This paper aims to explore the ideological and social tensions that soap operas exported by Turkey engenders in other developing countries in the ex-Ottoman cultural sphere, and hence to extend the resistance literature in marketing through the use of qualitative research. Critiquing Davutoglu's (2001) notion of strategic depth, where Turkey emerges as the central player, which spreads its economic and cultural power to the ex-Ottoman sphere countries, this study will interview media practitioners, international relations experts, and more importantly, consumers of the soap operas in order to explore the discourses of resistance consumers practice within the hegemonic cultural presence of Turkish soap operas.

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identity perspective, one easily neglects the individualized meanings of symbols in favor of their shared core meanings (Belk and Costa 1998). Recognizing the interplay between being an individual and being a community member allows for a much more dynamic and holistic understanding of special objects.

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**This Time (Again) Consumption May Not Unite Us**

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This paper aims to explore the ideological and social tensions that soap operas exported by a developing country engenders in other developing countries, and hence to extend the resistance literature in marketing as suggested by Izberk-Bilgin (2010) through the use of qualitative research. In-depth interviews with international relations experts and media professionals as well collated material from the press provided preliminary insights and clarified the context, as explained below. Izberk-Bilgin (2010) pointed out the need to expand the geographical boundaries of research on resistance beyond the Western world. While she suggested studying the tensions and reactions to Western goods in developing countries as a starting point, this study will examine the tensions created by and reactions to (immaterial) goods originating from developing countries in developing countries, extending Thompson and Arsel’s (2004) local-local work. Although a number of scholars have studied the tensions in developing countries by exploring consumer desire for Western products (e.g. Belk 1988; Eckhardt and Houston 2002; Ger, Belk, and Lascu 1993), the reactions to goods exported by one developing country to another have not been studied within the resistance literature in marketing.

Thompson and Arsel (2004) develop the notion of hegemonic brandscape which is “a cultural system of servicescapes that are linked together and structured by discursive, symbolic, and competitive relationships to a dominant experiential brand” (p.632). They use this notion to study how Starbucks structures local coffee shops and the anti-Starbucks discourse. Similarly, it is suggested here, based on the interviews with international relations experts and media practitioners, and on material in the media, that a hegemonic cultural goods space exists which consists of production and consumptionscapes that are structured around relationships to soap operas exported from a dominant country. The dominant country in this study is Turkey, for reasons explained below.

Ahmet Davutoglu (2001), in his 2001 book *Strategic Depth* (SD), argues that geographic depth transcends the artificial breakdown of ancient ties in the Middle East. SD aims, for example, to reunite Ural(Turkey) and Aleppo(Syria), or the whole Mesopotamia which disintegrated after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. SD claims that this reunification does not have any irredentist or imperial agenda and that Turkey’s relations with former Ottoman regions are reminiscent of Japan’s influence over Eastern Pacific region (Davutoglu 2001). This tightening of relationships comes with the baggage of spreading Turkey’s cultural and economic influence over Ottoman cultural sphere (countries formerly included in the Empire territory), as is also acknowledged by Davutoglu (2001). One of the hallmarks of this cultural influence has been that of exporting the currently very popular Turkish soap operas (such as Gumus, known as *Noor*) to other countries in this sphere.

Within these hegemonic production and consumptionscapes, there are different discourses that are produced by both the consumers in the host countries (e.g. Syria, Egypt, etc.) and the guest country (Turkey), as is gathered from the preliminary interviews and the media (e.g. Apikian 2010, Bilbassy-Charters 2010): “The (Anonymous) Media Group is good at this, since they are the producer company. They get their share of success... always running pieces about how people in those countries buy licensed t-shirts of the series, how the royal family there is friendly with the actors” (interview, news editor in a national Turkish TV channel, 37, male). Further complicating the terrain are competing constructions in the media. In addition, there are competing discourses around how these TV series are received, consumed, and resisted in the host countries. What can be classified as the celebratory approach to this import/export of soap operas lies within the market-bound perspective of resistance (e.g. Firat and Venkatesh 1995). Some (Baraka 2009, Golcek 2010) suggest that the popularity of the soaps is
drawing the Arabic and Turkish people together after years of mutually held prejudice. The non-celebratory approach, provided by interviews with two editors form the media and two international relations experts, however still market-bound, resonates with Marx’s (1844/1973) and Horkheimer and Adorno’s (1944/2000) views on resistance which are centered around the concepts of enslavement, cultural imperialism (Tomlinson 2002), hegemony, and at times, misogyny.

Davutoglu (2001) suggests that the Western civilisation no longer has the monopoly over the experience of accumulation. SD asserts that in order to contribute to the accumulation of experience, Turkey, as the centre of the last non-Western civilisation basin, can use its Islamic-Ottoman legacy to influence the interaction of civilisations (Davutoglu 2001) and give the Western civilisation an opportunity to cope with cultural plurality (Davutoglu 2002). By presenting Turkey as the centre of the last non-Western basin, SD is rooting Turkey as the potentially hegemonic party which is also accentuated by the Ottoman rule’s heritage. It is suggested here that Turkey emerges as the hegemonic power both because of this conceptualisation and is perceived as such by some accounts (Buccianti 2010), therefore casting the import of its immaterial cultural goods as hegemonic, if not culturally imperial. How consumers in both the host countries and Turkey perceive and negotiate the export of these goods is the ultimate concern of this paper.

Just as Thompson and Arsel (2004) report different manifestations of the desire to experience the local, it is expected that consumers will have built more than one discourse about the hegemonic culture of Turkish soap operas. Do the consumption of soap operas challenge the practices in the host countries as is suggested by some accounts (i.e. the values communicated through the television series challenging religious values and norms) or structure the reactions of local media production companies (Sakr 2007, Baraka 2009, Thompson and Arsel 2004)? What form of resistance is practiced by different agents such as those that view the series as ‘wicked and evil’ (see Hammond 2009) or by left-wingers who perceive the phenomenon as “politically insignificant markers of the relationship between Turkey and Arabs” (interview, international relations expert, 30, female, Egyptian)? It is suggested here that opinions of the consumers of these soap operas be consulted to better understand the “…issues of national sovereignty, preservation of national idiosyncrasies, and authenticity and ownership of cultural products… [that] may arise in cross-cultural examinations… revealing previously unexplored motivations and forms of resistance” (Izberk-Bilgin 2010, p.316).

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