it was an unusual, more radical anti-hero story. Even if the both projects were admired by the channel executives, they rejected the projects because the executives thought they were taking a risk with broadcasting these projects. The target audience of both projects were limited to AB group unlike the channel's expectation to reach total audience. She indicates that the producers and channel executives suggested revisions on the content in order to alter the story to reach total audience, but she says the revisions disrupt the dramatic structure. She further explains that she presented her anti-

hero story to an online streaming platform that she sees as a more radical and liberated medium.

The rating rivalry between different channels is effective on the extension of durations. When another channel extends a serial five more minutes, the channel executive demands the same from his/her crew. There is a constant increase in the episode durations and the number of episodes of television serials on Turkish television since the 1990s. According to Aysel Aziz, one of the TRT's most prominent serials in the 1980s, *Küçük Ağa* was shot and edited as eight episodes, its episode durations was 45 minutes. (Aziz, 1999, 79) A popular drama from the end of 1990's screened on ATV is *İkinci Bahar. İkinci Bahar* consisted of 37 episodes and three seasons, each episode was around 45 minutes long. Produced in 2004, *Çemberimde Gül Oya* broadcasted in Kanal D was 60 minutes long, it was on air for two seasons and 40 episodes were produced in total. By the end of the 2000's, episode durations increased to 90 minutes. *Ezel (*2009), can be shown as an example here. This popular drama was on Show TV for the first season then transferred to ATV for the second season. The serial has 71, 90 minutes long episodes and two seasons. In the end of 2010's, the episode durations increased to two hours. *Sen Anlat Karadeniz* was top of the 2018's rating chart above other dramas. Its first season consisted of 20 episodes of 120 minute long.

In 2010, a declaration that followed a protest named "Yerli Dizi Yersiz Uzun" signed by 97 television scriptwriters. This declaration was about the duration of local television dramas. In this declaration scriptwriters state that they are unhappy because they are forced into writing serials that exceed two hours each and every week. They state that there is not any other example of this kind of production in another country. In order to fulfill the production companies' sales goals and the channels' rating rivalry with other channels they have to compromise from the drama causing them to drift away from the cinematic language. They are complainant that the high working tempo affects their lives and they are tired and exhausted ("Dizi Sektöründe Deprem: Senaristler Kazan Kaldırdı," 2017). But evidently, this protest didn't work as it was expected. The increase of durations of episodes endured.

Çakır states that this approach is totally economical. "Normally he (the channel) would collect two separate advertisement fees and they would pay two separate prices to two different production companies. Now he (the channel) collects ads, pays for a single show

and earns more. It increases the channels economy." However longer episodes by a single production company and a single crew decreases the expenses of channels the crew's income is not affected. Çakır states that their revenues did not increase as the durations increased. The durations increased but wages did not change. This is in fact a factor that affects the motivation of the writers. A decade ago, they were writing serials that was almost half-length in duration, and now the creative team is forced into working twice as hard than they use to before.

Pınar Bulut, underlines the importance of increased durations in scriptwriting. She states:

> "When we look at the authoring specialty in the world, there is not a single dramatic structure that can carry this length. Actually, we're starting a job that can't be done well. That's the reason I don't write television. When I sign a contract with the channel I say: 'I'm going to write you 3 or 4 beautiful episodes, then the quality of those episodes will begin to fall'. Of course, we cannot give the same quality episodes every week for 150 to 160 minutes. In that sense one of the reasons of uniformity is this."[37]

She further explains that as the writing spans get shorter, they had to give up quality. As they rushed to complete the episode, they do not talk about how they would do it better, but they talk about giving in 20 more pages, that they have to complete 150 minutes. She mentions that the channel does not care about the content of that 20 pages. This statement makes the frustration of writers more visible.

Some writers I interviewed mentioned that they gave up their profession only because of the high tempo this job requires and because they cannot write what they aim to write at the first place. This production rush causes the serious exhaustion. The storylines that are planned for an entire season of a drama gets spent because of the increased demand of duration causing visible problems in the dramatic structure.

After the first few episodes in the television serials, quality begins to decline, and a growing rush prevails among scriptwriters. The decline in the quality after the first couple of episodes, leads to cancellation of serials long before their planned finale. This also explains the high number of cancelled or finalized TV serials. In the 2017-2018 broadcasting season[38] 52 television serials cancelled in the six major channels. Out of these 52 serials, 25 were cancelled before the eleventh᷀ episode. This is actually a major problem in the serial economy. The decreased quality episodes that screened affect

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[37] (P. Bulut, personal communication, January, 9, 2019).
[38] This covers a time period from September 2017 to September 2018.

audience engagement with the serial and ratings decrease. The channel economies are affected by the ratings because as they lose audience, they also lose profit that comes from the advertisers. Since the channel and producers do not want to take the risk of losing profit, they order similar serials that gain the highest ratings. This limits the creativity. Scriptwriters and other creative crew have to produce serials ordered by the executives. The longer durations of serials affect not only the scriptwriters but also all the people working in production of serials. The production processes and content is affected by the elongated duration demands of channels and producers. Gülden Çakır underlines the increase in terms of duration and its effect on storytelling "The TV has evolved for the last ten years. In other words, TV evolved in terms of storytelling. In the beginning we were writing 60-65 minutes, this duration increased to 140-150 minutes per episode then the stories were transformed into something else."[39] She also points out that channels use to produce two different serials for a day but as soon as they see they can decrease their budget by extending the durations the primetime 2 slot vanished. She states that "There was more variety in the second time slot, the themes and genres were detective stories and the tense thrillers. There was diversity." In the 90s when there were two different primetime slots there was a diversity in terms of genres and stories; detective stories, genres of crime and horror was available on television.

Alper Mestçi, the writer and director of popular horror movie sequels and television shows who has also written and directed *Sahipli (2017)* for BluTV, explains the reason why there is not any horror genre serial on Turkish television nowadays. He says the advertisements are effective as well as the age factor. He states that:

> "Advertisers don't give advertisements to horror. You can't show blood anyway. They blur blood. You cannot broadcast (the horror genre) on the primetime so it falls off-primetime. There is no advertisement revenue on off-primetime. Because of the serials, the broadcasting system fell apart. Normally between 8 pm and 11 pm (primetime) the advertisement revenue ranges between 10 million to 20 million. After 10-11pm this number lowers down to 15 thousand TL. So, the channel cannot give money to the program."[40]

According to Mestçi, as a consequence of the rating rivalry of television channels to gain more advertisement revenue, the durations of television serials increased and affected the programming in an irreparable way.

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[39] (G. Çakır, personal communication, December, 16, 2018).
[40] (A. Mestçi, personal communication, January, 01, 2019).

4.6 Impacts of Exportation of Serials

According to Ayşenur Sıkı, a scriptwriter who works for television serials as a writer since 2014 "The content is also shaped by the target countries for sales." She explains in order to sell serials to those countries they have to involve stereotypical stories. For example, involving great love stories, clichés that stem from the dualities like good and bad or rich and poor became requirements. It also effects the choice of actors and actresses. Even if an actor or actress is not popular in Turkey if they are popular in the foreign countries, they get the chance to get another role in a similar story. This also limits the options in the actor or actress choice. The boundaries of creative field is again limited with the target countries' content expectations.

Foreign market sales also benefit from the extended episode duration of serials. In order to extend their content producers of the serials force the crew to increase the durations. According to Selcan Özgür, a scriptwriter who worked in one of the early examples of online streaming original *Dudullu Postası* (2018) and traditional national channel serials like *Behzat Ç.* (2010-2013) and *Seven ne Yapmaz* (2017) states that the exportation also affects the form of the serials. She states:

> "The main difference is that serials in Turkey that they are sold abroad at a very high rate. The main reason we write each episode for 120-140 minutes is that we are transferring our rights to the producer and the producer is handing over to the channel. Channel divides an episode to three to sell it abroad."

Producers and channels benefit from the extended durations, but the scriptwriters and the creative crew do not. Several interviewees stated that their wages did not change even if they have to work twice as hard. Most of the times the crew do not earn anything from the re-runs or abroad sales.

Onur Saylak, states that Turkish serials took place of Brazilian telenovelas in the world. He states:

> "Instead of the content, what is worked on is image or the sound and the continuation of the story with the logic of 'to be continued'. There used to be such a thing as 'to be continued tomorrow'. You stop watching for a day and you're watching where you left it from the next day. We can call the format of all the serials from A to Z as soap operas. A format they call Telenovela. Now they, the producers and channels, are satisfied with doing it like this because they are earning huge amounts. But when it comes to production side, the creative part, almost everyone complains. Because no director can produce anything in

the 5-6 days for 140-150 min. He cannot set up 40 episodes of mise-en-scene per year. He cannot catch up with all this stuff. Similarly, 15-20 pages per day cannot be played."

Even though the traditional channels intend to sell their content to foreign countries, it is not a major goal for online streaming platforms. Sarp Kalfaoğlu, states that foreign sales are not a vital source of income for BluTV. He states this about traditional television channels "No one in Mena region or Latin America would want to see Bergüzar Korel cheating on Halit Ergenç with a younger and more handsome man. So, if you do that you would eliminate a serious source of income." On the contrary online streaming platforms –at least BluTV- does not have such an economic goal he states. That enables a more liberated environment for the creative crew, producers and for platform. Kalfaoğlu states that "Our characters swear if the need to swear. Because it is not a matter of life or death for us to sell our content to that region. If our characters need to drink alcohol they will." An important limitation shaping the content on traditional television channels seems to disappear on BluTV. This approach is one of the reasons behind the "online platforms are more liberated" perception.

4. CONCLUSION

Online streaming platforms are increasingly becoming an important media outlet worldwide for audiovisual content. For the past years with the introduction of VoD platforms into the Turkish market, Turkish serial industry and its practices have been transformed. Few researchers have addressed the issue of online streaming platforms in Turkey and their original productions. Previous work has only focused on traditional television serials, their effects, power and production processes. While there have been several studies on online streaming in the world, this thesis differs from them in terms of its focus on the local production practices of serials in the context of both television and online streaming platforms. The goal of this research was to reveal the external and internalized limitations which restrains the creative crew. It aims to show changing impacts of these limitations.

In this study several questions were asked in order to understand the production processes of Turkish television serials and original productions with a new perspective. The effect of online streaming platforms on content and production processes, the changes for the creative crew with the online streaming platforms were investigated.

In order to investigate this new medium and its practices 14 semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with the people who work for the serial industry in Turkey. The interviewees were chosen among the people who has an influence on content more than others involved in that specific project: producers, scriptwriters and directors. Also, a head of content from an online streaming platform was interviewed in order to understand the creative processes and approaches of the platform. All of the interviewees were asked the same questions.[41]

In the body of this study, a brief summary of broadcasting in Turkey reviewed, the external limitations and effects on production practices discussed. In this research I have found that there are several external limitations that affect the content production practices. These external limitations are RTÜK's force on the creative content, ambiguous laws and regulations, the media monopolization, channel economies, their rating anxieties, channels' broadcasting policies and exportation of serials. These external limitations internalized by the creative crew and leads to building a self-censorship

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[41] See Appendix D for the interview questions.

mechanism. However, emerging online streaming platforms follow different paths and are exposed to different governance and control systems than traditional television.

In that sense, there is a liberated environment in the emerging online streaming platforms for creative crew yet still the self-censorship mechanisms endure in a shapeshifted way. The dilemmas of the online streaming platforms derive from different sources and the self-censorship in that medium aims something else. Simply put, the creatives who work for online streaming platforms limit themselves in order to avoid the eyes of governmental institutions; to protect this emerging liberated environment.

There is a significant difference between the views about traditional television and online streaming platforms. It is clearly visible that most of the interviewees perceive online streaming platforms as a more liberated environment. Initially I thought that the online streaming platforms are fully liberated from external limitations. Yet it is critical to note that external limitations are still there in a shapeshifted or in a transformed way. There is no direct governmental control but internalized reflexes that limit creativity, there is no monopolization but still lack of alternatives.

In the next few years can online streaming may become an alternative for traditional television? There seemed to be a rapid growth of online platforms worldwide in the past years but the latest news shows a decline in the number of subscribers to the dominant streaming platform Netflix. According to the latest reports, the company lost paid subscribers in USA for the first time in eight years. (Feiner, 2019) This data seems to show a regression yet there are other services that plan to start their own VoD services like Disney and services already actively streaming in USA like HBO. This shows that the online platforms will progress and branch out, the alternatives will emerge. It is still unknown if these platforms will be active in Turkey or will any new local platforms emerge in the upcoming years. Even if there will be other platforms in the following years that stream in Turkey will they produce local content like Netflix and BluTV? Will the limitations still be effective or will the upcoming platforms be free from those limitations? History repeats itself. Four years after the emergence of private channels in Turkey, as alternative media outlets contrary to rigid TRT, RTÜK was founded with the Radio, Television Law No. 3984. RTÜK started to control and audit the content and eventually television content monotonized.

In 2016 online platforms started to stream in Turkey and just three years later, on August 01, 2019 RTÜK started to be effective on online platforms with a new regulation. From now on online platforms have to have a license from RTÜK to be able to stream their content. This regulation will surely effect the content production practices of BluTV and Netflix Turkey since the regulation enables RTÜK to interfere with the content. The same vague expressions in the radio television law will be valid and the penalties of RTÜK will be educative to the creative crew. There are limitations on television and online platforms and I believe in the future, unfortunately, the limitations will become more pressing for online streaming platforms.

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CURRICULUM VITAE

Personal Information

Name Surname   : Ayşe Yörükoğlu
Place and Date of Birth   : İstanbul, 1991

Education

Undergraduate Education : Bahçeşehir University, Film and TV (2009-2016)
                                   Bahçeşehir University, Communication Design
                                   (2012-2016)
Graduate Education   : Kadir Has University, Cinema and Television Program
Foreign Language Skills   : English

Work Experience

2018 Feb - 2019 April   Kadir Has University / Teaching Assistant
2019 March - …   FMV Işık University / Research Assistant

Contact:

E-mail Address   : aysyoruk@gmail.com

APPENDIX A: THE CHANNEL OWNERSHIP HISTORIES

The ownership histories of six major television channel in Turkey can be examined in the Table A.1 The Ownership Histories of Major Television Channels in Turkey.

Table A.1 The Ownership Histories of Major Television Channels in Turkey

ATV	Media Conglomerate (1992-2000)
	Çukurova Conglomerate & Ciner Media Group & MV Holding (2000-2001)
	Media Conglomerate (2001-2002)
	Ciner Media Group (2002-2007)
	TMSF (2007)
	Turkuvaz Media Group (2007-today)
FOX TV TURKEY	News Corporation (2007-2013)
	21st Century Fox (2013-2017)
	The Walt Disney Company (2017-today)
KANAL D	Doğuş Yayın Group (1993-1994)
	Doğan Conglomerate (1994-2018)
	Demirören Conglomerate (2018-today)
SHOW TV	Europe and America Conglomerate, Web Conglomerate, Hürriyet Conglomerate, Medya Conglomerate (1991-1993)
	Europe and America Conglomerate, Medya Conglomerate (1993-1994, 1995-1997)
	Europe and America Conglomerate, Medya Conglomerate, Doğan Conglomerate (1994-1995)
	Europe and America Conglomerate (1997-2000)
	Çukurova Conglomerate (2000-2013)
	TMSF (2013, 2014, 2015)
	Ciner Yayın Conglomerate (2013-today)
STAR TV	Özal Conglomerate (1989-1992)
	Star Media Group (1989-2004)
	TMSF (2004-2005)
	Doğan Conglomerate (2005-2011)
	Doğuş Media Group (2011-today)
TRT 1	Owned by Turkish state as a autonomous entity

APPENDIX B: CHANNEL REVENUES

RATEM's sectoral report published in 2018, the revenues of commercial communication of televisions in 2017 are listed on the Table B.1 Commercial Communication Revenues of Televisions by Revenue Types (RATEM, 2019).

Table B.1 Commercial Communication Revenues of Televisions

(Thousand TL, Current Prices)

Revenue Source	2017
Advertising	3.415.846
Product Placement	16.225
Tele-Shopping	5.150
Other	3.771
Total Advertising Revenue	**3.440.992**
Sponsorship	192.850
Total Communication Revenue	**3.633.842**

APPENDIX C: ONLINE STREAMING ORIGINALS

Original serials produced between 2017-2019 by three online streaming platforms of Turkey, Netflix Turkey, BluTV and Puhu TV can be examined in the table C.1 Turkish Online Streaming Original Serials.

Table C.1 Turkish Online Streaming Original Serials (2017-2019)

Name of the Serial	Platform	Duration	Seasons	Episodes	First Stream Date	Last Stream Date
Adana 01	BluTV	25-55 min	5	37	2016 (First 2 seasons streamed on Youtube)	TBA
Masum	BluTV	54 min	1	9	27.1.2017	17.2.2017
Sahipli	BluTV	55 min	1	10	24.2.2017	24.03.2017 (?)
Fi	Puhu TV	64-90 min	2	22	31.3.2017	9.3.2018
7yüz	BluTV	59 min	1	7	22.9.2017	3.11.2017
Dudullu Postası	BluTV	59 min	1	13	26.1.2018	20.4.2018
Şahsiyet	Puhu TV	54-71 min	1	9	17.3.2018	8.6.2018
Dip	Puhu TV	57-80 min	1	6	30.3.2018	25.5.2018
Yaşamayanlar	BluTV	60 min	1	8	17.7.2018	18.10.2018
Bartu Ben	BluTV	33-50 min	1	10	18.10.2018	29.11.2018
Bozkır	BluTV	55 min	1	10	30.11.2018	31.02.2019
Hakan: The Protector	Netflix	33-45 min	2	20	14.12.2018	TBA

APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interview Questions

1. Can you evaluate the projects you have done for television and online platform? Can you explain the similarities and differences between the content and the production process?

2. What do you think about the form and narrative of the serials produced for online platforms?

3. What similarities and differences do you see when you compare characters and stories in TV and online platforms??

4. Can you evaluate the impact of RTÜK on your projects?

5. Can you evaluate the fact that the RTÜK law will include online platforms?

6. How do you think the inclusion of online platforms in the law affects the creative processes and production of the serials? Could you please give examples for me to understand?

7. Is there anything you want to add?