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N. H. HAMASAEED

PhD

2011

**THE IMPACT OF COMMERCIAL GLOBAL TELEVISION
ON CULTURAL CHANGE AND
IDENTITY FORMATION**

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A Study of Kurdish Women and the Turkish Soap Opera *Noor*

Nazakat Hussain Hamasaeed

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Bradford Media School

University of Bradford

Supervisors: Dr. Ben Roberts & Dr. Mark Goodall

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KEY WORDS

Identity, Identity Formation, Cultural Identity, Globalisation, Media in Iraq, Media in the Kurdistan Region, Global Commercial Television, Soap Opera, *Noor* Soap Opera.

ABSTRACT

This thesis aimed to report on the qualitative research conducted which identified the role played by international television soap operas in identity formation and cultural change in relation to Kurdish women. Currently, Kurdish women live in a cultural context where traditional values often conflict with modern values when it comes to behaviour deemed appropriate for their gender. Through the impact of international television soap operas, Kurdish women come to identify themselves as being “traditional” while at the same time they attempt to integrate non-traditional beliefs into their value system. This study looked at the relationship between Kurdish women’s exposure to international television, soap operas and consumerism, as well as the problems which they create in terms of non-Western women’s identity formation. This thesis has documented the lives and experiences of 21 female Kurdish participants, aged between 18 and 40, through in-depth interviews and observations.

The thesis assumes that the views recorded are representative of the general viewpoint of viewers of the international soaps. Open-ended, in-depth interviews about women were used to explore viewing habits and preferences for various soaps. This thesis incorporates and expresses the ideas which were recorded with regards to the accepted “typical” characteristics of men and

women – it is these characteristics which play an important role in self-formation. It became evident that these women had incorporated values from the traditional Kurdish culture and the modern way of life. The Kurdish women cannot be said to have a “modernist” outlook on gender-appropriate behaviour, as they are still endemically entrenched in traditional Kurdistan worldviews.

The qualitative research analysed the level in which the soap operas act as a kind of medium between the values of modernity and those of tradition. This study, in addition, demonstrates the appeal that soap operas can have on the norms, and other aspects, in the Kurdistan Region, and therefore illustrates that the soaps have an active role as a mechanism of change in Kurdistan. Thus, the research demonstrates the power of the soap operas and their effects on the Kurdish people in this region. Furthermore, this research explored the current media environment in the Kurdistan Region by reviewing the dependency of Kurdish viewers, and the Kurdish television channels, on foreign and imported television programmes into the region.

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INTRODUCTION

Understanding how global commercial television products and information, flowing from developed countries to developing countries, can affect culture is an important issue. It will change, according to the situation of the country in question, based on a one-way flow of information and based on whether a country has the level of resources to produce its own national television products for its viewers. Some people view such exposure to programmes and information flow, from developed countries to countries which are undergoing economic and socio-political changes, as the introduction to creating a more modern society which may leave behind more traditional societies. Others see it as an imperialism of culture that is creating identity crises and cultural shifts as a result of the international communication system which serves the requirements of industrialised countries. The imbalance in the flow of information between industrial and developing countries, between the North and South, presents a threat to the traditional society.

Continual imbalances in international information flow have become a focus of attention due to concerns emerging regarding the free flow of information. This situation has its roots in the turbulent process of national liberation from the imperial powers that swept throughout Asia and Africa in the preceding decade. This liberation helped small companies to dominate and create new communication orders by increasing the role of the mass media and, in turn, the relationship between the developed and developing countries. As Carlsson (2005) argues, a small number of transnational companies control the marketplace in terms of news and communication technologies. The two main points of focus here are: firstly, the new international information

command and the role of the media and mass communications in the development of society; and, secondly, the relationship between the industrialised and developing countries.

The notion of a “free flow of information” between nations was formulated in the USA in the final throes of World War II. National frontiers were no longer to act as a hindrance to the flow of information between countries. Even at the height of the war, it was clear that the USA would emerge from it as the hegemonic world power. The Americans saw before them a world without colonial ties, a world that lay open as an arena of opportunity to an already robust and expansive American economy. The information sector played a significant role in paving the way for economic growth (Carlsson, 2005). As Elasmars and Bennett (2003, p. 6) argue:

The end of World War II ushered in a new international order: the United States emerged as a superpower whereas many of the countries that were powerful before the war suffered significant destruction. The idea of modernisation came from America’s fear that the extraordinary power it had enjoyed at the end of World War II had eroded. Therefore, the idea of neo-colonialism developed in this post war period.

As Lee (1980) describes, after World War II the USA found itself at the top of the world power structure. It was the only nation that had intact infrastructures, including roads, bridges, buildings and banks. In contrast, many of the colonisers were beginning to allow their colonies to achieve independence.

Since the deregulation of the audiovisual sector, in many parts of the world, television systems departed from a system of public service programmes and moved towards privatisation. Thus, television became an entertainment medium and was not used solely for its inherent technical

characteristics; instead, it reflects social, political and cultural milieus (Lee, 1979). International televisual broadcasting began to play an effective role in transmitting news and the provision of information; it commented on events and provided views, opinions and perspectives via satellite communication methods. It has played a significant role in the reinforcement of social norms and in the encouragement of cultural awareness via the distribution of information on a plurality of cultures and societies.

The Kurdistan Region

The Kurdistan Region (northern Iraq) gained its independence following the popular uprising against Saddam Hussein's regime in 1991. Once the control was removed, the region immediately found itself facing globalisation (this will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Three) through the use of satellite television. People then began purchasing satellite dishes – which had previously been banned throughout the country by the former Iraqi administration. Due to the lack of resources for the production of local and national television products, this region found itself relying on a high amount of imports, adaptations and foreign television programme formats. Kurdish audiences were thus exposed to a high number of such programmes, especially commercial ones (which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Three).

Today, television has become the most influential form of media in the Kurdistan Region, particularly since the arrival of satellite, which has amplified its role in the media industry since the popular uprising and the region's acquisition of independence from the former Iraqi regime. This has particularly affected those who have limited or no admission to the external arts, as a result of deprived access, illiteracy, low income, or issues of social and cultural

marginalisation. For example, most rural and poor urban Kurdish families rarely access external activities and media forms such as the cinema and the arts, or newspapers, magazines and the internet. It is very difficult for them to gain such access due to low incomes and illiteracy and they rarely have direct interaction with foreign people. In comparison with other neighbouring countries, the Iraqi people in general and the Kurdish people in particular still have very few opportunities to travel outside their country to see other societies and different cultures. This is related directly to the average family income and the political and economic situation in Iraq. They therefore rely on television to learn about what is going on outside their country – this is provided by the transmission of global news. Semati states that “the satellite provides sounds and images of life lived differently in the world outside their own borders. Moreover, during the war years escaped when entertainment was limited” (2008, p. 95).

Recently, international television broadcasting in the Kurdistan Region (as in other Middle Eastern developing countries) has had an important role in the search for information in terms of identity formation. It has introduced modern ways of life and posed challenges to the traditional Kurdish culture. Thus, Kurdish viewers have developed an appetite for viewing people’s lives outside of their own region and have developed an appreciation for pluralism and difference. Currently, there is a one-way flow of foreign programmes to this region, and this thesis is the first full academic study of this subject in terms of the Kurdistan Region. Shaswari (2008) examined the impact of satellite television on one village in the Kurdistan Region, and the influence of satellite television in terms of the adoption of alternative, non-traditional lifestyles and clothing choices. However, his study was very limited, focusing on the weakness of social relationships invoked indirectly via the influence of satellite

television, and it failed to address issues regarding women and their desire for change. It also ignored issues of identity and the impact of television upon these. Chro (2008) also conducted a study on the impact of international satellite television on Kurdish women viewers, but this was a simple report rather than an academic study, which examined the general impact of satellite television on Kurdish viewers and did not focus in-depth on culture change or identity issues.

Furthermore, aside from some newspaper and magazine articles which have provided some analysis, studies of the global or commercial media, the international flow of information, and the use of soap operas, as a culture tool by Kurdish women has never been conducted by academic research. The lack of research is not limited to this particular subject – in other discourses by Kurdish researchers, the voice of Kurdish women is equally silent. To illustrate, Ewald et al. (1994, in McDonald, 2001, p. 135) state:

In the aftermath of the Persian Gulf War, a number of articles appeared in international law journals discussing the Kurds' right to self-determination, secession, and the response of the international Community to their plight. The voices of Kurdish women and their experiences are notably absent from this discourse. Unfortunately, this absence of women's voices prevails in most international legal debates.

Thus, due to the fact that the Kurdish people and the nation have been struggling with popular issues for a very long time, they now face the problem of being a “non-state nation”, as defined by Mojab (2001) in her book *Women of a Non-State Nation: The Kurds*. This issue is reflected and has been given priority in Kurdish historical literature. Many books have been written and research has been conducted on this popular issue, including the aforementioned: *Women of Non-State Nation: The Kurds*, *A People Without a Country: The Kurds and Kurdistan* by Gerard Chaliand (1993); *A Modern History of Kurds* by David

McDowall (2000); *The (Re)production of Kurdish Patriarchy in the Kurdish Language* by Amir Hassanpour (in Mojab, 2001); *The Kurdish Question: A Historical Review* by David McDowall (in *The Kurds: A Contemporary Overview* by Philip Kreyenbroek and Stefan Sperl, 1992); and, *The Kurds and Kurdistan* by Derk Kinnan (1964).

Women in this region have been struggling, for a very long time, with their rights and they therefore want to identify and gain their rights and fight sexual discrimination. This is also reflected in most Kurdish writings, books and research, for example *Kurdish Culture, Repression, Women's Rights, and Resistance* (2007), by Steven Argue, which describes Kurdish women's resistance and their struggle for their rights. *Women, War, Violence and Learning* by Mojab (2010), provides new theorisation on the gendered dimensions of learning, war and violence, with the aim of offering new insights and views on the impact of violence on women's learning, wellbeing, etc.

In most of these sources, and from other Kurdish writings, the focus is on women but more in terms of their role in nationalism and the fight for their rights. Some of the literature deals with the impact of the media and foreign culture, but women's identity has rarely been studied. Certain sources, such as *Kurdish Culture and Society* by Lokman and Maglaughlin (2001), deal with Kurdish women's issues and their socio-political situations; however, the issue of the media and identity is not included. In *Women of a Non-State Nation* (2001), Mojab discusses political roles and achievements by Kurdish women and their socio-political situations, such as the variety of lifestyles among Kurdish women, their experiences, and their membership in parliament and military activism,

which provides some evidence that Kurdish women enjoy more freedom than their Arab, Turkish and Persian counterparts.

Today, times have changed and so has the situation. A case in point is the introduction of international and global television, which has had a huge influence on both urban and rural cultures. Previously, Kurdish people lived lives of a less modern style, but now, having viewed a large number of international or foreign television programmes and shows, Kurdish peoples' views of the world and their attitudes are challenged.

Moreover, the Kurdish lifestyle has changed and consumerism has opened the Kurdistan Region to globalisation. As such, control has been reduced on the flow of foreign media from various countries since the fall of the Iraqi dictatorial regime (will be discussed in more detail in Chapters Three and Four). The people's limited exposure to influences beyond their own borders, the experience of war over many years, and living in a country with difficult economic circumstances, meant that their lifestyles had previously been controlled and restricted from consumerist pressures – but, it was, in turn, also devoid of luxuries and was not very pleasurable.

In the wake of this strict control, lifestyle choices became possible. Satellite television presented attractive consumerist trappings and produced a demand for lifestyle changes within the Kurdistan Region, in turn affecting and changing culture. A multi-layered identity, based initially on local and regional traditions, was created. There was a shift from a traditional and local Kurdish lifestyle which was based on tribal origins, male order and a patriarchal society: "Gender relations among the Kurds are marked by male domination. Men occupy the commanding positions within the family and community. This system

of domination is preserved through a strict process of socialisation into norms and values that structure the rules of behaviour for men and women” (Bagikhani, 2001, p. 5). As such, a more modern society, where power was not excised in terms of age or sex, began to develop where the notions of independence, empowerment and equality for women in the family, occurred as a result of contact with the mass media and foreign products (this will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Four).

In today’s world of options for cable, satellite, and internet viewership, television acts as a point where multiple identities can come together. Also, it has increasingly become an important part of everyday living within nations, acting as a place that brings people together literally and ideologically (Lewis, 2009, p. 13).

Exposure to foreign television and emerging satellite channels has been aided by two significant historical events. The first is the cessation of control and censorship by the Iraqi government following the end of many years of conflict with Iran. The second is the lifting of the satellite ban imposed by the former regime (discussed in more detail in Chapter Three). The lifting of restrictions over satellite television networks meant that television could now offer a vision of ways of life different from those of Kurdistan – an escape from the pain, limitations and distress of a population whose cultural worldview had been limited to images of war and aggressive political discourse.

Semati (2008) in his study *Media, Culture and Society in Iran* discusses the arrival of satellite television in Iran. The Iranian government allowed the population to own satellite apparatus at the end of the eight-year long war with Iraq which had begun in 1980. This war had created a unique socio-cultural context, in which the options of cultural exchange, access to information from

neighbouring societies, and travel to other countries by means of mass media were severely, if not completely, restricted. Semati also points out that the political situation of the war era had created a context of social and cultural constraints. The satellite television networks were then made accessible to everyone and new horizons emerged, in terms of cultural and political attitudes.

Furthermore, the commercialisation of the media and the intensification of control over it, by corporate interests, are reflected in the predominance given to consumer culture and entertainment. In this sense, television may well be the best way in which to bring a message to an audience of consumers, and a well-designed commercial becomes the vehicle for attaining additional income and revenue. Brown and Singhal (1990) argue that televisions have a greater potential impact on social development now than ever before in human history. This means that the influential personalising and mythmaking forms of advertising are best expressed through the television commercial, which itself does more than simply promote products. Commercials form their products and goods in accordance with ideological constructions which can, themselves, represent a set of cultural values and beliefs.

Moreover, international commercial television, with its displays of attractive consumerist trappings, has encouraged a demand for lifestyle changes inside the Kurdistan Region, with concomitant effects and changes in terms of culture. In terms of the shift which has taken place from the Kurdish traditional lifestyle to the modern one, increased contact with international television productions – Western ones – can be held to be chiefly responsible. In addition, the lack of national productions is another reason for the success of transnational television, especially when it comes to entertainment programmes

such as films and soap operas. Shaswari (2008) argues that homogenisation processes are caused by and through television genre dominance, for example by the dominance of Western soap operas. The importation of Western television soaps, films and cartoons has extended rapidly due to their stylish production techniques and their higher entertainment value, as well as the dearth of national programming.

Impact on gender roles

Television, especially the commercialisation and Westernisation of television in the Kurdistan Region, has created a new vista for the Kurdish woman that is revolutionising the way she looks at the world and at herself. The viewing audience, especially the female audience, is rapidly increasing in the Kurdistan Region. Therefore, it is important to study the complex ways in which the new Western imagery impacts gender roles in this region. The consequences of the “invasion” of Western television content via private satellite networks, in the wake of the 1991 uprising, may be both positive and negative for Kurdish women. The portrayal of women in independent and leading roles might be considered as primarily positive, but at the same time the portrayal of women as sexual beings might be strange for the traditional Kurdish viewers. However, at this time, there is no doubt that Kurdistan is undergoing some significant cultural changes, and that Kurdish women are greatly impacted by these changes (this will be discussed in Chapter Four).

Today, Kurdish women are viewers of the foreign mass media; they compare and contrast their lives with those that they witness in the films and soaps of international television productions. This causes confusion in terms of the conflict between the traditional Kurdish way of life that these women are

situated in and the modern lifestyles they witness on the television. While some women have embraced modernity, others have avoided it by taking tradition to be their source of identity, yet others have adopted a mixture of both modern and traditional identities. In addition, these tendencies and tensions exist in their social behaviours and viewpoints on life. The Kurdish satellite television channels also tend to contribute to socio-cultural growth and serve to widen the gap between the traditional Kurdish way of life and the more modern way of life. They tend to separate, very forcefully, the traditional and the modern as options in terms of identity (this will be discussed in-depth in Chapter Four).

Soap operas and dramas are just some of the materials which this region cannot produce (as discussed in the forthcoming chapters). However, these programmes receive higher viewer ratings, especially among women (the demographic in which this study focuses on). Among the international products, the soap opera genre is the main product watched by Kurdish viewers, especially women. As Shaswari (2008) points out “The Western group of satellite TV channels secured 84% of viewers. Films and soap operas were the second most popular of these satellite TV products, after the news bulletins which secured 30% of viewers” (2008, p. 45).

A few years ago, women in the Kurdistan Region had a clear perception of their self-identity. There was a simple and commonly agreed-upon secular male order and a male-dominated society (this will be discussed in-depth in Chapter Four). To illustrate, family authority in Kurdish society was usually related to age and sex, as such the men were the leaders of the household and were responsible for household tasks.

However, today, after observing the global media, Kurdish women feel that they are housewives, mothers and caretakers, and yet they still need to understand who they are as people. These women question how they can find a balance between housework and other work duties and between the two different cultures, the global and the local.

Furthermore, Kurdish women are now exposed to many foreign soap operas following the introduction of satellite television. They tend to identify themselves as traditional Kurdish women while they attempt to incorporate non-traditional beliefs. In particular, certain television dramas provide notions and concepts that are lacking in Kurdish society, such as those of: modern married life; equality or equal partnerships, with a spouse or in the family life; independence for women as individuals; and, concerning the existence of female leaders in business, the government and politics using diplomacy (this will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Six). A life of love and romance, freedom of expression and human rights has been established repeatedly in the international television products, especially in the soap operas.

Kurdish women have been introduced to a much wider range of foreign programmes than just the soap operas, since the Arabic satellite station MBC4 began to translate a plethora of soaps into Arabic; however, soaps are the most popular type of television programme watched in the region. Among these foreign and global commercial products, Turkish soap operas have dominated this region since 2008. A variety of Turkish soap operas have become increasingly aired in the Kurdistan Region due to the recent strengthening of economic relations between the two regions. These two regions have investment and economic ties based on their close cultures and shared

Ottoman history (discussed in Chapter Four and Six). There is, currently, much debate and concern over the cultural impact of the Turkish soap operas on this region. However, Turkish soap operas attract people from across the Middle East, not just the Kurdistan Region, to visit Turkey to experience the green landscapes and modern fashions of dressing, styles and furniture (discussed in Chapter Six).

Rahhal (2008) argues that observers believe that these soap operas have a clear impact in terms of changing behaviours because the viewers identify with the characters. The domination of Turkish soap operas is also the result of certain trade and economic relationships as well as commercial aims on the part of Turkey for the Kurdistan Region (discussed in more detail in Chapter Four and Six). Havens argues that “while features and TV movies fetch the highest per-programme prices on the global markets, episodic series are the most numerous, in large ... because their regular daily or weekly scheduling can provide relatively consistent audience ratings for advertisers” (2006, p. 42).

The popularity of Turkish soap operas, especially the soap opera *Noor*, influenced the choice of *Noor* as the example for this study. In addition, this soap opera is close, culturally, to the Kurdish culture (this will be discussed in more depth in Chapter Six). Kurdish women therefore identify better with this soap’s characters and they find it easier to compare their own lives with those of the characters. As such, they may find themselves in conflict between the traditional Kurdish culture and the modern Western culture.

Shah (2008) examined the impact of Bollywood soap operas on Nepalese women and obtained similar results. Some of her methods have been applied to this study but with some modifications; Shah’s study focused on

Bollywood soap operas in general, rather than one specifically, and it only focused on one geographical area of Kathmandu (capital of Nepal) and stay-at-home mothers.

This study focuses on the soap opera genre; this was selected from other types of international commercial television programmes based on the fact that it is a powerful tool in influencing people's perceptions of the world and shaping their behaviours. Today this genre plays an important role in transporting culture to the Kurdistan Region and has therefore significantly impacted on the individual and society, leading to changes in domestic culture and culture conflicts.

This research aims to obtain and report qualitative data about the role of international and global commercial television soap operas in terms of Kurdish women's identity formation. It should be noted that these soap operas generate and propagate the tensions which already exist between the forces of modernity and traditionalism in Kurdish society. Moreover, based on the limited literature available for this study, Kurdish women and their contributions, based on watching and using the behaviour of soap opera characters, will be recognised in scattered paragraphs throughout this thesis. However, it should be noted that no previous research study has ever been conducted involving interviews, personal histories and women's own conceptions of the influence that this television genre has had on them.

Thus, the aim of this study is to understand and analyse the dependency of Kurdish viewers and local Kurdish television channels on international commercial television programmes. Television has become part of everyday practice in the Kurdistan Region, and this study seeks to establish how Kurdish

women identify themselves in comparison with the soap characters, their behaviours and in terms of an awareness of their future identities.

Research questions

1. How does contemporary media or global commercial production television affect the Kurdistan Region from cultural and social perspectives?
2. How does the dependency on imported television programmes affect Kurdish women's identity and how does it affect the shaping, creation and formation of traditional identities and gender roles within traditional Kurdish culture?
3. Why is the *Noor* soap opera so popular in the Kurdistan Region? How and why are the Kurdish women attracted to this particular soap opera?
4. What are the cultural and social consequences of *Noor* being watched by a large proportion of Kurdish women?
5. How and why do Kurdish women use this soap's characters' behaviours as a cultural tool of identity formation?

These questions and some other questions will be addressed and answered in the following chapters of this research.

Review and outline of PhD thesis

This project will focus on general notions; it will then make these more specific by using a case study. The main aim of the thesis is to examine how Kurdish women use soap operas as a cultural tool to identify themselves. This thesis will be structured in the following way:

After the Introduction, Chapter One will examine definitions of identity and identity formation, including a short overview of sources of identity, with reference to some literature on the topic. A brief analysis will be made of the identity crisis and identity formation problems created by international broadcasting using the “developmental stages” of Erikson (1975). It will argue that identity problems are more widespread in today’s globalised world than they were in Erikson’s day. Furthermore, it will propose that today’s identity formation process is different from yesterdays, and that it has always been very much influenced by the products of popular culture. A significant part of this chapter and its aim will focus on how globalisation, or global media, creates new forms of identity and shifts the concept of identity from being unchanging to contingent. It will be argued that cultural homogeneity has been replaced by postmodern cultural heterogeneity.

Chapter Two concerns methodology. This chapter will outline the reasons behind this study’s choice to use qualitative research methods. The organisation of the qualitative data will then be laid out. This chapter will explain the study’s approach and will then discuss the method of analysis of the data gathered through the interviews. The data collected will then be analysed and critiqued. A coding scheme will be developed to capture the respondents’ comments and to explain their use of soap operas as cultural tools for self-identification and identity formation.

Chapter Three focuses on the media in the Kurdistan Region and its dependency on imported television programmes. Due to the fact that the Kurdistan Region has been part of Iraq until recent years, it has been affected by Iraqi media policies made by Saddam Hussein and his Ba’ath Party elite.

The first section of this chapter discusses the media situation in Iraq pre-2003 and post-2003. This will include a brief comparison of the media situation in the Kurdistan Region with other state-controlled countries. The chapter will then analyse the media in the Kurdistan Region by looking at the emergence of satellite communications in the Kurdistan Region as it faces globalisation.

Chapter Four will focus on Kurdish women and their introduction to global commercial television, by looking at how this type of media has affected the socio-cultural context. It will examine the way in which these programmes have created change and shifted traditional culture and concepts of identity to modern versions, along with helping to generate multiple and ambiguous identities for Kurdish women, shifting their role from householders to working outside the home and having careers. Thus creating a dilemma and tension for Kurdish women with regards to how they balance these two duties. The question for them is how to keep their traditional role and culture whilst following the modern lifestyle. Foreign television programmes show and invite them to be independent and work outside the home and, at the same time, their society pulls them back towards traditional modes of living. A brief examination will be presented concerning the consequences of global commercial television in terms of its effect on social and cultural change. This chapter is concerned with exploring some of the ways in which global television affects how people feel about their traditional culture and the changes posed by modernity. The chapter will conclude with a brief discussion of when and how Kurdish female viewers were introduced to foreign soap operas, and why they have a higher regard for these than other international commercial television products.

Chapter Five will examine the emergence and evolution of the soap opera as a genre; it will also review other studies on this topic. This chapter will focus on the commercial purpose of introducing soap operas in the first place, and the way in which Kurdish women identify with the soap opera characters. Specifically, this chapter will focus on the commercial role of soaps, as a television genre, and how powerful they are in transferring and changing culture.

Chapter Six will shift the focus of analysis onto the case study of the Turkish soap opera *Noor* along with its themes and scripts which have attracted Middle Eastern viewers, in general, and Kurdish women, in particular. The argument will be made that the unique success of *Noor*, in the Kurdistan Region, is due to its effect on the identities of Kurdish women and the familiarity which these women feel with the characters. The chapter will show how the structure of this soap opera is related to Kurdish women's lives in terms of cultural proximity. Focus will be given to the female role and imagery in this show and on how Kurdish women identify with the characters by trying to adopt and follow their behaviours and by applying their attitudes to their actual lives. It will also examine how this show, in terms of culture and the image of women, deals with the recent tensions and dilemmas in which Kurdish women in this region have found themselves since their exposure to global and international television.

Finally, Chapter Seven will close the study with a discussion and a conclusion of the findings.

Aims of the study

The aims of the proposed study are stated below:

1. To study participants using interviews and observation as the key methods for providing primary data on Kurdish women.
2. To analyse the current Kurdish media environment by exploring the dependency of the national television channels in Kurdistan, and the Kurdish viewers, on international television products.
3. To understand why Kurdish women in the Kurdistan Region are more influenced by the soap opera *Noor* than the other soap operas they watch.
4. To assess how the narrative of this soap opera corresponds to the changing social and cultural norms of morality.
5. To analyse the social context in which people relate to these themes with the aim of exploring the construction of identities in Kurdistan in the contemporary era.

It is difficult to assess the impact of television, but by considering the different themes within *Noor* and by analysing the social context in which people relate to these themes, we can begin to explore the construction of identities in Kurdistan in the contemporary era. For example, in analysing the codes expressed by the participants, such as: extended family, arranged marriage, female lead roles, respect and religion, it is possible to understand how these viewers attempt to find similarities and differences between themselves and the characters' lives in order to identify with their lives and attitudes.

Rationale behind the study

This study has emerged from the personal and public debates which have emerged concerning the impact of international commercial television products,

and soap operas in particular, in the Kurdistan Region. This relates specifically to their effects on Kurdish female viewers and on the traditional Kurdish culture, social lifestyle and identity formation.

This study will be conducted with Kurdish female viewers from the Kurdistan Region. The study aims to understand how this group of viewers uses international commercial television as a cultural tool for understanding themselves. Turkish soap operas were chosen as the specific soap of interest due to its popularity. The study aims to highlight the way Kurdish women use Turkish soap opera characters as models which serve to effect cultural change, the adoption of Western values and identity formation. Women of this age (18-40) represent the “ideal” for marriage and motherhood, as defined by traditional Kurdish society – most of the time, women of this age group, stay at home as housewives. Shah states that: “These soap opera heroines in spite of being an “ideal” housewife are shown as someone who is able to adopt Western values” (2008, p. 7).

Kurdistan is a developing region which has undergone radical change in its political situation and, as a result, has recently seen development both economically and socially. However, due to a lack of production of national television, the country is still facing a one-way flow of information from developed countries and as such depends on a high rate of imported television programmes.

Suitability of the case study

This investigation into soap operas and their impact on identities falls within the classification of “psychological investigation” because soap operas provide subtle scripts for people which endorse new roles in society.

In particular, soap operas provide people with information, they create ideas about morals, behaviours, relationships and the actions of an idealised citizen. As an example in the Indian soap opera *Atamaja*, female foeticide and the root causes of female foeticide are addressed. The Indian series also has strong identifiable characters and aims to empower women by: shaping individual behaviour, encouraging healthy interpersonal relationships and breaking traditional myths about the female child. *Hum Log*, India's first long-running television soap opera, affects the viewers' beliefs in terms of perceptions of women's status, their freedom of choice, and in terms of family planning. Also, Abu-Lughod (2001), in her anthropological book *Dramas of Nationhood*, has provided insight into the powerful effects of the mass media, especially soap operas, in the lives of Egyptian people.

Shah (2008) in her investigation into Nepalese women, using qualitative research, studied the role of television soap operas as a source of ideology that has become employed by these Nepalese women; it concluded that soap operas play a role in terms of influencing identity formation. The study indicated that Nepalese women live in a cultural backdrop wherein traditional values often conflict with Western values on the subject of gender-appropriate behaviour, and they identify themselves as traditional even though they challenge tradition at times with non-traditional beliefs.

The soap opera *Noor* is about a Muslim family in a Muslim country – however, they live differently – this makes Kurdish viewers relate to it better. *Noor's* tremendous achievement reveals the degree of influence popular culture can have on society. It is important to recognise that popular culture can be a great and radical source of cultural change. Also the cultural divide between the

modern Turkish culture and the traditional Muslim culture in the Middle East has been made evident in the show (this will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Five). Thus, viewers can compare both these cultures and can therefore identify with nearly all the characters.

The progress of this research

In 2001, while a graduate student, the author wrote an essay entitled “Why Kurdish spouses do not have a good level of understanding and communication between each other”. This prior research will be used to contribute to this study. With regards to exploring the soap opera and its relation to Kurdish women’s identity this study proved helpful as background material. While planning to do a research project, the author had no intention of focusing on soap operas. The original project looked at the impact of international television broadcasting on Kurdish viewers in general. But at the beginning of the winter in 2008, while in Kurdistan and preparing to conduct a literature review for the research, the author thought about the different products of international television. The debate about one Turkish soap opera was raised; arguments relating to its effects on society and the family in Kurdistan have spread everywhere. In particular, when the author read newspaper articles about how Kurdish women could relate to the characters of this soap, it became apparent that soap operas have a profound effect on people’s self-identification. Advice and comments from supervisors on this work helped to further define the direction of this study. They helped to orientate the study towards looking at the power of soap operas as a tool of cultural change. Moreover, after reading the book on *The Impact of International Television: A Paradigm Shift* (edited by Michael Elasmir, 2003), the author realised that the problems created by these soaps relate to the

international flow of information between the developed and developing countries as well as to the problems around modernisation and the traditional.

It is particularly interesting that this soap opera was not very successful in Turkey itself, but it attracted a lot of attention in the Middle East. Part of the reason that the programme seems to have caused so much more conflict and debate in Kurdistan and the Middle East is because the problems surrounding globalisation – multiple identities, tradition/modernity clashes etc. – are so much more acute than in Turkey. As Rahhal (2008) argued, the show failed to gain popularity in Turkey; Muhannad, the star, has risen much more in the Arab world than in Turkey itself, where some refer to him as a soft-porn magazine star.

The significance of the study

This thesis is concerned with the impact of global commercial television on the identity formation of Kurdish women.

The thesis focuses on: the international flow of information, the impact of global commercial television in this region, and on the use of soap operas as a cultural tool by Kurdish women. This subject is unique for academic research, in particular, as the voices of Kurdish women are very rarely considered in academia.

Contribution to knowledge

1. Firstly, it must be noted that there is a limited amount of literature on this topic, so this study aims to prompt further investigation.

2. It contributes to the literature on Kurdish women and soap operas, and contributes to the Western reader's understanding of the phenomenon of cultural change and identity formation.
3. This thesis contributes by raising a debate among the Kurdish community concerning global commercial television and the impact of international commercial television on the Kurdish Region, specifically that of soap operas.
4. It raises awareness about the weakness of national products, specifically dramas and soaps, and illustrates the region's dependency on imported television productions.
5. This thesis contributes to the on-going debate regarding the changes occurring in the traditional Kurdish lifestyles in the region.

Limitations of the study

As with most research, the lack of time and space has imposed significant limitations. It was not the purpose of this thesis to provide a comprehensive review of all of the impacts of this television genre on the social lives of Kurdish women. Therefore, the study will focus on the soap opera genre from the viewpoint of the influence of international commercial television programmes on Kurdish women's understanding of themselves. Self-identity is the focus here, and how the identity formation process has changed over the years. Significant parts of this thesis focus on how globalisation and commercial television programmes create culture shifts and new forms of identity, and in the process of doing so create mixed or hybrid identities. These notions will be discussed in detail in the forthcoming chapters.

CHAPTER ONE: GLOBALISATION, MASS MEDIA AND IDENTITY FORMATION

This chapter will review some of the definitions of identity and identity formation. Special attention will be paid to the analysis of the phenomenon of globalisation and the mass media and their effects upon identity formation. The purpose is to gain an understanding of, and investigate the effect that globalisation has had on Kurdish women's identities.

Definition

Identity is a very indistinct term which carries different meanings. It refers to the cultural values or perspectives an individual specifically relates to, such as the "Asian identity" or the "American identity". The distinguishing character or personality of an individual includes those features that differentiate one person from another. This can also be the distinguishing character or persona of an individual. The briefest definition of identity can be gleaned from questions such as "Who am I?", "What grouping do I belong to?", and "What do I desire to be?"

Certain researchers have defined identity as follows: "Identity is the name we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past" (Rantanen, 2005, p. 84). Or "identity is about sameness and difference, about the personal and the social, about what you have in common with some people and what differentiates you from others" (Weeks, 1990, p. 89). This means that personal identity deals with questions that arise or which we ask about ourselves by virtue of being human. A person's identity in this sense contains elements that make him or her unique or different from others as an individual. In other words, both questions of personal identity (who am I?) and personhood (what does it mean to be a person?) denote the essential characteristics that explain a person, as opposed to a non-person. A person's identity also refers to what it takes for a person to continue from one

point of time to another, or how he or she finds out who is who. What kind of evidence can be used to determine whether the person here and now is the same one who was here yesterday? For convenience, this research defines identity as the essence of one's identity which comprises those elements that the individual preserves in order to remain a distinct entity from others.

Identity refers to one's exact and unique characteristics and features which generally differ from those of others. It represents the real "self" of the person and the behaviours and requirements due to that perceived "self." As Butcher defines it, "Identity is a social phenomenon but it is also a tool for the management of the self" (2003, p. 16).

Developing a sense of self is a vital part of everyone's life, especially as the individual grows up. Moreover, each person's self-conception is a distinctive or unique combination of several aspects of identification, this includes the broader biological sense of being a female or male, their belief system (Catholic or Muslim), as well as the narrower sense of being a member of one particular family or group.

This also indicates that human behaviour was recognised by someone, from the very beginning and its boundaries were the family, tradition, ideology or the state. Each person had a certain role in society: the farmer was the farmer; the American was the American, etc. The question "Who am I?" did not arise as often because everybody already had a picture of who they were which was given by society. As Barker argues:

The search for identity in an increasingly uncertain world is an aspect of religious movements and individual quests for meaning. In this context, a cultural study explores how we come to be the kinds of people we are, that is, how we are produced as subjects and how we identify with certain

descriptions of ourselves as male or female, black or white, young or old, in short, what kinds of identities we adopt (1999, p. 2).

Furthermore, identity is a term that people often use in everyday conversation; it is however a complex concept. Sometimes, the notion of identity is strongly linked to the idea of the nation (state), as conceived in a national identity, but at the same time there is a variety of levels of identity to which one can relate.

Thus, it becomes apparent that every person has a number of identities: his or her own personal identity, which can be indicated by several categories, such as being a male, being a rugby player, being an engineer, being an excellent cook, etc. The same person also has a combined identity, like being an American or European, being part of a certain religious groups or communities, such as being a Muslim, Christian or Jewish, or being the follower of a defined school of thought.

Moreover, the notion of identity is based on a subjective sense of sameness and continuity: “The conscious feeling of having a personal identity was based on two factors: on the direct perception of one’s own sameness and continuity in time as well as on the perception of this sameness and continuity by others” (Erikson, 1966, p. 17-18 in Szykiel, 2007, p. 5).

However, some see that the notion or concept of identity has also changed and developed. Erikson proposed a theory of identity according to which “each person has an ego, which develops and changes through the experience collected in the procedure of maturation” (Erikson, 1966, p. 17-18).

Cultural identity

While personal identity is important for people in order to answer the question “Who am I?” cultural identity is also important for them to obtain a sense of self

in relation to others. This means that cultural identity based on ethnicity is not essentially exclusive. For example, people may identify themselves as Chinese in some circumstances and as part of a particular culture in another situation. They may also identify themselves with more than one culture. Tajfel and Turner explain that “social identity theory argues that people are enthused to belong to groups that are better than other groups in terms of status” (1986, p. 10). Gilroy emphasises the growing importance and relevance of identity to today’s world:

There has been an increased interest in cultural identity in recent years, particularly as cultural identities undergo constant transformation. We live in a world where identity matters. It matters both as a concept, theoretically, and as a contested fact of contemporary political life. The word itself has acquired a huge contemporary resonance, inside and outside the academic world (1997, p. 301).

However, ethnicity is an issue in the process of identity formation, especially for ethnic-minority people. Ethnicity refers to the group identity that has been developed in a group of people from a common origin and through a common history and experience. Ethnicity is based on mutual ethnic origins, shared cultural values and traditions, territorial or national ties, language, and religion. Mithun (1983) defines an ethnic group as “people who share a sense of traditions, be that derived from religious, physical, linguistic, aesthetic, or historical origins” (p. 210).

Clarke in the study “The Process of Identity Formation in Black Youths Raised in a Racially Dissonant Social Environment” (1996) found that:

Middle class black youths, residing in suburban communities, where they are present in very small numbers, do encounter common experiences based on these circumstances. Furthermore, it would seem that these black youths, in situations where the black population is small, also have to deal with conditions not faced by visible minority youths in an

environment with larger populations of members of their racial, ethnic group (p. 164).

Identity is a tool for studying the relationship between individuals and society. Verkuyten states that “it reflects the means by which people position themselves in society and on how sense is attached to this position. Therefore, changes in society, being political, actor, economical, demographic or cultural, all have their impact on identity” (1999, p. 5). Furthermore, Hall describes cultural identity as a type of collective sharing of culture: “cultural identity is a “shared culture”, a sort of collective “one true self” hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed “selves”, which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common” (1994, p. 394).

However, there are different ways in which cultural identity can be understood. Thus, cultural identities reproduce the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which create a sense of being “one people” with steady, unchanging and incessant frames of reference and commonness.

Moreover, cultural identity concerns experiences, it is a matter of “becoming” as well as of “being”, meaning that it belongs to the future and undergoes change as it did in the past. To illustrate, Rantanen argues:

Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation, and far from being eternally fixed in some essential past, they are subject to the continuous “play” of history, culture and power” (2005, p. 84).

Thus, cultural identity is not something which previously existed and subsequently transcended in terms of place, time, history and culture. Cultural identity has come from somewhere and it has a history. Rather than being

eternally set in some essential past, these are matters that evolve and influence the course of history, culture and power. As Lebaron and Bruce explain:

Cultural influences and identities become significant depending on background. When the feature of cultural identity is endangered or misunderstood, it may become comparatively more important than other cultural identities and this set, thin identity may become the focus of stereotyping, negative projection, and conflict. This is a very common circumstance in obstinate conflicts (1993, p. 21).

Societies do help people acquire their personalities, which can be referred to as “identity achieved”. For example, the younger generation naturally learn the meaning of humanity and values when they are mature enough to work and create the labour force for society. To be able to guide generations to this level of identity, societies must have appropriate plans to educate and take care of their children from a very young age. Thus, the values and moralities can be passed onto them and remain strong for centuries. Furthermore, children construct their cultural identity through interaction with their parents, peers and other significant people in their social surroundings.

All the aforementioned characteristics of human personality mean that one’s identity is multiple and exists within varying contexts. In a broad sense, identity can be categorised into the following theories:

- 1) The psychological approach, according to which some psychological relations are essential or necessary for an individual to preserve his or her identity.
- 2) Cultural identity is a subject or matter of becoming, it is as much a part of the future as well it is a part of the past.

Identity formation

Today, nationality and ethnicity play a less absolute role due to the social effects of globalisation. Cultural homogeneity seems to have been replaced by cultural heterogeneity. People with modern views do not classify or consider themselves as belonging to only one place, one group or one nation. As stated above, personal connections and being unique are the most significant factors of identity formation. However, it is also evident that people, besides forming their personal identity in the context of the family and school at a very young age, acquire their social identity with regard to what group they belong to and obtain membership to family, ethnic, religious or work-related groups. These group identities are a requirement for people to be able to identify themselves in the eyes of both others and themselves.

Erikson (1975) discussed “identity formation” at length in his developmental stages theory, according to which identity formation extends from birth through to adulthood. However, in today’s rapidly changing world, identity crises are different and more widespread than in Erikson’s day. The global market has not only brought with it economic growth and wealth, but it has also created isolation and identity crises. As Miller argues: “whereas a century ago the identity of individuals was rooted in production – as workers or owners – today it is consumption which confers identity. This is because consumption is the one domain over which individuals feel they still have some power” (1997, p. 26). Consequently, globalisation creates a change in the role of people from production to consumption; in the past, people felt power in having their own products, now people do not use their abilities and powers to create products, instead they depend on packaged products.

The idea that identity remains central to one's character is substantiated only when a person encounters an identity crisis. "Identity only becomes an issue when it is in crisis, when something assumed to be fixed, coherent and stable is displaced by the experience of doubt and uncertainty" (Mercer, 1990, p. 43). Furthermore, identity crises also happen in societies which have recently recovered their national dominion or opened their borders; the issue is thus strongly connected to the problems of globalisation and multiculturalism.

Sztykiel (2007) illustrates the idea of the identity crisis in his study "Identity Crisis and National Identity Issues in Modern Poland". Poland, as one of the countries of the former Soviet Union bloc, nurtured hopes of independence for many years. However, once its wish finally became a reality, it turned out that the country had to face many problems, not only on the economic level but especially on the social level. In the process of learning to establish democratic institutions, Poland was again subjected to a new transformation when it became a member of the European Union in May 2004. Also Sztykiel argues that "with open borders, globalisation, inter-cultural meetings and language policies, all of these components are of course needed in every country, but in the case of the young Polish democracy it caused a kind of disorientation" (2007, p. 4). The example of Poland illustrates the difficulties of identity formation within the cultural and social context.

Erikson (1970) stated that identity formation begins in childhood, continues into adolescence and becomes complete in adulthood; accordingly, the critical age for the formation of identity is adolescence. Having achieved physical development and sexual maturation, and being offered a variety of occupational opportunities, young adults begin to integrate their previous

experiences and characteristics gained particularly in childhood years into a predetermined and perhaps permanent identity. Thus, the building blocks of identity are laid down in childhood and the teenage years.

An expected obstacle to identity formation is identity crises caused by various experiences and situations. According to Erikson's developmental stages (1975), identity crises may develop during teenage years, and only those people who are successful in resolving these crises are prepared to face future challenges. At the same time, identity crises may return, as the changing world demands that humans continually redefine themselves. The author, therefore, suggests that people undergo an identity crisis when they lose "a sense of personal sameness and historical stability". However recent discussions focus on the transformation from the conception of modern identity to postmodern identity. Bauman (1996, p. 18) discusses this transformation: "If the modern problem of identity was how to construct an identity and keep it solid and stable, the postmodern problem of identity is primarily how to avoid fixation and keep the options open. In the case of identity, as in other cases, the catchword of modernity was creation; the catchword of post modernity is recycling".

Marcia (1966) illustrates four common ways in which adults deal with the challenges of identity formation. Those who successfully resolve and move on from identity crises are referred to as being "identity-achieved". Others who try to make commitments without questioning or investigating alternatives are named "identity-foreclosed", and those who are "identity-diffused" try to flee from making decisions about their futures. Such people may also not be able to make absolutely positive commitments to their careers, values or other people in their lives. On the other hand, those in the "moratorium" cannot settle down or

are in suspension, struggling and experiencing an ongoing crisis as they try to “find themselves”. Researchers proclaim that those who make a strong commitment to an identity seem to be happier and healthier than those who do not. People with their identities in flux seem to feel out of place in the world and fail to follow a definitive sense of identity.

Cultural elements and language are interwoven into the relationships children have with others as they become conscious of belonging to certain groups. In the process of growing up, the scope broadens and identity formation is no longer based only on what is considered to be important inside the family. Adolescents become more aware of a variety of ethnic-cultural differences; hence, their own identity make-up becomes less and less self-evident.

Some experts argue that family is important for structure and identity, such families are able to provide an important stabilising influence and power in the development of their adolescent sons’ and daughters’ identities. In contrast, others assert that parents do not matter (Harris, 1998). However, on the whole, the family structure is deemed as providing a significant environment in which identity development occurs (Archer & Waterman, 1994).

Nowadays the situation is perhaps subject to ongoing change as the source of identity constructs for children and teenagers is continually changing, especially following the recent and rapid advancements in technology, due to globalisation. In terms of what this technology means for identity Koç argues: “Social changes and identities are influenced, if not determined, by technological innovations because technology is more than a machine and can very well convey information and embody social and cultural dimensions that shape society” (2006, p. 39). Thus technology constructs produce social

change. While the people need and use these methods these objects are used; however, they fail to pay attention to household practices and relationships within the household.

Globalisation, mass media and identity formation

The term “globalisation”, as Klein (2002) states, is used to explain the phenomenon of the world becoming increasingly interconnected, especially over the past several decades. It encompasses regionalisation, “stretched” social relationships, intensification of flow, rising interpenetration, and global infrastructures.

Nowadays, more and more consideration has been devoted to the widely discussed idea of identity and identity formation in the age of globalisation, be it individually or collectively. Such a tendency can be seen in relation to the ever-increasing trends of globalisation. Moreover, globalisation draws its strength from cultural differences in order to increase its scope and power of diffusion. Globalisation is described as a continual process by Mark (2000, p. 5): “The process of continuing integration of the countries in the world is strongly underway in all parts of the global”.

Sztykiel (2007) believes that there are two general perspectives on identity within the context of globalisation. The first perspective emphasises the globalisation’s beneficial purpose for the individual. In addition, with the opening of global markets and the removal of trade barriers, one counts achievement and innovation in the field of microelectronics as increasing the potential for cross-border communication. However, it is also argued that this information revolution not only serves private entertainment or commercial profits, but also reinforces the self-assertion of the individual, over state and social claims.

Besides this, it also restructures the world and thus weakens the self-determination of national borders.

Alghasi (2009, p. 67-81), after examining 20 Iranian-Norwegians and their diverse media consumptions, suggests that the dynamics are connected to the media's hegemonic quality. Iranian-Norwegians expressed, in their broad representation of reality and in their subjective positions that it seemed to have a vital impact on the way they resisted information as well as on the position of Iranian-Norwegian knowledge in Norwegian society. The relationship of the respondents of Alghasi's study were characterised by their efforts to describe and redefine their identity and position within society. This concerns the society they live in as well as the one they left behind. Furthermore, this study attempted to recognise and search for other definitions and opinions relating to the Iranians and their concern over who they are and where they belong. At the same time, this study also strived to define and redefine who they believe they really are and where they believe they really belong. This claim is also supported by the respondents' substantial focus on issues linked to markers of their status: being Iranian, being immigrants and coming from a Muslim background.

This means that in recent decades, the idea of identity has undergone a paradigmatic repositioning, moving away from the aspects of highlighting "sameness", whether this be "selfsameness" or resemblance of the self with others. The focus has now shifted to difference and plurality in which "identity" does not survive in the singular, but rather in fragmented and flowing multiplicities. Much of this draws on the poststructuralist ideas of scholars such as Jacques Derrida and his theory of difference according to which "the

meaning is neither temporal nor identical; it is continuously moving and changing” (in Sökefeld, 1999, p. 423).

Moreover, in the modern society and due to globalisation, identity shifts from unchanging “set”. Researchers such as Thompson define and describe this situation as follows:

With the expansion of modern societies, the self has, more and more, become a “reflexive project” in that individuals have increasingly to fall back on their own resources in order to build coherent identities for themselves (1995, p. 210).

Central to this process of self-formation – the construction of “a narrative of self-identity” – Thompson asserts and mediates symbolic resources. Giddens (1991) believes that the diverse identities that people acquire and draw upon do not always remain the same. Meanings are constantly renegotiated as privileges and priorities of identities evolve with time. Depending on different circumstances, these are transmuted because they refer to and may come into conflict with each other. Subsequently, although people may share identities, identity is not fixed but created and built upon, always in a process, a “moving towards” rather than an “arrival”. Such a project builds on what we think we are now (in the light of our past and present circumstances) along with what we think we would like to be (the trajectory of our hopes for the future).

Sztykiel (2007) points out that the science of sociology takes an interest in identity as a problem only when rapid and extensive social changes of a high degree occur as a result of globalisation. For example, Erikson (1966) supposed that the identity of an individual (the ego-identity) was an add-on to personal maturity, which the individual at the end of the adolescence stage

draws from the stock of childhood experiences in order to be able to tackle the tasks of adult life.

Miller (1997) believes that in the previous century the identity of the individual was rooted in production: identity of workers or owners. Today, it is consumption that confers identity because this is one of the domains over which people still have power. In recent days (as clear by-products of global capitalism, air travel and satellite communication, the age of universal markets and global mass media), a variety of authorities have claimed that the world is quickly becoming a single place. Information and communication technology (ICT) has eliminated geographic boundaries and enabled virtual relationships through which people are able to acquire new social identities. Although this somewhat exaggerated viewpoint has a significant contribution to make to the topic, an even more striking feature of the post-Cold War world is the apparently ubiquitous appearance of identity politics with the open aim of reinstating rooted traditions, religious beliefs, spiritual passions and/or commitment to ethnic or national identities.

In this sense, the movement or progress from traditional local life to modern dealings and interaction with the mass media has created identities that are already multi-layered with regional, local and national elements.

Kellner argues that “in modern industrial society a “media culture” has emerged which helps create the fabric of everyday life, shaping political views and social behaviour, and providing the materials out of which people forget their very identities” (1995, p. 1).

There is no doubt that globalisation and transnational television programming is a pervasive and influential factor on the lifestyles of people

which ultimately creates different outcomes of identity. In the words of Woodward:

Globalisation produces different outcomes for identity. The cultural homogeneity promoted by global marketing could lead to the detachment of identity from community and place. Alternatively, it could also lead to resistance, which could strengthen and reaffirm some national and local identities or lead to the emergence of new identity positioning (1997, p. 16).

According to Koç (2006), while the concept of globalisation transforms local identities, customs and values, inhabitants are also able to change and transfer the global into their local contexts.

This further suggests that new identities do not essentially belong to either local or global contexts and can be actively constructed. Ritzer argues that “globalisation has been distinct as “the interpenetration” of the global and the local, resulting in unique outcomes in geographic areas” (2003, p. 4). In the case of national identities, the question becomes “Where are you between?” rather than “Where are you from?”

Moreover, globalisation has offered a variety of sources of material for use in the building of identities or in the creation of multiple identities, as Barker (1997, p. 191) explains:

Globalisation has increased the range of sources and resources available for the construction of identity, allowing the production of hybrid identities in the context of a post-traditional global society where, although bounded by societies and states are very much still with us, the circulation of other global cultural discourses cuts across them.

On the other hand, globalisation creates weaknesses in relationships with other or indigenous societies in the formation or shaping of experience and identity. Giddens (1991) believes that “globalisation consequences a sense of being disembodied from places, in other words, a weakening of affiliation to localities”

(p. 21). However Hall (1996) argues that globalisation creates a weakness of identity and at the same time national identity becomes stronger in the resistance of globalisation:

Three important things can happen as a consequence of globalisation: first, as a result of cultural homogenisation, national identities are eroded. Second: national or “local” identities are strengthened by globalisation, and the third one; although national identities may be declining, new identities are formed (Hall, 1996, p. 619).

Thus, the process of globalisation affects the circumstances of life in particular localities and presents new opportunities and new forms of identity by influencing knowledge and behavioural attitudes.

Today, global totality is perhaps more specific and is very different from Erikson’s proposal where he argued that children acquire their identity from the family, school or the social environment around them. Chung and Moran (2008) point out: children around the world are growing up in a globalised environment influenced by several factors such technology, pop culture and the World Wide Web. One significant factor in determining their identity is the internationalisation of television programming. For example, a child living in India gets to see TV programmes dubbed from the Chinese and American cultures. Thus, the child may acquire cultural and personal traits that are unique to the Chinese or American cultures.

Koç (2006) describes the role of educational technology and educational media in helping to understand children:

Since educational technology is a resource that encompasses political, cultural and social dimensions, it needs to be placed in the hands of teachers who are culturally aware of the non-neutral aspect of it. The ways in which children come to understand the world are learned through imagery. Images consume children’s daily experiences and are prevalent throughout educational media and computer software. Educators who understand the potential impact of cultural media on children can be

influential in teaching students to read representational meanings of media artefacts” (2006, p. 42).

Television programmes help viewers develop a third identity which is a fusion of the local and global, an identity that transcends traditional ethnic and cultural boundaries. Television educates viewers on numbers and letters, social experience, language and diversity of culture.

At the same time, multiple or even ambiguous identities create a new tension: the pull between the global and local. As Straubhaar states, “television viewers around the world continue to strongly reflect these layers or aspects of identity while many also acquire new layers of identity that are supranational, based on cultural-linguistic “regional” and “global”” (2003, p. 77).

Researchers also argue that the connection between locations and identities has become loosened. Rantanen, for example, states that:

When Meyrowitz wrote that “we are physically no longer determined by where and who we are socially”, he is referring implicitly to changing identities, where the connection between place and identity has been loosened because of the action of the media and of communications technologies (2005, p. 54).

Moreover, globalisation and the media create an environment where people lose their moral values and their “place” in society causing them to feel isolated. Szykiel (2007) argues that the global market has brought not only economic development and wealth, but also a loss of moral values, isolation, decadence and genuine identity crises. The European Union, for example, brought benefits in many fields: it opened the national potential for work and life and created an easier exchange of information with cross-cultural contacts. However, at the same time, a kind of fear arose among the people brought together under the flag of the European Union. Today, it’s the people who feel a lack of inner

localisation, they do not feel at home in the new open world, even though they realise that there is no going back to the old regional certainty; it is this inner strife that leads to identity questioning. People increasingly, question who they are, where they belong, and what they should hold on to (2007, p. 3).

As well as the media, the goods of cultural industries have become resources for the creation of personality models and therefore contribute to the creation of cultural identities. As Kellener (1995, p. 1) argues:

Radio, television, film, and the other goods of the culture industries provide the models of what it means to be male or female, powerful or powerless. Media culture also provides the resources out of which many people build their sense of class, race and ethnicity, of nationality, of sexuality, of “us” and “them.” Media culture helps shape the prevalent view of the world and the deepest values: it defines what is measured good or bad, positive or negative, moral or evil. Media stories and images give the symbols, myths, and materials which help shape a common culture for the majority of individuals in many parts of the world today. Media culture provides the resources to create identities whereby individuals insert themselves into modern techno-capitalist societies... [and this] is producing a new form of global culture.

Thus, the media is extremely powerful in promoting social structure and cultural change by creating a role model for people to follow. Banerjee describes this in relation to research into American television:

In every country in the world, American television programmes and films adorn screens. Whether it be in the remote villages in India or in the kampongs of Malaysia, American and Western cultural icons and content make their overbearing presence felt. Globally, children interact with the symbols they see on television and incorporate these experiences into their daily reality. New generations of children are developing a third identity – a fusion of local and global – an identity that transcends traditional, ethnic and cultural boundaries (2002, p. 517).

These changes, created by media resources, tend to have more effect on individual socio-cultural change. Zaharopoulos (2003) argues that in the US, cultural dispersion is taking place via many means, including the mass media. However, changes in media economics, as well as cultural developments, allow

for almost a selective receipt of US cultural products and influences. These influences and impacts are more connected to an individual's socio-cultural and political identity rather than to cultural conversion and massive change. Individual identity is therefore related and linked to what one watches on television (2003, p. 54).

The mass media is made up of mass-produced television, films, audiovisual media, radio and recorded music. The publication media, such as newspapers, magazines and popular fiction, and the fusion of different forms of media on the Internet (combined text, image and audiovisual content, blurring the outline between "producer" and "customer", both as a broadcast medium and a means of personal communication) also influence the process of identity formation. As Chung argues, "while culture plays the larger role in shaping our view of ourselves, it is through multiple channels that we acquire and develop our own values, ethics, norms, and ways of behaving in our everyday lives" (2008, p. 3).

The introduction of new technology has challenged traditional identities. Turkle (1997) argues that engagements with new technologies "challenge what a lot of people have traditionally called "identity"; a sense of self is recast in terms of multiple windows and similar lives" (1997, p. 37).

Transnational products can open up an imaginary gap in which one's own culture is newly defined. "Media are being used by productive clients to maintain and build up boundaries, but also to create new, joint spaces in which syncretic cultural forms, such as new ethnicities, can emerge" (Gillespie, 1995, p. 208).

Hall (1994) suggests three arguments about the function of the media within the context of the transformation of cultural identities in the age of globalisation. First, development of cultural homogenisation and the global post-modernisation will lead to the corrosion of national identities. Second, national and other local or particularistic identities will be empowered in opposition against globalisation. Third, national identities will be reduced and new identities of a hybrid character will take their place. On the other hand, Bauman, analysing this transformation, argues that:

If the modern problem of identity was how to construct an identity and keep it solid and stable, the postmodern problem of identity is primarily how to avoid fixation and keep the options open. In the case of identity, as in other cases, the catchword of modernity was creation; the catchword of post modernity is recycling” (1996, p. 18).

This is particularly the case for the countries which are still facing a one-way flow of information from developed countries; these programmes create media products to help viewers adopt their values to help spread their own product cultures. As Salinas and Paldan (1979) argue:

Western powers (mainly the United States) export mass media to developing countries with the deliberate intention of corroding the traditional cultures of these countries and convincing the people of these countries to adopt Western cultural values which will lead to their purchase of Western products (in Elasmir and Bennet, 2003, p. 13).

Dramatised serials and soap operas are among the most popular forms of television programmes and, as such, have been the centre of much research in the anthropology of media.

To conclude, the components of one’s identity create a sense of personal continuity and uniqueness from other individuals, this creation of individualism affects variety and diversity. In addition to the formation of personal identity based on the need for uniqueness, people acquire social identities based on

their membership of a variety of groups, including: the family, ethics and work-related groups, to name a few. These group identities, in addition to fulfilling the necessity of organisation, facilitate the way people define themselves in the eyes of both others and themselves. However, today identity and the process of identity formation are interfered with, in a historically novel way, by contemporary patterns of media consumption. Due to the globalisation of media products, identity formation has shifted from being based on fixed concepts derived from tradition to being based on a confusing multiplicity of concepts generated in a global, homogeneous – and, bizarrely, at the same time multi-faceted – culture.

Globalisation and the internationalisation of television could potentially change the traditional culture of Kurdish society by making viewers think in different ways with regards to their role in society and the world, as they have recently recovered their independence and at the same time have had to face the impact of globalisation. This study chose to focus on Kurdish women in the Kurdistan Region, by looking at how they have been affected by globalisation and international television, especially in terms of identity and culture. However, prior to discussing this influence in detail, the Kurdistan Region's media situation and its dependency on foreign television programmes, in the face of globalisation, will be discussed in the following chapter. Before progressing to this discussion, the methodology of the research will be presented in the next chapter. The remaining chapters in this thesis will make reference to quotations from female Kurdish participants to support notions presented in this research. Interviewee responses will be utilised for different purposes, to highlight elements and, to provide further analysis, codes will be used in some places.

Please note that the researcher has tried to reduce as much repetition as possible, but in places this may occur to illustrate essential points.

CHAPTER TWO: METHODOLOGY AND DATA COLLECTION

When using a qualitative approach to investigate how and why Kurdish women use soap operas to help identify themselves, it should be taken into account that soap operas are not the only medium for self-identification among Kurdish females. It is vital to take into account the other settings which contribute to the formation of identity. The study of humanity becomes more complete when issues such as culture, historical background and institutional (social) settings are considered. People do not live in isolation from each other, and therefore the integration of multiple variables into a study allows for the investigation of the diverse facets of social phenomena. This research chose to focus on soap operas because they are an extensive and widely understood medium by women. As Cantor and Pingree describe, "The content of a soap opera reflects its intended audience. The stories are women's stories, focusing on love, romance, childbearing, health and illness, manners and morals" (1983, p. 28). In particular, soap operas provide people with information about morals, behaviour, relationships and the conduct of an ideal citizen. Signorelli and Bacue (1999) describe the soap opera as "acting as an agent of socialisation". In other words, soap operas provide the audience with the framework against which their daily life is judged.

Organisation of qualitative data

This research will utilise qualitative data by comparing, analysing and interpreting the primary data gathered from the interviews. Such an analysis goes beyond mere description to a higher level of synthesis in order to derive meaning, causes and consequences of the social phenomena. This research did not conduct a survey to gather quantitative data; however some quantitative results which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Six.

There are many advantages of qualitative methods; in particular, qualitative studies allow for the integration of data and provide in-depth evaluation of variables.

The purpose of qualitative analysis is to bring order to primary data, organising it into patterns, categories and basic expressive and analytical units. For the purposes of comparison and interpretative analysis, well-recognised qualitative approaches should be employed because they afford the researcher the flexibility needed to describe and compare participants' responses and to properly analyse the differences in their opinions.

For example, the "scissor-and-sort" process helps to identify key themes, or the main results, through a serial process of transcribing tapes, editing, coding, bracketing and dissecting transcriptions, writing connective materials, etc. Kitzinger argues that "the scissor-and-sorts technique which is sometimes called the cut-and-paste method, is a quick and cost-effective method for analysing transcripts of a focus group discussion" (1994, p. 25). This research did not utilise focus group discussions, in terms interviewing people as a group, but this technique was applied by the researcher to the transcript for identifying the specific parts that were relevant to the research question(s). This was based on the original reading and the categorisation of major topics and issues which developed. The material in the transcript connected each topic by recognising the amount of material that needed coding for each and every topic, this coding depended on the importance of the topic to the overall research questions and the amount of variation in the discussions. The coded material and the phrases and sentences were then either integrated or defined based on the interactions between the individual respondents.

Qualitative data analysis requires multiple approaches to the evaluation and discussion of the data in order to answer research questions and present the results of the study. Qualitative studies can be more effective than quantitative studies in bringing about an understanding by providing a more complete examination of social phenomena rather than trying to quantify and reduce the quality of the data to numerical representation.

Qualitative research does not limit the conceptual scope of an investigation, and thus allows for a deeper understanding of the social issues. Qualitative research is therefore the most effective methodology to adopt to study the lives and cultural norms of groups of women in the Kurdistan Region, as representative of the Kurdish female viewers' reactions towards the Turkish soap opera *Noor*. Furthermore, the research will engage in an in-depth discussion of the concomitant changes undergone by this audience in terms of culture and identity formation. The focus group is one of the most common and frequently helpful qualitative methods because it is effective in eliciting data regarding the cultural norms of a group. Researchers have rarely focused on this topic in this region – it has, as a social-cultural unit, been somewhat marginalised in academic research. Also, the group under focus will be useful in providing a deeper understanding of Kurdish women in their social and political context, as discussed in the previous chapters.

Nevertheless, it should be recognised that qualitative research has one significant drawback. In particular, it requires months of intensive work, because the researcher needs to become part of the culture under investigation in order to ensure that the observations are natural.

Qualitative studies provide knowledge which can affect the understanding of human beings. Research interviews, for example, facilitate the exploration of human beings in much greater detail than quantitative research. Interviews provide access to the subjective experiences of the participants of a study and therefore in this case will allow the researcher to explore the intimate aspects of the Kurdish women's lives and their society – this could not be captured through a quantitative study. The researcher gathers data, makes field notes and interprets the information gathered; in other words, the researcher must develop an understanding of the observations from the perspective of the group under study. However, due to the nature of Kurdish society and the socio-political situation in this region, as well as the time restrictions for this study, long and direct observations were not fully conducted.

Ideally, qualitative studies foster the integration of the researcher into the studied group. The purpose of this qualitative research was to explore the role of television soap operas as they appear to be a main resource employed by Kurdish women in forming their identity. The research focuses on the impact of the Turkish soap opera *Noor* on the way that Kurdish women understand and self-identify themselves.

It should be noted that the researcher had planned to watch the soap opera with the interviewees, or observe whether they watched it alone or with their families. In addition, the researcher had planned to ask the question: “do you watch the soap opera alone or with your family?”. As a result of the mentioned difficulties, the researcher did not successfully gain an answer to this question. The psychology of the Kurdish women affects their watching behaviours; however, other things also contribute including their family life. For

example, in some families, due to their economic situation, they have only one television and all the members of the family watch the same programmes on TV; whereas, for wealthy families the situation is very different.

Method

This qualitative study employs interviewing and observation methods as the main methods of collecting primary data from the studied Kurdish women, with regards to their identity and the role played by the soap opera *Noor* in the formation of their identity. As Denzin and Lincoln state, “qualitative researchers are challenged to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of meanings people bring to them” (1994, p. 2). The application of these two qualitative research methods makes it possible to examine a variety of experiential materials. Interviews will investigate by providing descriptions of the personal experiences of the research participants and the observation will allow for interpretation of the opinions expressed by further examining the participants’ lives. Kurdish women tend to be “closed off” and will generally need time to develop a relationship of trust and confidentiality before they will feel comfortable enough to talk openly and express their feelings and opinions about a topic. This research has used the qualitative observational method coupled with interviews because this research needs specific information and involves more than simply going out into the field to observe a given group of women.

This method involves the collection of massive amounts of data. The researcher, having grown up in the society under study, already has an intimate experience and knowledge of Kurdish women, their feelings, behaviours and attitudes. The researcher’s view could therefore improve this chapter by reflecting on her own role as a “Kurdish” woman and researcher; however, at

the same time she needs to consider her own subjectivity and whether her participation in the group could facilitate too much sympathy or antagonism when interpreting the behaviours of the group. The researcher was therefore careful to behave in a consistent manner as part of the setting so as not to cause significant changes in the community itself.

In addition, the researcher was aware of any presumptions that the participants may hold which could influence the findings, as well as being aware that the act of participant observation could affect her own behaviour. For example when conducting the interviews and asking questions, the researcher did not show knowledge of the Kurdish women's situation or of the soap operas; she wanted to collect words directly from the mouths of the interviewees and did not want to influence or affect the interviewees' responses. In addition, while writing notes, translating and analysing the data, the researcher was conscious of bias and worked to avoid this by remaining objective. It was difficult to keep bias from the discussions when talking about the society the researcher had grown up in; however, the researcher tried to remove bias by not reflecting personal views on the interviewees' answers and feelings.

The researcher aimed to conduct 40 interviews to gain substantial data from the participants in order to truly represent the different social statuses and different social roles; the sample included: students, mothers and employed women. It became evident that the comparison of responses was rather difficult due to the similarity of the participants' responses. The study focuses on family issues for women and the spouse's treatment of women, the researcher therefore chose to conduct 21 interviews with females possessing different

statuses and social responsibilities; thus, any correlation in their answers could be said to speak for women's attitudes in general.

There are a number of religious minority groups living in the Kurdistan Region, including: Christians, Jews and Yezidis, to name a few. This research did not reflect on the different religious backgrounds, the sample did however focus on different backgrounds in terms of: education, age, social and marital status and occupations, in the interview process (see Table 1, below). Moreover the Kurdistan Region not only includes religious minorities, but also ethnic minorities too. The region contains a multi-religious and multi-ethnic society and, as such, the research did not want to identify these as differences which could limit the research. The research aimed to identify the impact of this type of media on Kurdish women viewers in general, irrespective of their religious beliefs. The majority of religious and ethnic minorities living in this region speak Kurdish and consider themselves to be Christian Kurds, Jewish Kurds, etc.

Interviewees

This study included 21 female participants from the Iraqi Region of Kurdistan, they ranged in age from 18 to 40 years old. The age range was chosen due to the study's purpose and the questions which focused on the family and spousal relationships and the participants' desire to apply the shows family attitudes to their relationships with their family and spouse. This age range is also the ideal age in Kurdish society for marriage and motherhood. It is likely that there will be some variation in answers, as this large age range does not account for the differences in views and expressions of the women in this group, but it should provide descriptions and understanding of spousal and family life.

Table 1: Interviewee demographic

Interviewee	Age	Marital Status	Occupation	No. Of Children
Layla	39	Married	Housewife	4
Soma	38	Married	Shop Assistant	4
Shanaz	40	Married	Housewife	5
Rozhgar	40	Married	Housewife	5
Rahma	18	Married	University Student	0
Roza	30	Married	Teacher	1
Dlnia	20	Single	University Student	0
Roshna	40	Married	Housewife	4
Asia	30	Married	Engineer	2
Shirin	25	Married	Employer	1
Deman	20	Married	Housewife	0
Ashti	28	Married	Housewife	2
Shawbo	38	Married	Employer	3
Dwnia	28	Married	University Student	3
Nashmil	39	Married	Housewife	4
Narmin	30	Married	Teacher	3
Bahar	24	Married	Housewife	1
Eman	20	Single	Unemployed	0
Gashawa	40	Married	Engineer	3
Sarah	36	Married	Housewife	3
Asma	38	Married	Housewife	5

All of the participants watch several popular soap operas, including the Turkish soap opera *Noor*, which includes in its storylines representations of the “new” or “modern” lifestyle, including: modern relationships between the husband and wife, and strong and independent female characters. These two aspects are lacking in the lives of Kurdish women, and some of the women interviewed for this research referred to this. For example, Bahar, a 24-year-old housewife, in

answering the question “What is the difference between the other soaps you are watching and the *Noor* series?” noted:

This is the first time a Middle Eastern soap gives something we are missing in our life, such as romance, love and equal partnerships. I watch too many soaps, especially Iranian ones, but prefer the Turkish rather than the Iranian ones.

Interviewee 17 see Appendix.

Prior to the interviews, the researcher became acquainted with all of the participants. The participants were recruited from different areas, including: big cities, small towns and rural regions, in order to obtain a wide understanding of the different social contexts and perspectives. Thus, the participants were purposefully selected to fit the focus of this study which included the lives of particular groups of women.

Interestingly, the researcher found that Kurdish women had never been interviewed and their opinions had never been requested before. Therefore, the researcher noted that the Kurdish women might be hesitant and shy when speaking their mind to the researcher. In particular, the Kurdish women could fear saying the wrong thing or facing recrimination from their families. In addition, they might avoid answering certain questions for fear that it could present them in a “bad light”. For this reason, a prior connection with the study’s participants was made in order to avoid nerves and any discomfort from talking with a stranger. As a member of the Kurdish community, the researcher has regularly observed the behaviour of women who did not participate in the discussions. Their reactions to the study were also evaluated and embedded into the analysis of the findings.

Materials

The semi-structured interviews consisted of 25 “content” questions including five “demographic” questions. The qualitative data-collection procedure consisted of personal, face-to-face interviews with the aim of eliciting individual responses, views, thoughts and opinions. As Berger states: “The advantage of interviews is that one can generally record interviews and thus have a written record that can be analysed in detail” (2000, p. 113).

The in-depth interviews about women’s viewing habits and preferences for various soap operas were conducted in the Kurdistan Region with the help of a local native speaker. Interviews were recorded using audio tapes, they were translated into the English language, and then edited. The interviewer asked the participant sets of questions as found in the questionnaire, but a casual approach for unstructured interviewing was also utilised during the interview process.

As Lindlof and Taylor comment, “when used in qualitative research interviews go by several names, each with a slightly different shade of meaning: there are in-depth, unstructured, semi-structured, intensive, collaborative, and ethnographic interviews” (2002, p. 4). Berger believes that “Interviews are one of the most widely used and most fundamental research techniques... as they enable researchers to obtain information that they cannot gain from observation alone” (2000, p. 11). Unless observational research is undertaken for a sufficient amount of time, it is difficult to establish a link between the current and past activities and beliefs of people. However, through the method of interviewing, ideas, attitudes and thoughts can be easily discovered. Gillham suggests that “this is usually better for honing in on a particular topic and also

picking up specific ways of phrasing topics and questions” (2000, p. 20). Semi-structured interviews allow for the exploration of the relevant topics more thoroughly while the analysis of the information is much easier when the interview is conducted on study participants separately.

For some of the participants of this research, the researcher could not remain with the participants for long, for purposes of observation, due to time limitations. For example, one of the interviewees, who had a high regard for the behaviour of *Noor*'s female characters, did not allow the researcher to interview her in her own house because she was concerned that her brother or father would come back and be angry with her. So the researcher had to interview her at the house of one of her neighbours, and it was thus difficult to remain with her for any length of time for purposes of observation.

Open-ended questions

Open-ended questions were utilised during the interviews to gain a deep insight into the participants' opinions, judgements or beliefs. The respondents were able to express their unique opinions rather than be limited by the choice of prepared answers. Neuman (2000) states that open-ended questions allow the respondent to answer in more detail and clarify their responses whenever needed. In other words, open-ended questions allow the participant to develop their own responses as there are no boundaries guiding their answers. Furthermore, the researcher is able to request clarification to the responses and, consequently, get a more methodical understanding of the ideas and thoughts expressed.

Open-ended questions ensure that the researcher explores the true aspects of social phenomena rather than finds out what is expected to be found

out. For example, in this study the researcher did not plan to talk about violence and cover the violent situations which Kurdish women face within their family and society, but in response to the open-ended question some interviewees referred to the violence which they face in their society. Data for the violence code was therefore collected. For example, in asking the question: “Would you like your young children to behave like the characters in this show?”, the researcher wanted to know if it was difficult to these women to follow the “modern behaviour”, and whether they preferred the younger generation to maintain the traditional way of life. Some of the women’s answers referred to the fear of what their children might face should they accept and follow this behaviour. The responses clearly indicated the existing state of violence in their society, as illustrated, for example, by the response of Shawbo, a 38-year-old employer:

I would like my daughter and my son to behave like these modern characters and have an equal relationship, but I do not think they can do so in this society. If I allow them the society does not, because you know if a girl falls in love with a boy, the society will blame her and she may face violence.

Interviewee 13, see Appendix.

This comment indicates that women in this society are still facing violence and could be endangered if they try to accept modern life and change from the traditional life. This data and violence code, as well as other information, arose spontaneously through open-ended questioning and without any premeditation on the part of the researcher.

Data compilation

The number of Kurdish women who can speak and communicate in the English language is less than 1%. Therefore, the interviews were conducted in their native Kurdish language and then translated into English.

Initially, a pilot study was conducted, prior to the interviewing process. The pilot test led to a number of changes in questioning. It revealed that the phrasing of some of the questions was unclear and additional descriptions were required. To illustrate, instead of asking “Who is your favourite soap actress?” the question was modified to “These are the names of the actresses from your favourite soap operas. Which one do you favour the most?” The revisions made the questions clearer and aided the participants’ understanding. Because the interviewees had different social statuses and backgrounds – students, employees, housewives, etc. – sometimes when they were asked about the name of their favourite soap opera, some of them became confused and needed to think about the names of the soap operas which they watched. Housewives and illiterate women, particularly, at times could not remember the names of the soap operas that they had watched years ago, but easily remembered the names of soap operas with which they were familiar with and which they were currently watching. The researcher tried to write all the names of the soap operas recently aired in the region; several soap operas have been translated into the Kurdish and Arabic languages and broadcasted in the region since the arrival of satellite television. Kurdish women can therefore understand them and watch them all.

The participants in the pilot study mentioned that they liked all actresses. For this reason, the revised version of the question required women to think

about the specific soap actresses and to make a decision as to which one they liked the most.

Data organisation

Once the data was collected from the interviews, the answers were transcribed and then translated into English by the researcher. Due to the open-ended nature of the questions, only certain demographic sections and questions regarding areas of interest were coded after translation. For example, 36 questions were asked in the interviews, but after transcription only 25 questions were translated. Some of the question were just asked to help clarify other questions and to promote greater involvement with the interviewer so as to obtain the required answers. Most of these women had never been interviewed before, so they needed in-depth explanations and elucidation of what the questions meant. Once the actual study began, the researcher noted that, due to the limitation of the study, only nine questions and some demographic classifications could be coded and analysed. In addition, the survey was conducted before the actual study began and some of the questions and answers were actually irrelevant to the current study due to the path that it had taken (see Table 3 in Appendix).

Some of the questions dealt with the viewing habits of Kurdish women; however, for the purpose of this research, only those questions which related to preferences for soap opera characters and which concerned a higher regard for foreign television programmes, especially soap operas, were translated for further analysis. Thus, the translation of specific sections of the interviews was done selectively based on the content and its relevance to the given study.

Thus, once the interviews were transcribed, the investigation and analysis of the coding started. The element of analysis for the coding was the smallest meaningful comment, or what Gottman (1997) calls a “thought unit”. In other words, a meaningful comment is the smallest piece of information that may stand alone as an idea or meaningful thought. Thus, within a single person’s response to any one question, a variety of meaningful thoughts were coded. Some study participants had more than ten coded thought units, while others had only one in their responses. In the process of analysing participants’ responses, a qualitative coding plan was developed and refined.

Table 2: Sequence of steps of the qualitative study

Data Collection	Data Analysis	Interpretations	Judgments	Recommendations
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Coding

The transcripts of audio-recorded interviews and completed questionnaires are regarded as the artefacts of communication (Berg, 2004, p. 267). A content analysis was undertaken and codes were inductively recognised in the data and then transformed into categories. Based on the categories developed, the procedure for identifying similar phrases, relationships, commonalities, conflicts, ideas, identities or themes were established to trace the shared meanings among the participants. “The role of code words is to help you collect the things you have noticed so you can subject them to further analysis. Codes help you reorganise the data and give you different views of the data. They facilitate the discovery of things, and they help you open up the data to further intensive analysis and inspection” (Seidel, 1998, p. 14). For example, for the nine codes used for interpreting different meanings and analyses, such as analyses for the code *modern way of life*, the researcher did not just yield the number of the

women preferring this way of life, but she also aimed to understand the reasons why they provided this answer, as discussed in the code analysis. For example, it became clear that these women live in a male-dominated or patriarchal society and that something is lacking in their lives. They think that by following the modern way of life, they will be rescued from this situation and obtain freedom and better rights. As for the interpretation of the *independence* code, it does not just tell us that Kurdish women want to be independent, but it also helps us analyse why they desire this independence. What does independence mean for them? How do they understand this aspect? Which independence do they like? And what is the impact for preferring this code? All this leads towards a better understanding of the situation of this community and the motivations behind these women's choice of media materials and media access.

The key value of the qualitative study is the descriptive and integrative nature of the research; the coding reduces the importance of descriptions and variations to numbers and commonalities. In addition, the researcher was prepared for situations when respondents failed to talk in complete sentences. The procedure of transcription and analysis took into account these issues to ensure the satisfactory representation of the spoken word into a written transcript.

Coding system

The following coding system or scheme represents the whole process of coding and analysis of the data gathered from the interviews. Specifically, this coding scheme was developed to capture the comments in which the participants displayed their use of soap operas as cultural tools for self-identification and identity formation, whether for themselves or for other women. Overall, the

following nine key codes were recognised in the context of participants' views regarding: spousal relationships, family life, religion and female roles (these will be analysed and discussed more in Chapter Six). The nine different codes include:

1. Respect
2. Traditional Kurdish family
3. Modern way of life
4. Violence
5. Equal partnerships
6. Love, romance tenderness
7. Independence
8. Female leadership roles
9. Religion or Islam

**CHAPTER THREE: THE KURDISTAN REGION – FACING GLOBAL COMMERCIAL
TELEVISION**

Signal and Svenkerud (1994) described the media as being an integral part of the spread of modernity: “The mass media were viewed as an important contributor in the modernisation process of traditional societies. The role of mass communication was to expose audiences in traditional societies to the outside world” (p. 18). The most powerful catalyst for modernising people and cultures is the mass media (Lanuza, 2003).

At the same time, the local/domestic media is important as it can reduce foreign influences, protect local and traditional cultures, and prevent the one-way flow of information and media dependency. This chapter will identify and explain media policy and the dependency situation in the Kurdistan Region in the face of the spread of global commercial television. To fully explain this situation, the media policy and its nature in Iraq, before and after the Saddam regime, will first be identified with a brief overview of how, following the banned satellite dishes and the state-controlled media by the former Iraqi government, viewers were introduced and exposed to global television. Some comparisons will be drawn between the media situation in this country and in certain other countries to shed more light on the policy and media situation in Iraq and the Kurdistan Region.

The Kurdistan Region, prior to its independence, was part of Iraq. Moreover, Kurdistan’s Federal Government initially belonged to Iraq’s Central Government. However, this primary research is not about Iraq it is about the Kurdistan Region, and it is therefore beyond the scope of this paper to provide a full account of the media situation in Iraq; as such this paper will not discuss the tensions that have arisen as a result of programmes that these state-owned or

independent channels provide. Instead, this section will focus on the way in which the previous media policy from Iraq has affected the Kurdistan Region's media. For example, in terms of media control, and how this was maintained after the fall of the regime (albeit in a different manner), and how the ban on satellite television and lack of media material under the former Iraqi regime created a desire of viewers to watch foreign media material, including Kurdish women.

This study is about the influence of global commercial television on Kurdish women's identity and culture; therefore, before going on to examine this in the next chapter, it should be explained how the Iraqi viewers in general and how Kurdish women in particular responded to this type of media.

The media in Iraq

In order to understand the mass media situation in Iraq and the exposure to global television, the situation needs to be divided into two periods: first, during Saddam Hussein's regime, and second, after Saddam's regime. As these periods changed, the media institutions changed and developed enormously from being instruments of propaganda, for the regime, to being an arena for Iraqi people to discuss and vent their problems and opinions regarding the nation's political and socio-economic development.

During Saddam's regime

Until 2003, the Iraqi government and the Ba'ath (Arab Socialist Resurrection) Party controlled or state-owned all print and broadcast media in Iraq, with the exception of the Kurdistan Region, which gained independence from the Saddam regime and the Baghdadi government in 1991. The Ba'ath Party fully controlled the media and used it to glorify the dictator figure, Saddam Hussein,

and his regime (Noor-Aldeen, 2005). Saddam's regime would not allow anything to be said which opposed the policies of the regime. Criticism of the president and his family was not allowed and the only television programmes/stations allowed were state-controlled.

By 2003, Iraq controlled the publishing and broadcasting of six daily newspapers, one television service, one radio service and one satellite station. Its entire media was state-controlled and used by the government for propaganda purposes. This control extended not only over the state and public broadcasting, but also over commercial television stations, which would broadcast for six hours each day from Basra, Kirkuk, Mosul and 19 other locations.

The Ministry of Guidance monitored published materials to guarantee that all writing was in line with the nationalist and progressive revolution. News outlets were directly monitored by the regime itself, this was conducted by the Ministry of Information. The Ministry of Culture and Information's National House for Publishing and Distribution controlled all advertising, they had the only authority and power to import and distribute foreign newspapers, magazines and periodicals. In addition, satellite dishes were forbidden under the Ba'ath government (Al-Marshi, 2007).

Until 2003, Iraq provided little support to the private media outlets as they preferred to keep this state-owned to maintain control. Foreign media, if allowed into Iraq, were closely inspected and could be subjected to expulsion. All materials produced for domestic channels were subjected to censorship and control prior to broadcasting, even materials obtained from external foreign and satellite sources. The Iraqi News Agency (INA), located in Baghdad, was

controlled and managed by the Iraqi government – this was Iraq's only news agency.

The restriction on imported media materials by the former governmental regime arose from a reluctance to propagate a culture different from that provided by the state and by domestic channels. This control aimed to protect national culture and encourage support for the Ba'ath Party by avoiding access to cultures exposed by commercial or global television; these programmes aim to create global audiences by providing a consumer culture of freedom and democracy, these notions will be discussed in Chapter Four. As Lewis (2009) argues, domestic programmes are shaped to specific cultures; this helps to create and reinforce cultural values and expectations. Television programmes are tailored to domestic audiences, and their format and quality are chosen accordingly.

This regime therefore relied on the media to protect the Arabic and national culture as well as the government's policies; they viewed the import of programmes as a problem for national culture as it might affect the promotion of the Arabic nationalist ideology. People were not allowed to have satellite dishes or watch the foreign media, and thus had no knowledge of what was happening beyond their borders or across the world. The Iraqi people only received news, information and entertainment programmes that were approved by the state.

The exception was for programmes imported by the governmental television, most of which were selected based on what the government wanted and as long as they did not present a risk to national security. These programmes were generally not what the viewers wanted or liked; a number of entertainment programmes, such as serials and soap operas, were imported

from Egypt, Syria and Jordan, they were broadcasted on Iraqi television during Saddam's regime.

This control and state-owned/used media, for purposes of propaganda is similar to that exhibited by most Asian and non-democratic governments. For example, Iranian television is controlled by the highest leader and must be used to serve and diffuse Islamic culture. Semati argues that: "in Iran, television is controlled by the supreme leader and, according to the Islamic Republic's Constitution, must be used as a tool to serve the diffusion of Islamic culture and must strictly refrain from diffusion and propagation of destructive and anti-Islamic practices" (2008, p. 29). Another example for a non-democratic country comes from Russia, where Fossato (2006) describes the organisation of the media by the Russian government in a similar manner:

Television organised in a situation when the television screen has gradually become the only meaningful vehicle of socialisation between authorities and citizens. This situation is the outcome of President Putin's determined weakening of all political institutions (besides the presidency) during his two terms in office. In this respect, it is important to make a differentiation between the functioning and role of the federal and of the regional media, going beyond the notions of control and ownership for what concerns more than 1,000 television companies broadcasting on the territory of the Russian Federation (Fossato, 2006, p. 3).

In Syria, the media is primarily owned and controlled by the government and the ruling Ba'ath Party. Media workers are considered government employees, and those in higher positions are required to be loyal Ba'ath Party members (Ghadbian, 2001). In Singapore, Singapore Press Holding (SPH) and MediaCorp dominate and control all local print and broadcast media. Both are touted as privately-owned entities even though their management is linked to the government and they generally hold a pro-government stance. They keep strict control of the editorial line of their newspapers and television and radio

stations. Moreover, political regulation and structural control over the local media restricts and discourages the growth of an environment where views can be expressed freely. A culture of self-censorship can be observed, created by and enforced through lawsuits or the suspension of offending publications, or the threat of such acts (Baseline Studies, 2005).

In China, the state is constantly reassessing media policies and media control in general, as well as control over individual media operators. At the same time, they also exert control over the importation of programmes:

Thus, due to they fear that these imported programmes make a problem for the national culture while the culture of these imported programmes is different from the official culture provided by the government. Therefore the government has instigated some policy changes meant at reducing the quantity of imported “outside border” programmes. Chinese authorities believe that the purpose of television is to preserve national culture and that this should contain Confucian ideologies (Cao, 2005, in Stanton, 2009, p. 42).

Moreover, Chinese leaders have banned private ownership of satellite dishes, have forbidden newspaper advertising for foreign satellite television services, and selectively showcased the prosecution of violators. Even more productively, the government began to promote cable TV development across the country, making services obtainable at such low costs that people generally choose cable over satellite. Moreover Chinese leaders chose to proliferate access to government cable systems in order to restrict and limit signal flow, they assumed that cable systems would be easier to control and regulate than satellite signals from afar (Curtin, 2005).

After Saddam’s regime – facing global television

After the fall of Saddam’s Ba’athist regime in 2003, new media policies emerged and the reconstruction of the media began. Broadcasted media in particular was

viewed as vital in the process of rebuilding the nation of Iraq. The Ba'ath Party's censorship was removed and this gave rise to a growth in freedom of speech, which had been forbidden under Saddam's leadership. For the first time, in over 30 years of media control and censorship, the Iraqi people could see different images, stories and headlines on their front pages (rather than just images of Saddam and his family).

Media regulation was cast in a new form, wherein the principle media regulatory body in Iraq became the Communications and Media Commission (CMC) of Iraq, formed in 2004. The function of the CMC is similar to that of the American Federal Communications Commission (FCC) or the UK's Office of Communications (OfCom). The CMC is a body considered to be an independent regulatory authority for the Iraqi communications industries, including: television, both satellite and terrestrial; radio; telecommunications; and, wireless communications such as the internet (Al-Marshi, 2007, p.131). In the previous era, it was the Iraqi Ministry that basically fulfilled this function, using the media to disseminate Ba'athist propaganda, as discussed above (Al-Marshi, 2007).

Immediately after the removal of this control, people started to purchase satellite dishes, and for the first time viewers in Iraq were introduced to global and foreign television programmes which were free from control and censorship. The emerging media do raise ethnic and sectarian issues for Iraq's people; however, they ostensibly seek to call for national unity. In contrast, private media institutions, being "in the pocket" of rival political factions, reflect the country's conflicting ethno-sectarian agendas by raising concerns that they are simply another method of restricting and controlling the various political

factions. As such, the state-owned changed and it became a party-state. Noor Al-Deen (2005) argues that, with the fall of Saddam Hussein, a media free-for-all has emerged in Iraq and a number of media outlets have developed representing various political, religious, or ethnic groups. Al-Mrashi, et al. (2007) refers to this as a new hegemony. They argue that in addition to the changes in the media situation, the media has become dominated by other authorities. The Iraqi media landscape is presently dominated by specific ethno-sectarian and political factions, party-state figures or media personalities.

Moreover, following the US-led invasion, the Iraqi Media Network (IMN) television station emerged. This was funded by the allied forces. However, this US-funded media was also intended for propaganda purposes as it served the interests of the America and alliance countries, instead of being designed to maintain a semblance of local independence. As Hiebert (2003, p. 243) argues:

Techniques of public relations and propaganda were an essential part of the 2003 war in Iraq. The government framed the issues, storylines, and slogans to serve its purposes. Embedding journalists, staging showy briefings, emphasising visual and electronic media, and making good television out of it were all important to fighting the war.

Kumar (2006) argues that the message to journalists was clear: either censor yourself or face disciplining, the effect of which would be self-censorship. As Dan Rather, the celebrity Iraqi journalist, stated in a BBC interview in 2002: “what we are talking about here, whether one wants to recognise it or not, or call it by its proper name or not, is a form of self-censorship. I worry that patriotism will run amok and trample the very values that the country seeks to defend” (Kumar, 2006, p. 53).

On the other hand, only two key arguments were presented in Iraq by the media, they were supported and funded by the US and identified: firstly, that

Iraq was in some way connected with Al-Qaeda and the events of 9/11, and secondly, that the Iraqis possessed weapons of mass destruction. It tried to make this case to the public, individuals and groups. "The self-defence story focused on Saddam's connection to Al Qaeda and terrorism, or the oft-proclaimed Weapons of Mass Destruction. The rescue story focused on saving the Iraqi people and bringing democracy to the region" (Hiebert, 2003, p. 245).

Moreover, the majority of the media coverage on the front pages of major newspapers and the television headlines simply parroted the administration's line before and during the war. This spirit is best captured in the journalist Dan Rather's statement: "George Bush is the president, he makes the decisions, and, you know, as just one American, whenever he wants me to line up, just tell me where" (Rutenberg and Carter, 2001, in Kumar, 2006, p. 58).

Kumar (2006) also points to this fact in the study "Media, War, and Propaganda: Strategies of Information Management During the 2003 Iraq War". In the case of Iraq, the reinforcement of US control in the region allowed US-based media conglomerates and telecommunications giants to improve their position and to dominate the Middle East's markets. In addition, the collaboration between the media and the political elite is another element that has buttressed the launch of the recent system of war propaganda in the media. War and propaganda place structural limits on the corporate media system. As Kumar puts it:

I have argued that the propagandistic coverage of the war on Iraq reveals the extent to which the media are complicit with the aims of the military industrial complex. Yet, this relationship is sometimes strained in the interests of maintaining credibility. In democratic societies, the media have to maintain a semblance of independence so as not to appear to be obviously subservient to elite interest (2006, p. 64).

US internationally broadcasted radio first began with Radio Sawa, and then with Radio Free Iraq (RFI). These stations presented two distinct products to Iraqi listeners: Radio Sawa provided a mix of news and music, appealing to more listeners than RFI, which focused on hard news (Andary, 2007). Today, other international radio stations have started broadcasting in Iraq, such as Radio Monte Carlo and the BBC (in Arabic). Then two domestic satellite channels sponsored by the US government began broadcasting their programmes in Iraq. The first one, Al-Iraqiya, is a state-owned satellite channel which began broadcasting in May 2003 and started satellite broadcasting in October of the same year. The second one, Al-Hurra, began broadcasting on 14 February 2004 in 22 countries across the Middle East, US-government sources generally refer to the channel as Al-Hurra (which is Arabic for “free”). These two channels provide news and entertainment, and are watched by both urban and rural residents, but as Andary (2007) points out:

Urban residents are more likely to watch Al-Hurra than rural residents, and this is so due to easier access to satellite dishes and higher levels of education in the cities relative to rural areas. Al-Hurra has a weekly audience of 59.5% of urban dwellers, whereas it reaches only 47.1% of rural residents weekly (2007, p. 19).

The majority of Al-Iraqiya and Al-Hurra programming consists of recycled programming and some shows purchased from other Arab channels.

At the same time, people in Iraq have become exposed to international satellite television channels such as Al-Arabiya, MBC, Dubai TV, Al-Jazeera, Abu Dhabi, LBC, Al-Manar and Al-Alam. These channels provide news, information and entertainment to Iraqi viewers. On the other hand, Al-Iraqiya, Al-Sharqiya, Al-Hurra, Al-Forat, Al-Sumeriya, Al-Baghdad and Al-Diyar were all launched as domestic satellite channels in Iraq. As this study’s focus is not Iraqi

media, these channels will not be described in too much detail in terms of their owners, aims and programmes. Suffice to say, some of them belong to ethno-sectarian and political factions and others are independent and commercial channels (as discussed below).

Both international and domestic channels attract a higher Iraqi viewer rating and people have begun to trust them as valid sources of news, information and entertainment. At the same time, Iraqi viewers see these channels as windows through which to see different lives and different societies. According to the 2010 D3 System report entitled "Iraq Media Study: National Audience Analysis", MBC1 (Middle East Broadcasting Center), a Saudi-run company broadcasting a mix of free-to-air news and entertainment channels via satellite, is the most watched TV station among central Iraqis, with nearly 82% of Iraqi viewers trusting it as a good source of entertainment and movies (2010, p. 20). Al-Sharqiya is a domestic satellite channel and is the most trusted TV news station in Central Iraq with about 42% of Iraqi viewers tuning into it (2007, p. 21).

Iraqi viewers, due to a lack of understanding of foreign languages (except amongst the elite and the intellectual class), cannot access and watch non-Arabic foreign channels. Bourdieu (1984) saw language as a crucial element for accessing foreign media. As he argues, "at the individual audience level, competence, ability to speak or at least understand the language of broadcast, is an important ingredient in an audience's selection of a programme and their enjoyment of it, and language is a critical element of cultural capital" (in Straubhaar, 2003, p. 82). Thus, non-Arabic channels are seen as unfavourable and are not watched by Iraqi viewers, although some of the

programmes, such as comedies or entertainment, are dubbed and translated into Arabic by domestic and pan-Arabic channels. The MBC Group has always dubbed some of the American and Mexican soap operas, which attract high Arabic viewer ratings.

Iraqi viewers are faced with globalisation through international television, among other things, and people can access media from outside Iraq's borders free from direct state control. At first, Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya were the only outlets for regional news that were free from state control. Due to Iran's proximity and nearness, the Iranian Arabic-language channel Al-Alam managed to broadcast terrestrially into Iraq and is at times received by television sets without the need for a costly satellite dish.

Soon enough, ethno-sectarian political factions launched their own media and satellite channels, including the satellite channel Al-Furat, which started broadcasting in November 2004 and is directed by "Ammar Abd al-Aziz", Arab Shi'a and the son of the party's leader and member of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI). The Rafidayn Satellite Channel and the Baghdad Satellite Channel are Arab Sunni media and they represent the political agenda of Al-Tawafuq. Al-Zawra is owned by political groups who are calling for violence. These channels have become an important source of information and news for Iraqi viewers. As Al-Marshi (2007) puts it, each sectarian and ethnic group uses their media to demonstrate that they are victims in Iraq's ongoing violence (and to broadcast their party message). In addition, political party controlled media has emerged and almost all the political factions have developed their own media so as to communicate their party's

purpose. Thus, despite global influence, the Iraqi media cannot be said to be truly free.

Furthermore, after Saddam's regime, the state-owned domination reduced and the only state-owned media which remains is Al-Iraqiya which has now been established as a public broadcaster. It serves as the voice of all Iraqis and is designed to compete with the regional satellite channels being watched in Iraq such as Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya and the Iranian-based Arabic-language channel Al-Alam. This was enacted after the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) in Iraq established the Iraqi Media Network (IMN). The IMN was restructured into the Al-Iraqiya network; it expanded to provide two terrestrial TV channels as well as the Al-Iraqiya satellite channel, which began broadcasting in May 2003 (Al-Marshi, 2007). Most of its programmes deal with political, economic, social or religion issues. The station aims to compete with the other regional channels in attracting national viewers; however ethno-sectarian views are reflected in its programmes.

The development of Al-Iraqiya reflected the evolution of Iraq's post-war political process. In its initial phases, the channel was used by the CPA as a means to communicate with the Iraqis, and thus considered a tool of "American propaganda." It eventually established itself as a channel free of U.S. editorial interference, but then began to reflect the agenda of the interim Iraqi government of Iyad 'Allawi, who attempted to co-opt the channel to support his party in the January 2005 election (Al-Marshi, 2007, p. 106).

Iraqi viewers obtain news, information and entertainment through these channels, but at the same time the demand for the production of local and domestic programmes and news has increased. This demand does not stem from a concern for culture (as was the case with the previous regime), but is in fact due to the Iraqi political situation not being stable and civil war and political conflict rife throughout the country. As Al-Marshi argues:

By 2004 and 2005 two trends were emerging in Iraq vis-à-vis the regional channels. First, certain Iraqis, including those politicians in the transitional government, were offended that Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya referred to the Iraqi insurgents as the “Iraqi resistance” (*al-muqawwama al-'iraqiya*) thus bestowing on them some sort of regional legitimacy. Secondly, the Iraqis desired news and entertainment which was created by Iraqis, reflecting their concerns and desires (2007, p. 98).

To meet viewer demand, domestic channels were gradually beginning to provide Iraqi viewers with their news, this attracted new viewers (and as a result the viewers of some of the international and regional channels declined). According to the “Iraqi Media Study: National Audiences” report conducted by D3 System, “the Iraq Media Network (Al-Iraqiya) is the most trusted TV news station in southern Iraq, and according to this report 44% of Iraqi viewers trusted Al-Iraqiya for news” (2010, p. 23), despite the scepticism about its objectivity due to its close ties with the US. According to the Andary report “International Broadcasting in Iraq” (2007), Al-Jazeera is watched by 27% of Iraqi viewers and is considered a valid source of information, although in 2010, D3 System reported a 4% decline in this figure. Both of the Andary and D3 System reports above reported Al-Iraqiya in 2007 and 2010 as being at the top.

Al-Arabiya, according to the Andary report, was the second most important source of information for Iraqi viewers with 39% of viewers watching it. Although by 2010, according to the D3 System report, it had declined in importance and only 26% of Iraqi viewers were using it as a source of information.

At the same time, Iraqi people have displayed a belligerence towards the US and Great Britain. According to the Andary (2007, p. 21) report, “Iraqis have become considerably more negative toward the United States in the last two years; in 2005, 28% of Iraqis said they were very unfavourably inclined toward

the United States, but in 2007 that figure rose to 37%”. The same report says that in answer to the question “How favourably inclined are you toward the following countries?”: “37% of Iraqi people spoke of the U.S. very unfavourably (this is the highest rate compared with the other choices, and 33% spoke unfavourably about Great Britain – also the highest rate amongst the possible choices)” (2007, p. 21).

Moreover, people want to watch their own domestically produced quality programmes, especially when it comes to entertainment and movies which reflect their daily lives. However, most domestic programmes are adopted from foreign programmes:

The desire for Iraqis to produce content that reflects their aspirations has resulted in the adaptation of several foreign programme formats, such as reality TV, to a local Iraqi context. These Iraqi entertainment programmes can provide an alternative to the “Iraq” that the Iraqis usually witness on TV; that of the news depicting unrelenting violence in their country. The literature on conflict resolution and the media stresses that entertainment programming is one method to reduce tensions in a deeply divided society. Both state and private media can play important roles in using entertainment for this goal (Al-Marshi, 2007, p. 98).

Furthermore, domestic and national products increased after the emergence of certain semi-independent and commercial channels, such as Al-Sumariya, Al-Sharqiya and Al-Diyar, which are considered to be commercially independent channels because most of their funding comes from advertising. The advertisements shown during their programmes generate significant revenues for these channels. Al-Diyar is an entertainment channel and the majority of its funding comes from advertising. Al-Marshi argues that “the majority of Al-Diyar programmes, including local soap operas are produced in Iraq” (2007, p. 122). Moreover, Al-Sumariya, which describes itself as an independent satellite

television channel aims to show the real situation in Iraq, rather than just images of violence. Most of its funding also comes from its advertising revenue.

Al-Fahya's news programmes (which are based in Cairo, Dubai, and Beirut are independent channels, but the critics argue that due to sectarian ownership by an Arab Shi'a, are biased) deal primarily with the security situation, and also offer programming that deals with the daily hardships faced by Iraqis, such as the lack of basic utilities and security. Al-Fahya runs public service announcements highlighting anti-terrorist measures.

These channels work towards anti-terrorism and anti-violence through public advocacy programmes. "All the independent channels feature public advocacy programmes. These programmes offer the Iraqi citizen a chance to address constructive criticisms of the Iraqi government through studio interviews or on-the-street interviews or viewer call-ins" (Al-Marsh, 2007, p. 120).

At the same time these channels play a major role in providing entertainment, including soap operas and talk shows (most of which are produced locally, with others imported from Egypt, Latin America and the United States). Non-Arabic soap operas and movies are also imported from abroad, they are then dubbed and translated. However, this material affects Iraqi viewers in both positive and negative ways, but the impact on Iraqi viewers as a whole will not be covered as the scope of this thesis is the influence of global commercial television solely on Kurdish women viewers.

With the emergence of these independent domestic channels, people have turned to watching programmes based on an interest in public services and entertainment programmes, such as talk shows and soap operas.

According to the D3 System report (2010, p. 17), Al-Sharqiya (at 82%) is the top station in terms of its Iraqi audience. Al-Sharqiya was the first channel to respond to the Iraqi desire for entertainment that actually related to the people's daily lives:

In post-war Iraq, private Iraqi media, with ownership in the hands of competing political factions, have emerged, reflecting the country's conflicting ethno-sectarian agendas. At the same time, media have also emerged independent of Iraq's political mosaic, which seek to provide a public space for education, entertainment and cathartic release from the daily violence that dominates Iraqi public life (Al-Marshi, 2007, p. 97-98).

Nowadays Iraq's domestic satellite and television channels produce various soap operas and entertainment programmes, but the conflict and hardship of people's lives are reflected in the content of these programmes. However, their lack of professionalism, financial insufficiency and inadequate government interest has hindered them. Atabey (1991) identified certain factors that determine the flow of television programming from one country to another. These include the fact that Third World countries have a lack of capital with which to fund the production of material, and a lack of trained technicians, scriptwriters, actors, translators, producers and other essential staff. Furthermore, he argues that government interests also play an important role in the flow of television programming. Other relevant factors are competition, commercial motivation, ethnocentrism, language barriers, and the degree of cultural similarity between the producing and receiving countries (1991, p. 70).

However, Al-Sharqiya is trying to provide Iraqis their own home-grown entertainment with dramas, comedies and music shows as well as news and current affairs programmes; but the Iraqi media reflects the realities of life and war in Iraq. For example, one of the most popular series produced locally in Iraq by Al-Sharqiya in 2005 was the daily soap opera *Love and War*, a show

detailing the lives of Fawzi and Fatin, a couple who lived through the Iraqi war which began in March 2003 and the ensuing post-war chaos. It featured kidnappings, beating and murders. In the final episode, its hero and heroine finally married after many problems, only to be blown up by a suicide bomber as they drove away towards their honeymoon. So, the Iraqi people still favour American, Mexican or Turkish soap operas that are dubbed into Arabic, or other Arabic soap operas produced by Arabic countries.

According to the 2010 D3 System report, Iraqi movies are at the bottom of the pile in terms of Iraqi viewers (in total about 40% of viewers watched these while Arabic-language movies are first and international ones are second (p. 14). These insufficiencies in turn make it difficult for the Iraqi media to obtain the ability to provide viewers with national programmes, especially entertainment, and they also do not hold a position in the Arabic media market like those of their neighbours. To illustrate: “Iran and Saudi Arabia are now key players in the Arabic-language media market, transforming it into an arena for confrontation and quests for popularity” (Hagood, 2010, p. 1). In relation to Syria, Salamandra explains that:

Over the past decade, Syria has developed a TV drama industry rivalling that of Cairo, long the centre of Arab media production. Syrian dramatic series have even begun to attract attention from the Western press: Damascus was recently dubbed “Hollywood of the Middle East”, albeit with an ironic question mark, by the *Washington Post* (Lancaster, 1998, in Salamandra, 2005, p. 2).

To sum up, people are now exposed to global and commercial television, through international and domestic satellite television channels, since the ban and the censorship have been lifted.

Television broadcasting in Iraq, now, takes on a public role by seeking to produce a public forum for education and entertainment, rather than solely covering political conflict and the daily violence that has dominated Iraqi public life in recent years. It seeks to satiate the desire for entertainment and educational programmes rather than war reports and political propaganda. But due to the insufficiency of Iraqi domestic broadcasting, most of their programmes depend on imported materials which are dubbed or adapted. These programmes have therefore affected the indigenous cultures; but, as discussed above the scope of this study is limited to the Kurdistan Region, so the broader influence on Iraqi viewers cannot be dealt with here.

The media in the Kurdistan Region

The Kurdistan Region is different from middle and southern Iraq in that it became a semi-independent state in 1991. From the beginning, the media was solely controlled by the two main political parties in authority: the PUK (Patriotic Union of Kurdistan) and the KDP (Kurdistan Democratic Party). They launched their own local television channels and offered: news, information, entertainment and children's programmes in the Kurdish language. But, the majority of the programmes were imported, especially entertainment and the news programmes; most of which clashed with Kurdish values, this will be discussed later in this chapter. In addition, the new generations in this region do not understand Arabic; after the region gained independence in 1991, the education system and language at schools and universities changed from Arabic to Kurdish. Thus, the imported foreign programmes needed to be dubbed and translated into Kurdish. It is the researcher's understanding that there was initially no state television in this region, thus the local channels

belonged to the political parties and most of their programmes became propaganda for their parties. This thesis specifically focuses on the impact of global commercial television, so the whole of the media situation in this region will not be dealt with here.

Gradually, some of the small political parties established their own local television channels. Non-political party media television channels were not generally viable until 2000. Dramatic changes occurred in Kurdistan's television industry over the last two decades in response to viewer demand and socio-political changes in the region. These changes transformed many areas, ranging from media policy and strategy to technology, professional practice, institutional structures and programme content.

However, the media in this region was directed by the party-state, due to the region being run by the political parties. The competing political factions reflect the country's conflicting political ethno-sectarian agendas and television broadcasting is not independent. There is no transparency with regards to obtaining information from the Kurdish government by journalists belonging to private and independent media institutions. Consequently, independent journalists face threats and pressures from the officials and security forces behind the powerful political parties. Although some private media ownerships emerged in this region and were declared by established media companies to be independent companies, they still operated within the limits set by the party-state because most of their owners had political-party backgrounds.

To illustrate, WUSHA Company (which means "Company of Ward") was a media company launched in 2007. Its director was a politician that had recently left the PUK Party, and he declared his opposition to the government,

promoting equality and democracy, and thus separated party ideologies from government policies.

Another example is the Xandan Media Company which was established in 2000 and was directed by Dr Barham, the new prime minister of the Kurdish government; he also held a high position in the PUK Party. In addition, the Xak Media Company, incorporating television and radio broadcasting as well as magazine publishing, was directed by Hero Xan, the wife of the Iraqi president Jalal Talabani, who was the leader of the PUK Party. Consequently, they were seeking to extend the boundaries of their party-media systems and ideologies. These channels provided programmes in the Kurdish language; but, despite the political background of their owners and due to the lack of national programmes, they depended on foreign television programmes. These imports used adopted formats or joined products; however, the culture provide by them did not relate specifically to the Kurdish culture.

Moreover the lack of private and independent domestic media companies in this region has meant that there is virtually no competition to push the state media outlets to meet viewer demands. There are numerous established channels, but they are not utilised to reflect the views of the citizens. Instead they support their political party's aims. Consequently in the Kurdistan Region, the media faced challenges with regards to: firstly, promoting an independent public broadcasting system that truly represented the whole society; secondly, establishing a socio-political stance that was not simply selected by the political parties; and, thirdly, promoting an independent pluralistic private media that could actually help to promote and build the nation. Moreover, other problems were encountered concerning funding, lack of

national advertising, market problems, lack of professionalism and lack of technology to create programmes to respond to viewer demand in a timely manner.

Prior to the introduction of satellite TV, Kurdish viewers had limited viewing choices and exposure to foreign programmes; they gained all their information from the party-produced local channels. However, the emergence of the Kurdish government brought with it the establishment of some local TV channels, though all these channels belonged to the political parties and most of their programmes were dependent on foreign TV products obtained through satellite means, including films, cartoons, news and other entertainment programmes (Chro, 2008). Their producers were affiliated to political parties and thus influenced their channels according to specific political cultures and policy rather than based on what the population wanted. Therefore most of the material produced and broadcasted locally did not provide information on different lifestyles or information about life beyond the borders.

Viewers were therefore not exposed to alternative ways of life until the arrival of satellite dishes. Satellite and global television could “rescue” and liberate the population from such close party/state media control. Murdoch (1993) enthused that satellite television was breaking down borders and proving to be an unambiguous threat to dictatorial totalitarian regimes everywhere. Murdoch (1993) added that satellite television broadcasting makes people hungry for information in many closed societies, as such they choose to by-pass state-controlled television channels. Meyrowitz’s states that:

The most provocative assertion is that TV can at times permit tens of millions of viewers to experience events from a perspective that emanates from no place in particular. That is, because we sometimes shares the

same imagery, we then migrate informationally to the same “place”, which is an electronic elsewhere that is geography less (1985, p. 145).

According to Rugh (2001), satellite broadcasting has begun to play an effective role in conveying news and information of general and specific interest, commenting on events and actions and providing opinions and perspectives, as well as reinforcing social norms, values and cultural awareness through: the distribution of information about the culture and the society; providing specialised data for commercial promotion and services; and, finally, entertaining (in Amin, 2001).

In the case of the Kurdistan Region in particular, television is seen as an instrument of significant potential, because illiteracy, as discussed in Chapter Four and Six, is still very widespread. Therefore audiovisual media constitutes the most accessible source of information for large parts of the population. Satellite broadcasting has the potential to achieve an enormous number of things, from leveraging scarce educational resources and capital to providing a model of global broadcast entertainment.

However, satellite television channels have brought both challenges and opportunities to the Kurdish society (which will be discussed in the next chapter). Kurdish society is still afraid of the danger of the cultural impact, and fears that satellite broadcasting may have an effect on Kurdish families. Schleifer (1995), amongst others, has a similar view on Arab society and argues that programming that threatens family relations or condemns family values are not satisfactory. As such, materials that favour divorce as a means of solving family problems or programming that includes obscenity, nudity and eroticism, or acceptance of premarital sexual relations, are not allowed in Arab society. These fears are particularly relevant to the Kurdistan Region and its culture

when we consider that most of its television scheduling and programming is produced, adapted and formatted from outside its borders. Lewis argues that “when television schedules are interrupted by the inclusion of foreign programmes, these differences are highlighted, but when foreign programming begins to overwhelm the schedules, cultural imperialism becomes a concern” (2009, p. 12).

The emergence of satellite television in the Kurdistan Region

Satellite dishes arrived in the region in 1994; previously, their use had been banned by the former Iraqi government, due to (as discussed above) concerns about the culture that could be diffused through global media and its potential impact on the formal culture that the government was providing through its own media. Kurdish audiences in this region, following their independence from Iraq, were free to watch any foreign programme on international satellite television. The Kurdish government did not ban or show concern about the arrival of satellite, unlike the former Iraqi regime.

Moreover, the arrival of satellite dishes allowed the main political parties to establish their own satellite television channels, including the Kurdistan Satellite Channel launched in 1999 by the Kurdistan Democratic Party, and Kurdsat Satellite TV launched in the same year by the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan. Other political parties also launched their own satellite channels and programmes and they slowly began producing local products. However, most of their programmes, imports and other programming including talk shows and entertainment, were produced locally in a more Westernised way in terms of styles and format, and they generally purchased American and Western films. The foreign cultures and values influenced viewers, as Atabey points out:

The indigenous and modern cultures of developing countries have particularly been under the influence and the threat of Western cultures flowing to their societies through television programmes or films. These cultural products may have greater impact upon the feelings, thoughts and cultural values of the people than informative programmes (1991, p. 2).

Moreover, the Kurdistan Region, like many other developing countries, is not able to produce sufficient local television programmes and must therefore resort to importing television programmes. Developing countries thus end up facing cultural imperialism from the countries producing the material, dictating and professing their way of life as superior. Salinas and Paldan (1979) argue that the emergence of transnational corporations has led to cultural imperialism, adding that the United States and Western powers produce and export mass media to developing countries with the deliberate and purposive intention of corroding the traditional cultures of these countries and influencing their people so as to encourage them to adopt and accept Western cultural values.

With the abolition of state control, and as Iraq entered the post-war period, the economic sanctions and the strict media control were reduced. Moreover, by depending on foreign technology the profit motives of the broadcasting companies' business models changed, thus increasing a demand for foreign programme importation, as seen in the case of China: after state control was loosened, demand for foreign television programmes increased:

China's media theory has been a straight copy of Soviet communist press theories and Marx-Lenin-Mao class struggle theories. This was a shape of totalitarianism that has now evolved into a more libertarian model with limited private ownership of the media under strict state control. This loosening of control and the permission of profit motives into the business models of the broadcasting companies created demand for foreign programme importation (Stanton, 2009, p. 41).

Kurdish audiences in this part of Kurdistan were exposed freely to foreign programmes through satellite channels, including Arabic, Persian, Western and

American channels. For example, in the beginning Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya were the only outlets for local news that were free from government control; paradoxically, they were responsible for the domestic Iraqi news. Satellite television spread particularly quickly in the Kurdistan Region compared to other Iraqi cities. However, the cost of satellite apparatus was proportionally very expensive when compared to the family incomes of when satellite arrived in the region, in 1994.

After this time, it spread quickly and widely and became cheaper as economic and financial circumstances changed. Many families had satellite dishes and the demand for foreign programmes increased across all parts of the region, from urban to remote areas: “as the economy and living standards improved, the demand for television programmes had a concomitant increase” (SARFT, 1999, in Stanton, 2009, p. 43). According to Shaswari’s (2008) study of a small remote area in 2004, of 857 families in Tawila in the Kurdistan Region, 750 of them had satellite television. Thus, they were introduced and exposed, freely and widely, to foreign television programmes. Kurdish viewers used their satellites to watch foreign channels, without any control, especially Western programmes and channels.

The Kurdish people believed that they needed to change to become a modern and democratic country. The modern world was developing, moving through a new phase in which the dealings and interactions between global and local interests were becoming enmeshed. Barriers such as cultures, communities, nations and even geography, which previously limited exchanges and interaction between different social groups, had become porous. To illustrate: “Modernisation theorists mainly attempted to convert a traditional

society into a modern society based on Western-modelled industrial economic infrastructures which could also serve the economic and commercial interests of the advanced capitalist countries” (Atabey, 1991, p. 47). Thus, modernisation leads to a capitalist society, where the traditional society introduces innovations in education, develops infrastructures such as banks and other economic establishments for capital mobilisation and to help broaden the scope of commerce, and finally encourages the establishment of modern manufacturing industries. On the other hand, due to the leading position that Western countries hold in the modern world, the Western way is viewed as the only method of development for the future world in the framework of a global economy:

Modernisation and dependency theories place on the ground that Western countries are the world leaders due to their top level of development, which affects practically all aspects of life, including [the] economic, education, political, social, moral, norms and even cultural life (Leys, 1996, p. 210).

Some of the people interviewed for this present research referred to this fact in answering the question “Why were you drawn to these particular programmes, and what else do you like from international satellite programmes?” Rahma, an 18-year-old university student, replied:

I like this programme, and any other Western programmes, because they are about modern life, they teach us how to be a modern society or modern person, or how modern men and woman behave. Not like our traditional life, where women are not independent, or are not allowed to be leaders or conduct business.

Interviewee 5, see Appendix.

Modernisation and dependency theories highlight that the relationship between developed and developing countries is imbalanced, and developing countries are in some way dependent on the developed ones. Although the views on dependency vary considerably, both theories highlight the leading position that

Western countries hold in the modern world. The Western way is viewed as the only method of development for the future of the world in the framework of a global economy.

With the arrival of satellite television in this region, foreign television programmes very quickly dominated the region in the absence of the introduction or announcement of any law to regulate and control these programmes. However, it is difficult to control something once it has become dominant. Guback and Varis (1982) explain that it is difficult to introduce and enforce laws designed to stimulate national film and television industries and decrees regarding foreign dependence after that foreign influence has become dominant. In contrast, in Iran with the proliferation of satellite dishes in certain parts of Tehran a debate ensued between the conservatives and reformists about this technology and television; the conservatives voiced opposition and called for the banning of satellite television (Semati, 2008).

Furthermore, the Kurdistan Region improved its education and economy: individual family incomes increased, as did the educational levels of the populace. The Kurdish people began to travel more and have more direct contact with people from outside their own borders. Straubhaar (1999) argues that the relationship of media–audience perceptions is not a simple one of exclusive cause and effect, because the media does not provide the only source of ideas about society, there are other sources, such as travel and direct personal contact.

The television programmes helped the Kurdish people to develop their localised thoughts and ideas to become more globalised notions, especially for the elite and the rich, who were given more opportunities to travel and develop

global skills. Consequently, the country and its viewers demanded the import of global programmes. The inability of the region to meet the country's and its viewers' demands led it to depend on the importation of external programming.

Kurdistan Region: facing global commercial television

The dependency of the Kurdistan Region's mass media on imported programmes and the exposure of Kurdish viewers to foreign television programmes occurred in several ways.

First, as discussed above, Kurdish viewers were introduced to foreign programmes when the region gained independence and when local Kurdish television channels emerged; these channels obtained most of their programmes, particularly entertainment and films, from the foreign media. Elasmir describes the concerns that developed from assumptions about exposure to foreign programmes and classified these into three levels: firstly television programmes are imbedded with the values of the society in which they are produced. Secondly, when shows produced in society A are imported in society B, viewers in society B are exposed to the values of society A. Finally, after being exposed to the television programmes of society A and the values imbedded within them, viewers in society B will progressively adopt those values and lose their indigenous ones (2003, p. 157). This results in the spread of the producing country's influence over different spheres of life, including the cultural level. Today, many countries are influenced by the US culture, while national cultures are often found to be oppressed which, as can be expected, engenders a certain degree of resistance, frequently of a nationalistic and extremist character. But, unfortunately, the national cultures are not capable of

opposing the influence from abroad due to the economic weakness of these countries.

Second, after the arrival of satellite television and the removal of control over the media, viewers became freely exposed to higher numbers of foreign satellite programmes from international satellite channels. Carlsson (2005) explains that developing countries had no option but to make use of the structures shaped by and for the developed and industrialised regions of the world. This was especially so after the neutral or non-aligned countries introduced news bulletins and information via the international mass media. The non-aligned countries introduced the demand for a new global information order in the mid-1970s, as an extension of an already existing demand for a new economic world order. As Somavia argues:

It is becoming increasingly clear that the transnational communication system has developed with the support and at the service of the transnational power structure. It is an integral part of the system which affords the control of that key instrument of contemporary society: information. It is the vehicle for transmitting values and lifestyles to Third World countries which stimulate the type of consumption and the type of society necessary to the transnational system as a whole (1979, p. 16-17).

For example, in the case of Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation (one of the world's biggest media and communication conglomerates), Thussu (2005) describes that it seems to have been more successful in negotiating its way around the complex Asian media scene. Murdoch's media company can justifiably claim to have pioneered satellite television broadcasting in Asia when in 1991 it launched five television channels, reaching a pan-Asian audience. By 2005, Star (Satellite Television Asian Region) was broadcasting, according to its website, to "over 50 television services across 53 Asian countries". In 2005, it had a daily viewership of some 100 million and control over 20,000 hours of

Indian and Chinese programming, as well as owning the world's largest contemporary Chinese film library with more than 600 titles (STAR TV website, in Thussu, 2005, p. 55).

Murdoch is described by Curtin (2005) as a man who wants to control the news, whether in America, China or elsewhere, and whose "stated ambition is to put together the first global satellite network and then float a public stock offering hopes of recouping his initial investment. An important part of that portfolio will be Star and Phoenix, but many media executives in Asia wonder if either service will ever turn a consistent profit" (p. 176). However, his widespread and extensive control of both information software programmes (content) and hardware (delivery systems) makes him a hugely powerful global multimedia player. His news empire spans the globe, with wide-ranging media interests in the form of newspapers, film broadcasts, satellite and cable TV, interactive digital TV, television production satellites and the internet, with Fox News in the United States, Sky News in Europe and Star News in Asia. Today, Murdoch's media are played on television screens around the world, giving him extraordinary and unusual power to influence the coverage of the open-ended and global "War on Terror" (Thussu, 2005).

Curtin (2005) also points out that "Rupert Murdoch's dreams of exploiting a pan-Asian market were dashed by the cultural diversity of audiences and the logistical demands of competing with local and national television broadcasters. Likewise, the complexity of product distribution networks on the ground undermined the possibility of expansive advertising strategies in the sky. And, finally, the promotional chores associated with building services inside China were exacerbated by restrictions on newspaper and magazine advertising"

(2005, p. 171). However, as Thussu also argues, “one key result of “Murdochisation” is the ideological shift in media culture from public service to profit-oriented programming” (2005 in Thussu, 2005, p. 57).

Wark (1994) states that we can observe, for example, that media imagery does not just “fall from the sky into our lives”, but rather is shaped by powerful institutions that are challenging each other and competing for power and control under very dynamic situations. Meyrowitz (1985) also argues that, “Although at certain moments forces may conspire to move us “informationally to the same place” that place is not a vague elsewhere, but is in fact a locale that is structured by influences that emerge on the ground just as much as they emanate from the sky” (in Curtin, 2005, p. 172).

The programmes produced by global television were popular and spread rapidly, particularly due to their modern and stylish production techniques and higher entertainment values. Moreover, these programmes were attractive because, internally, there was a lack of production of national programmes. For example, soaps and advertising, which could be argued to be the most “foreign” material, were watched by Kurdish women on foreign satellite channels (namely Middle East Broadcasting Center, MBC), which impacted upon their culture. Shi, for example, views the soap opera genre as a homogenisation and culture imperialism genre: “foreign investment, the spread of the commercial media system and cultivation of consumerism among global audiences are all in indicators of media imperialism and cultural homogenisation” (2008, p. 1202). He also argues that homogenisation happens via genre dominance, for example the dominance of soap operas, talk shows and reality shows around the world.

Thirdly, numerous Kurdish satellite channels were established, as discussed above, but they were weakly developed and economically impoverished. With a lack of professionalism and government interest in this region, the media organisations were not able to report on news events nor were they able to produce entertainment programmes. As a result, they became largely dependent on international news agencies and bought and imported programmes from foreign media companies. In contrast, there are countries where, with the advent of satellite, the production of indigenous programmes began. For example, for many years Iran banned the use of satellite TV, resulting in a huge number of indigenous domestic dramas and programmes being created internally. As Semati states, “it should be noted that with the advent of Farsi channels, the number of people who bought satellite equipment rose gradually” (2008, p. 97). Havens argues that “it was cheaper to import than to self-produce, because production requires an investment in studios, crew, hardware, actors, writers, caterers and so forth, while importation involves purchasing only a copy of the original production” (2006, p. 14).

Fourthly and finally, the lack of strong national television industries and local products created a high demand for foreign television programmes. The loss of control also occurred as a result of the demand for foreign programmes. At the same time, the Kurdish government focused on profit motives within the business model of broadcasting, and private broadcasting companies were established, which helped to improve the economy and living standards. And when these improved, the demand for foreign programmes increased. Investment from outside the borders helped to increase the commercial media system and commercial Kurdish satellite channels such as Korek and Channel

4, which are the large investment companies in the region. SARFT (1999) has similar ideas about China with regard to control: “this loosening of control and the permission of profit motives into the business models of the broadcasting companies created demand for foreign programme importation. As the economy and living standards improved, the demand for television programmes had a concomitant increase” (in Stanton, 2009, p. 41).

These commercial channels started to produce national programmes such as talk shows, political shows, reality shows and entertainment programmes. However, in their production of national programmes they adapted foreign formats, and various domestic programmes were developed based on Western shows. *Min Jiawazm* (which translates to “I am different”) is a talk show produced by Zagros TV, a Kurdish satellite station, and is an adaptation of *Britain’s Got Talent*. Likewise, the *Dashni Show* is an adaptation of *Live from Studio Five*; the show is produced entirely in a Western style and advertises Western clothes and goods. It is presented by an educated Kurdish woman who is Westernised. It is produced by the Kurdish satellite channel Korek and is directed by the Korek Telecom Telephone Company, which is a large investor in the region. The *Azhdar Show* was adapted from the style of the *Paul O’Grady Show*, and *Korek Star* are talent shows that were adapted from *X Factor*. *Klawen* is a quiz show produced by Kurdsat TV, it is an adaptation of *Deal or No Deal*. Straubhaar (2007) suggests that the recent global formatting and adoption of dominant show formats works well for the recently commercialised stations and networks around the world.

These shows are hugely entertaining and engage Kurdish viewers from urban and rural areas. Talk shows, game shows and quiz shows are popular in

the Kurdish Region. On the other hand, most of these show and some other competitive programmes are produced by investment companies or are jointly produced or co-produced in some cases. The companies would use Western TV production experts in an attempt to remedy the lack of their own professionalism. To illustrate, “Co-productions were initially perceived to enhance collaboration between countries with small production industries which would be able to pool resources and compete in an international market” (Taylor, 1995, p. 414).

Sarbast (2010) found that the majority of the producers, designers and directors of the two Kurdish commercial channels (Korek and Channel 4) came from Turkey, and there was collaboration and co-production between these two channels and the Turkish satellite channels (Channel Show and Taratata Channel, both of which are Turkish government television channels). Some countries ban the products of the specific co-production to avoid culture contamination. On the other hand, Chan (2005) argues that joint production was a way of avoiding cultural contamination in China: “since foreign ownership of production companies was banned, joint productions became popular where the expertise of the West could be used but the style and content of the programme could avoid culture contamination” (in Stanton, 2009, p. 43) .

The co-production process encourages globalisation; the hybridisation of diverse cultures identifies a commercial focus that is aimed at international audiences who are consumers rather than just citizens. There is some concern regarding this type of co-production format: Shi argues that “scholars warn us that the flow between countries of genres, formats, or patterns of creating programming or co-productions is more troublesome than the uneven flow of content in the current global media environment” (2008, p. 1202).

Some countries that co-produce programmes identify these programmes as being foreign – for example, China: “under the official SARFT Decree No. 101, all imported and co-produced programmes are referred to as “outside border” programmes. This included, at the time, all programmes produced in Hong Kong and Taiwan” (Stanton, 2009, p. 42). Thus, these programmes produced in the Kurdistan Region by Western experts could be described as foreign, because their style and format are different from the traditional Kurdish culture as they are influenced by the countries which produced them. Moreover, this region is very small compared to many other countries facing cultural imperialism and dominance from bigger countries, which means that it is more at risk of losing its own style and culture than bigger countries: “smaller countries or ethnic regions would be in the greatest danger of this cultural pollution due to their small size and lack of resources to fight back” (Stanton, 2009, p. 45).

Furthermore, the rapid rise of entertainment in Kurdish television has introduced many dubious and questionable cultural phenomena. Most of the song shows rely heavily on celebrity singers and beautiful, educated, Western girls for their high ratings. Consequently, images and voices from traditional Kurdish songs are likely to be marginalised or completely eliminated from these shows. For example, *Dashni Show* and the *Azhdar Show* only present very beautiful Kurdish girls with Westernised styles in terms of their attitudes, how they sing and what they wear – the show Kurdish girls living in a Western world. This means that Western styles, attitudes and ideas have monopolised this programme. In this way the broadcasters are not representing a variety of ideas

and they are not allowing the public to hear different opinions. Annan has spoken of this impartiality in terms of the duty of broadcasters:

Broadcasters should allow the widest possible range of views and opinions to be expressed, and broadcasters are not doing their job if they allow one view to monopolise their service. Their duty is to let the public hear various voices and a broadcaster needs to be knowledgeable and sensitive to issues, attitudes and changes in public life. Impartiality should not be a shield behind which broadcasters' shelter but should be a key to opening up public affairs and making them transparent (1977, in Eldridge, 1995, p. 5).

Some broadcasting authorities have a standard role for broadcasting to ensure they avoid this marginalisation; for example broadcasting standards in New Zealand note that:

Broadcasting standards should provide a baseline for radio and television broadcasters, in essence requiring them to give people a fair go, to treat programme participants fairly, to report events accurately, to allow a range of opinions to be heard, to help parents monitor their children's viewing, to assist viewers and listeners to avoid content they might find distasteful, and to protect the vulnerable (Broadcasting Standard Authority, 2006, p.15).

Moreover, many programmes, especially the dramas and shows produced by private companies, face serious production problems. Financially, they depend on private production teams. Companies supply the content for international imports, but private production teams, unfortunately, often fail to provide the professional skills needed and are primarily guided by commercial values and principles. A focus on preference rather than artistic values has led to an increase in entertainment materials which lack artistic themes and values and generally focus on enjoyment and fun.

Another important phenomenon in the Kurdistan Region concerns exposure to unofficial imported programmes. In recent years, official imports and local productions no longer monopolise the Kurdish viewership. Instead,

viewers can now import films, cartoons, TV series, documentaries and songs illegally. These are accessible online and on the market without any control or censorship. In Kurdistan, copyrighting restrictions are loose: anyone can copy any DVD or TV materials cheaply on their own computer. Consequently, Kurdish viewers, including children and younger generations, watch underground materials across the Kurdistan Region.

However, on the other hand, this exposure to higher numbers of foreign programmes and styles has opened the region to globalisation and introduced it to modernity. The modernisation theory underlines the requirement of borrowing the experience, skills and ways of life from Western countries to developing countries in the Third World (Scott, 1995). Particularly in terms of the modernisation theory, there is a gap between the wealthy and poor countries in the world in terms of modern skills and experience: “to understand the gap between wealthier and poorer nations, modernisation theorists explored the process of development and offered a composite portrait of what it means to be *modern*” (Timmons, 2000, p. 9).

This therefore affected the Kurdish people in this region and motivated them to increase their demand for knowledge of what was going on outside their borders and in other peoples’ lives. To illustrate, some of the people interviewed for this research referred to this as a need to know what was happening outside their borders when answering this question “Why were you drawn to these particular programmes; and what else do you like from international satellite programmes?”:

Every time when I watch a new foreign drama, I learn some things which I did not hear or see before. So, from this show Noor, I learn some things which are not allowed in our society. I feel pleasure when I see the practices of someone else.

Dlnia, 20-year-old university student, Interviewee 7, see Appendix.

Our country is changed: we have opened towards the world, we need to adopt or learn the new life from different societies. The Kurdish dramas do not tell us a different way of life; they represent our society, nothing new. Today, through international or national satellites, we see a variety of programmes. You can learn how to behave and act from such things they show.

Shirin, 25-year-old employer, Interviewee 10, see Appendix.

The lack of local and national programmes and appreciation for foreign programmes are also reflected in the interviewees' responses:

I would like to watch dramas, not a simple drama like Kurdish dramas, because I want to learn from dramas about life outside our society or country, how people live, how they think, how they behave. Not just for laughing or wasting time. I need to learn about the other society's life. And also commercial programmes because we can decide what can be used for our betterment from advertisements.

Layla, 39-year-old housewife, Interviewee 1, see Appendix.

I like this Noor because it gives us another way of life, modern life, women's lives in the other society. We do not have anything like this soap in Kurdish television programmes.

Soma, 38-year-old retail assistant, Interviewee 2, see Appendix.

The above discussions highlight that, as a result of a lack of producing national television programmes, there is an uneven flow of information from foreign television programme styles. These imported programmes dominate Kurdish television, on both national and international channels, and introduce Kurdish people to a modern way of life different from their traditional Kurdish life. At the same time this has affected national culture and identity in certain ways that some experts see as a type of cultural imperialism. For example, Said (1985) argues that a new form of colonialism – “cultural imperialism” – has developed.

This refers to the worldwide increase and dominance of American consumerism. Cultural imperialism operates at both the conscious and unconscious level, providing images of what a “good” life means and seeking to shape people’s identities. In Tomlinson’s view, “as global cultures fall into conditions of modernity through the spread of the institutions of modernity, they all face the same problem of the failure of a collective will to generate shared narratives of meaning and orientation” (1991, p. 165).

To conclude, the lack of indigenous and national television programmes that are affiliated with commercial television channels, within this region, has resulted in the region becoming more dependent on imported television programmes. Furthermore, their own producers do not meet the increasing demands of the viewers, especially for entertainment; to illustrate, “Many countries simply do not have sufficient creative production capabilities to produce local entertainment and other types of programmes that can compete with Western programmes such as Miami Vice or Dallas” (Atabey, 1991, p. 70).

By watching and importing these programmes, Western cultures and goods have now appeared in the Kurdish Region in the form of lifestyle, behaviour and attitude changes – especially since independence was achieved eighteen years earlier. This has created a generation that is experiencing cultural globalisation – unique, national, traditional and local identities are still forming for the majority of people. An important force in developing their identity is the internationalisation of television programmes.

Within the flow of international programmes, this research will focus on soap operas because they receive the highest viewing figures, particularly for women. Though soap operas are not the only television material available in

this region, due to the limitation of preferences from the viewers, this study has chosen to focus on soap operas. Before moving on to the analysis of soap operas and issues of women's identification, the next chapter will firstly deal with how Kurdish women's identity has developed over the past eighteen years as a result of this uneven flow of information and the expansion of globalisation and the increase in global commercial television.

**CHAPTER FOUR: GLOBAL COMMERCIAL TELEVISION AND THE CULTURAL IDENTITY OF
WOMEN IN THE KURDISTAN REGION**

The recent situation of women in the Kurdistan Region

Kurdistan or the homeland of the Kurds (Kurd Land) is a vast mountainous highland area which extends in the form of a crescent shape over an area of 520,000 km². The area extends over different countries in the Middle East, including: Iran, Iraq, Syria and Turkey, and has a total Kurdish population of 30 million people. "Most sources agree that today there are more than 30 million Kurds and at least one third of them live outside Kurdistan because of war, forced resettlement or economic deprivation" (Lokman and Maglaughlin, 2001, p. 4).

This area holds a strategic geographical position in the heart of the Middle East; in addition, the Kurds are one of the oldest groups of people in the Near East. The Kurdish people are the largest national minority in the world that do not have an actual state. "Three of the four states that rule over Kurdistan – Turkey, Iraq, and Syria are products of the dismantling of the Ottoman empire in the wake of World War I. While republican Turkey inherited a piece of the Ottoman pie, Britain and France created Iraq and Syria out of the south-eastern provinces of the empire when they defeated the Turkish sultan in 1917-1918. The result was a re-division of the Kurds among four countries with a small enclave in the Soviet Union" (Klien, 2001, p. 6). They live in eastern Turkey, northern Iraq, north-eastern Syria, to the north west of the Zagros Mountains in Iran, and in Armenia. "Three of the four states that rule over Kurdistan-Turkey, Iraq, and Syria are products of the dismantling of the Ottoman empire in the wake of World War1. While Republican Turkey inherited a piece of the Ottoman pie, Britain and France created Iraq and Syria out of the south eastern provinces of the empire when they defeated the Turkish sultan in 1917-

1918. The result was a re-division of the Kurds among four countries with a small enclave in the Soviet Union.” (Klien, 2001, p.6) Kurds speak an Indo-European language, because Kurdish belongs to the family of Indo-European languages and the Irano-Aryan group of this family. “The Kurds speak an Indo-European language which like Afghans and Persians, is part of the Iranian group of language” (Gasemlou and Chaliand, 1993, p.4).

In terms of religion, Islam spread among the Kurds in the seventh and eighth centuries and forms a large part of Kurdish identity. At least two thirds of Kurds are Sunni Muslims of the Shafi'i school. “Nearly all Kurds (99%) are Muslims, they are also about 30,000 Nestorian and Assyrian Christians, and up to 50,000 Yezidis, the misnamed “Devil worshippers”” (Gasemlou and Chaliand, 1993, p. 41).

Economically, Kurdistan is known to be very wealthy in its natural resources. Not only oil and water, but copper, chromium, iron and sulphur are in abundance in Kurdish soil. Gasemlou and Chaliand describe the Kurdish population's economy in Turkey as: “Kurdish society is still mainly agrarian. As noted earlier, 72.2% of the people live in the countryside and make their living from agriculture and stock rearing. Industry provides jobs for only 5.5% of the active population. The rest of the urban population engage in trade, services and craftwork” (1993, p. 42). Kurdish lands are rich and productive, and they maintain the Kurdish people through rural activity as well as through agriculture (Izady, 1992). Agriculturally, Kurdistan also has rich pasture lands, they have large and fertile mountain valleys which comprise of 28% of the land in the region (Lokman and Maglaughlin, 2001).

In terms of education, the ban of the use of the Kurdish language in most parts of Kurdistan as well as the lack of schools and teachers in Kurdish villages and towns has severely hindered the development of education throughout the Kurdish population. The Ba'athist ruling of the country and its persecution, deportation and war has affected the Kurdish Region significantly. A generation has grown up under these circumstances, they rarely attended school and the majority of the regions' population have not completed primary school. To illustrate further: "Nowadays, up to 46% of men in Northern Iraq are illiterate. Illiteracy is even more widespread among women. Especially in rural regions, girls are still denied education. While education is essential for the development of a democratic society in Northern Iraq" (Wadi Project, 2008).

There are two important dates in the modern history of the Kurdish people: the first is 1514, when the whole of Kurdistan was divided between the Ottoman and Persian empires following the Battle of Chaldiran; and the second is 1920 to 1923, when Britain and France defined the modern political boundaries of Kurdistan by dividing Ottoman Kurdistan between Iraq, Syria and Turkey (Lokman and Maglaughlin, 2001). Today Kurdistan extends over significant parts of Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria. In March 1991, the population of northern Iraq launched a general uprising against the Iraqi regime and briefly managed to expel it from the area. They were able to create their own independent administration and achieved significant autonomy from the Ba'ath Party government. Women in the Kurdistan Region have had a different experience from their counterparts in Iran, Syria and Turkey following the popular uprising in 1991.

This independent administration compared favourably to other areas, with significant Kurdish populations, in its ability to direct crucial socio-political and economic change. These changes reflected themselves in the socio-political life of women. In general, Kurds are the most tolerant and receptive of women's freedom when compared to other neighbouring Muslim people (Turkish, Persian and Arabian). "The alleged freedom of Kurdish women vis-à-vis their neighbours was used by nationalists to show first, how Kurds were different from their neighbours, and second, how they lived up to the standards of the age, "freedom" being a key word in modernist discourse" (Klien, 2001, p. 39).

This change began after the popular uprising of 1991. As Mojab and Gorman argue:

Since the end of the Gulf War of 1991, Kurdish women in the Kurdistan Region have participated in a state-building project initiated within the "Safe Haven" region of Northern Iraq. The nature of this state-building project is now however changing rapidly as a result of the war and occupation in 2003. The period from 1991 until 2003 provides an excellent research opportunity to study the mechanisms and results of the participation of exiled women in state-building and post-war reconstruction projects (2007, p. 65).

Mojab and Gorman (2007) also argue that women in the Kurdistan Region were a vital part of Kurdish society, they even played an active role in the uprising in March 1991. This helped to free women from injustice and various forms of violence and repression, terrorism and insults under the practices of Baghdad's central government. Under Saddam Hussein's Ba'ath regime, women in Iraq suffered significantly as victims of political rape and torture, as mothers unable to provide for their children, or as wives who lost their families, husbands and sons. Nonetheless, some of them were able to reach positions that are still off-limits to many women in the Middle East, as employees and politicians; as such

they have been able to be in a somewhat prominent view and act as relatively active members of society. Directly after the uprising in March 1991, a number of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) were recognised in this region, whose key goals focused on empowering women and advancing their political and social equal opportunities.

A particular achievement of Kurdish women is in their involvement in the central decision-making process and politics. Mohammed (2009) found that:

In the Kurdistan Region there is an increase in women's opportunities to enter into decision-making administrative bodies and to establish women's networks within the government offices and political parties. In addition, there is good collaboration between women policy makers, scholars in women's NGOs, women's NGO workers, and women activists (2009, p. 39).

Mohammed also points to the percentage of Kurdish women MPs in the Kurdistan Region:

In the Kurdistan Region women's representation reached 27%, but the persistent pressure from local NGOs, the changing tendency of MPs from radical to democratic, and the pressure from international NGOs may gradually remove the obstacles for women's representation in politics. Thus, in 2009 Iraq's Kurdistan Parliament has increased the quota of women to 30% (2009, p. 37)

Women have continued to contribute to the region's development and achievements. Three women now serve as ministers in the Kurdistan Regional Government and several serve as judges. They also contribute to public life as members of parliament, teachers, engineers, lawyers and labourers. A number of women's organisations are now established in the Kurdistan Region, they have been directly and consistently supported by the Kurdistan Regional Government. Examples are the Kurdistan Women's Union, linked to the KDP; the Zhinan Kurdish Women's Union, linked to the PUK (both of these women's organisations are divisions of the political parties, PUK and PDK, which

advocate the rights of women, protect them from violence and protect their interests inside the political party and society). There are many newspapers and magazines written and run by Kurdish women. Women are also participating far more in theatres and in the arts, areas which were once hard for them to enter because of social attitudes to these professions and women in general. As the Kurdistan Democratic Party (2007) noted, Kurdish women play remarkable roles and participate in Kurdistan's theatres and arts. In the past, Kurdistan's theatres suffered from a lack of female involvement because society viewed women in a different way and thought that they should remain in seclusion.

In terms of education today, the number of young women in the Kurdistan Region wanting to study higher education or return to school has increased since the country gained its independence and since its exposure to globalisation. As previously noted, many of the people from the regions' populations did not complete primary school and a low level of education was common. The majority of Kurdish women only wanted to learn how to read and write and then they'd get married young. Mojab states that "37% of women in the Kurdistan Region are illiterate; most women marry under the age of 19 because women over 23 are considered [to be] someone who has waited too long to get married and is now too old, [as such] few women progress on to higher education" (2008, p. 21). Today these women manage to get a higher education, participate in politics or have jobs that do not revolve around the family.

The researcher illustrates this well as she returned to study higher education after a ten year gap from school. She had not completed higher education during the Iraqi regime because she had left school due to the

political and economic situation of the country. Unfortunately, due to a lack of academic study in this field, the researcher could not find any statistics concerning the number of women who returned to study; although a lot of resources and data were available regarding the violence and killings faced by these women:

Violence against women, female genital mutilation, abuse and so called “honour killings” are still a widespread phenomenon in Iraq and Iraqi-Kurdistan. An estimated total of more than 2000 women have been killed in Iraqi Kurdistan for “honour reasons” during the 1990s alone (Irin News 2003, in Vot et al., 2006).

Kurdish women and their identity following the introduction of global media

Kurdish society was traditionally tribal; this traditional Kurdish tribe was naturally led by a Sheik, whose ruling was firm. The definition of a tribe is the social and political item of a group of people, usually linked with a particular geographical area, which professes hereditary relationships throughout a single ancestor. Kurdish tribes were combined by additional geographical areas more than by relationships to a common ancestor; however, in other respects they also fit the anthropologists’ definition. Lokman and Maglaughlin in their book *Kurdish Culture and Society* described the tribe’s structure and culture in Kurdish society as: “Accordingly, the loyalty of the Kurds is primarily directed towards the immediate family, clan, the cornerstone of the social system, and thence to the tribe, the largest grouping within Kurdish society” (2001, p.4).

Family is all-important in Kurdish society; traditionally families were peasants which formed the basis of the Kurdish societal structure. A household typically consists of: a husband, a wife, and their children, sometimes also the grandmother and grandfather. Family authority in Kurdish society is usually

related to age and sex; the male is the leader of the household and is responsible for the household tasks. The Kurdish family and society are dominated by males; the male is responsible for the socio-economic and political contacts with the outside world. Kurdish women are often part of the socio-economic and political processes within their villages, but the wives are accepted as obeying and serving their husbands and as such submit to them when in the community. To illustrate:

Kurdish women are essentially free, by citing how the Kurdish woman takes on the duties of her husband, i.e., of men, in social interactions with men; for example, she will take in guests and will host her guests herself, just like men do (Klien, 2001, p. 38).

Hassanpour also explains the control that a man has over the woman's body:

In Kurdish society, as elsewhere female sexuality is crucial to the reproduction of patriarchy. The ideal, good female is one who firmly constrains her sexuality according to established codes of propriety. Women are punished, often violently, if they breach the terms of the "social contract" scripted by patriarchal tradition (2001, p. 238).

In other words, the men refer to the feudal and tribal traditions of the Kurdish society:

In feudal and tribal Kurdish society, resistance against patriarchy was constrained by the absence of feminist consciousness. The feminine consciousness resonating in oral literature could not lead to theoretical reflections on patriarchy, male oppression, sexism, women's rights, unequal gender relations, or non-sexist language (Hassanpour, 2001, p. 256).

But the Kurdish women have forced a number of crucial social changes, particularly in relation to allowing public access to satellite broadcasts after years of prohibition by the former Iraqi regime (as discussed in the previous chapter). Programmes such as talk shows, films, soaps and news programmes exhibit the new and rapidly changing role of women in society. Viewers can see

female role models in the fields of business, government, politics, diplomacy and the arts, and they can now compare their lives with them.

On the other hand, international television programmes via satellite broadcasts in a diverse multi-channel environment have helped bring Kurdish women together, and have deepened the dialogue amongst Kurdish women on their identity. Zaharopoulos argues that “the media creates an environment in which cultural change is possible, this cultural change results in the acceptability of foreign cultural norms, alien lifestyles and ideologies, and consumer goods which these ideologies produce” (1997, p. 304). However, it also brings certain problems and challenges to the life of Kurdish women, as discussed below.

Thus, because programmes broadcast by international television channels, especially Western ones, depict values, ideas and emotions that may be shaped in a way that differs or clashes with the set of values and ideas that are well established in the Kurdistan Region. For example, portrayals of women as sexual beings, as independent women who work outside the home and as female leaders are at variance with the role of women in Kurdish society as well as the image of women previously portrayed on national Kurdish television. Nevertheless, the international programmes are preferred by most viewers in the Kurdistan Region due to a previous deprivation from this kind of television programming, as discussed in Chapter Three, and because international programmes represent modern life. Soma, a 38-year-old, shop assistant, noted that she preferred Western television programmes to her national television programmes; she stated:

I like this show because it gives us another way of life, modern life and women's lives in other societies. We do not have anything like this soap in Kurdish television programmes.

Interviewee 2, see Appendix.

Hamelink (1993) argues that the global media is aimed at a global audience, one with no geographical or national borders, as well as having no political, religious, social or cultural differences. At the same time, the power of global culture is firmly linked to the adoption of technological developments, alongside the domination of new media and commercial competition (and their concomitant value system).

Crawley views satellite television as a tool for changing culture – “the private satellite sector was instrumental in changing the cultural and programme priorities of television, first of all in entertainment and, later, increasingly in information and news as well” (2005, p. 129). This is particularly the case since the arrival of satellite brings international programmes to every household: “the advent of satellite technology for distributing television signals to small home receivers has made foreign TV programmes more directly available to households worldwide” (Elasmar, 2003, p. 163).

Television in the Kurdistan Region has therefore come to play a role in the socialisation of young women. The arrival of international television programmes in the Kurdistan Region, via satellite, has also led to concerns about the potential loss of Kurdish traditional culture and an identity crisis. As Barker points out: “the globalisation of the institutions of television raise crucial questions about culture and cultural identities” (1999, p. 3).

This is particularly the case when women access entertainment programmes or soaps from international television channels and they discover

that movies are discussing certain topics and subjects that were previously considered taboo in their traditional society. This can be seen in the interviews that form the basis for this present research. For example, Ashti, a 28-year-old housewife, clearly referred to these differences and taboos in answering the question “Do you think the characters’ behaviours resemble your life and your family relationship? If yes, how?”

No, because you know this is TV not real life. However, we can find some differences in comparing our life with soap operas. For example: abortion and love; we just don't talk about them like the girls do with their parents in this show, even though many girls in Kurdish families fall in love.

Interviewee 12, see Appendix.

Thus, despite the fact that the belief for change and the adoption of Western values has started, there are still certain issues that remain taboo and which most women cannot ignore as part of their traditional beliefs and their society’s norms.

Dymone (1999) found that media organisations are characterised by contradictory and conflicting ideologies which are exposed in the tension between commercial values concerning profit and professional values concerning quality. When endeavouring to shape their cultural context, members choose to change the past by drawing on an understanding of the present, or understanding the present by drawing on the past. However, rising market pressures and managerially inspired discourses threaten to dislodge and frustrate traditional and professional ambitions. Therefore organisational members find it more and more difficult to arrive at common understandings when considering the historical norms and values.

Despite the political and economic changes, it became apparent from the responses and life experiences of the interviewees, within this research, that the biggest changes currently facing the Kurdish people are the socio-cultural changes which are affecting women in particular. One of the main challenges encountered by Kurdish society over the last century has been caused by the clash between modernity and tradition, and the multiple identities caused by the gap between the two. However, with regards to the patriarchal, tribal and religious Kurdish society, it is difficult to gain a consensus; there is a constant challenge to move from the traditional to the modern, but both these notions contribute to Kurdish culture, traditional identity and lifestyle changes.

Viewers of the foreign mass media compare their lives to the film and soap characters' lives, which causes confusion concerning how to achieve a balance between the adoption of the new culture and the existing national culture. Some women, on the other hand, have embraced modernity as the means by which to leave their traditional culture and become modern. Others have avoided modernisation by maintaining the Kurdish traditions, and a number are confused and are continually being challenged by the question of whether they should follow the modern way or maintain their traditional way of life (as dealt with in more detail in Chapter Six). The Western television products can add to this confusion as they portray an independent woman who is strong, charismatic, career-oriented and self-reliant. This is apparent in the interviews that form the basis of this research, where some of the people interviewed preferred the roles of the women in the Turkish soap opera *Noor* which portrayed educated and independent women:

I like this show because it created the case of a character who is a woman being a strong independent individual, a high-level administration worker.

Roza, 30-year-old teacher, Interviewee 6, see Appendix.

My favourite female character is Noor, who is a beautiful woman, independent and self-reliant as a professional fashion designer.

Asia, 39-year-old engineer, Interviewee 9, see Appendix.

Moreover, satellite television has brought some new qualities to the Kurdish women's lives; as Martelanc argues:

Direct television broadcasting via communication satellites will most probably bring some new qualities, relations and parameters to the way of life of many nations and societies. Satellite-based television is reaching for new frontiers, or, perhaps better said, towards a situation where in some cases there may be no frontiers at all. As a means of cultural exchange, as a vehicle of social change, television is becoming an indispensable means of the socialisation of man, a real power on a vast international scale (1990, p. 60).

Martelanc also argues that:

Every culture is a living structure, neatly interwoven and interrelated in an integrated system. The majority of its essential elements must tally with the existing pattern, if a culture is to operate smoothly, efficiently and without conflict. A major change in the method of communication will change the whole system of communication, and this will subsequently leave a mark on the whole cultural and social model (1974, p. 10).

This is especially true as the rise of global culture has been accompanied by changing notions of the "ideal" Kurdish woman, this includes questions concerning women working outside the home, having careers and thinking about independence. "Media can help modernisation by introducing Western values, but they do so at the cost of a breakdown of traditional values and the loss of authentic local cultures" (Zaharoupols, 2003, p. 40). This contrasts with the former ideal of the Kurdish woman as a mother and housewife; traditionally, the woman's duty was to service the males of the household and to give birth to male children – at the same time, they had limited participation in public affairs.

Nevertheless, Kurdish women contributed to certain socio-economic and political processes within their villages, whereas in Muslim and traditional Kurdish societies, the wives must obey and serve their husband and submit to them in public. Galletti refers to this aspect of the role of Kurdish women: “Western visitors have often described the beauty and the strong character of the Kurdish woman whose role has always been relevant in Kurdish society as mother, partner, political chief and sometimes fighter and bandit” (2001, p. 207).

Semati (2008) examined the impact of Persian satellite television networks in Iran and the growth of satellite television. He pointed out that over the past century one of the essential sociological conflicts in Iranian society has been caused by the clash between tradition and modernity. While some social groups have embraced modernity, others have shunned it and remained engaged in traditional modes of life and worldviews. He also argues that satellite television is only one facet of a larger hegemonic power that Iran, along with many other societies throughout the world, is facing.

Global commercial television and the culture of Kurdish women

One of the most dramatic changes to have transformed broadcasting in post-industrial societies has been the growth in commercial competition, the concomitant decline in public broadcasting and the greater appearance of commercial media, which has helped to form a multinational hybridised culture. In this new world media order, the global commercial media itself tends to be under the ownership of just a few companies linked to each other through division and cooperation agreements. Katz (2005, p. 333) points out that:

Global television shaped two central developments: a new global communications order and it also determined a new cultural order whose influence is significantly beyond the global changes. Changes began

taking place after public broadcasting bodies were exposed to competition from commercial broadcasters. Though these debates differed among countries, the trend was clear – a merging of the old model of public broadcasting with the new model of commercialised broadcasting. This means that, nowadays, the media “landscape” of country might contain a variety of broadcasting systems, including commercial, party-state, public service, and these different types of broadcasting systems are not mutually exclusive. For instance, broadcasting regulations might place public service obligations upon commercial broadcasters.

However the focus of this research is not to explore the tensions between the different types of broadcasting system. It is enough to note that Kurdistan now has, like other countries, a mixed broadcasting system that includes both public service and commercial broadcasting. Katz also explains:

The concept of global culture refers to the formation of common cultural values in different societies. The cultural impact of global media offers a dominant structure which includes competitive and commercial transmissions, live transmissions around the clock, and programmes with characteristics which are common to a large number of countries (i.e., news, sports, music, entertainment, fashion, science, and movies). These global media offerings bypass the authority of local governments by providing transmission and reception of channels outside their country of origin. The global environment of proliferation of programming and culture has created common cultural characteristics having to do with food, fashion, music, entertainment, tourism, and the consumption of television programmes (2009, p. 333).

Thus, the globalisation of culture through the mass media could bring a different cultural experience to audiences, it could create a mass culture as a result of the commercial system – a system where the motive of profit predominates overwhelmingly.

Commercial television often prevents the production of high-quality programming, even if the actual sponsors are nominally devoted to quality and diversity. Commercial programming is often of a lower quality compared to public television. A connected concern is that a shrinking audience for public television may weaken the rationale for maintaining financial support for such

commercial companies. Blumler (1992) argues that the increased commercialisation of broadcasting across the world has induced a heated policy discussion. Opponents have voiced worries that entertainment programmes marginalise informational programmes and damage an already impoverished public sphere. There are also concerns that the commercialisation process decreases variety in programming. The greatest risk herein is present for the weaker segments of society, the poor, the less educated and the less informed, including children and the elderly.

Graffman (2009) explains the process by which an audience and all its related tastes are constructed by the television programme itself. After spending nine months completing extended fieldwork at one of the largest commercial television production companies in Stockholm (Sweden), Graffman found that the producers very seldom mentioned the recipient (the audience) in their daily work. Graffman also adds that the work of the production company is based on the notion of an existing audience being out there, such an audience in fact being the creation of the production company itself. As can be seen today, the viewers of the Kurdistan Region are exposed to a considerable number of international and national commercial television programmes, all of which count the viewers as customers.

Some experts argue that commercial television acts to serve the existing plutocratic elite and not the public or society itself. Espinosa (1982) argues that “the strategies used by the producers to create an image of the audience include the construction of the “average person” based on statistical figures, reference persons, viewer ratings and general knowledge of the TV institution, as well as experiences of earlier shows and of themselves as surrogate

viewers” (p. 85). Thus, the task of commercial media is to deliver advertisements to its audience whilst that of the commercial television is to seek out viewers for commercials. All this is designed to make profits for the companies whose products are featured in the commercials. These commercial products are not just designed to sell products, but also to sell a desired culture.

As McQuail argues:

Media organisations recognise themselves as “cultural” in a way that most other organisations do not. They see themselves as communication channels which, by conveying cultural content, serve both to shape and to reflect societal culture (1987, in Daymon, 1999, p. 5).

This type of programming and global culture has a substantial influence on the countries that import and broadcast its programmes. Thus, audience behaviours and attitudes are deeply impacted by this commercial culture. McCarty and Hattwick (1992) argue that culture impacts on every feature of a society, including the thoughts and actions of every member of a group. Thus, cultural values are important in terms of advertising and market research. Schudson (1984) views advertising as a window to culture and a mirror that reflects the culture. Firth (1997) has argued that consumers understand advertising messages by relating them to their respective cultures.

Today the Kurdistan Region is one of the developing countries showing and importing the highest number of these programmes. These programmes have changed the television images of Kurdish women, they have expanded the portrayal of woman from innocent and pure housewives and mothers to women working outside the home who have become, to a significant degree, Westernised. These new images of women are conveyed by the Kurdish and non-Kurdish, and the private and commercial television network broadcasting organisations in the Kurdistan Region.

Moreover, commercial programmes and advertisements impact on cultural change for Kurdish women in terms of fashion, lifestyle, culture, family relationships, opinions, etc. As Zaharopoulos (1985) argues, “advertising was found to be the most important means of promoting foreign lifestyle and cultural values, as advertising embodies the promotion of cultural values and the promotion of products” (in Elesmar , 2003, p. 44). However, the increasing dominance of foreign (especially American and Western) media in the Kurdistan Region has raised awareness of “cultural imperialism”. Herman and McChesney (1997) and Schiller (1991) argue that this spread of media imperialism, as cultural imperialism theorists underline, is based on the dominance of the US media. As such:

The most crucial incursion of media imperialism, as cultural imperialism theorists highlight, is the increasing dominance of the commercial media system and the spread of the US model as the evolutionary model that defines the path of media development in other countries, which ultimately brings these countries into the orbit of interest of dominant powers (Herman and McChesney, 1997; Schiller, 1991, p. 40).

This illustrates that the globalisation of the privatised advertisement-driven model of American commercial television has carried consumer culture into living rooms across the world. In addition, the significant increase in the number of satellites has given way to the growth of transnational networks accessible to international audiences. Furthermore, media dependency, the increasing number of imports, the adaption of foreign television programmes that dominated the Kurdistan Region (as discussed in Chapter Three), and the involvement of Kurdish television channels in commercialisation, have created the desire or belief for change in terms of lifestyle. To illustrate, Barker (1999) notes that:

Television is an asset open to virtually everybody in modern industrialised societies and one which is increasing its visibility across the planet. It is a site of popular knowledge about the world and increasingly brings us into contact, albeit in mediated fashion, with ways of life other than the one into which we were born (Barker, 1999, p. 3).

This desire was clearly visible in the answers provided by the interviewees for this present research. For example, Asia, a 30-year-old engineer, prefers these programmes because she believes that through these, she learns about modern life:

I like watching these soaps because through such dramas or films we learn about Western, modern life, the achievement of which is the dream of many people like me.

Interviewee 9, see Appendix.

Furthermore, the development of the new global order assists the movement of people, ideas and physical capital, through technology, as much as politics and it is therefore pushing the boundaries of traditional identity formation. At the centre of this process lies the tension between cultural homogenisation and cultural diversity. Elasmar and Huntwe (1996) found that “exposure to foreign TV increases the sales of foreign products, especially clothing. Similarly, exposure to foreign TV increases the tendency of audience members to hold values similar to those present in the country producing the foreign message” (1996, p. 63). Bagdikian (2004) describes this situation as occurring in countries with limited domestic or national product and which lack the capacity or finance to create their own programmes, thus fuelling the demand for imported TV.

The interview participants in this research referred to this impact in their responses with regards to their desire to know what was going on outside their country:

I like modern life, I like to know how the women outside our society live, behave, think. Particularly the advertisements and commercial breaks that occur every 15 or 20 minutes during the broadcasting of this show, they show us what is the new fashion, makeup, furniture and what people in the other countries are wearing.

Roza, 30-year-old teacher, Interviewee 6, see Appendix.

By watching the Western channels, advertisements help women to adopt and wear Western clothing and the new fashions.

Asia, 30-year-old engineer, Interviewee 9, see Appendix.

Shaswari (2008) examined the influence of satellite television in terms of the adoption of alternative, non-traditional lifestyles and clothing choices in one remote area in the region. He conducted a survey on 100 people – 65 men and 35 women. Respondents were asked whether they thought that international television had affected women's choice of clothing: 64% said "yes", 34% said "sometimes", and 2% said "no". Respondents were then asked whether they had bought home furnishings which reflected those that were exhibited on television: 27% said "yes", 54% said "sometimes", and 19% said "no" (2008, p. 41-43).

By watching foreign programmes, such as films and advertising, much can be learned about the norms and cultures of the source country. The advertisements inform people about appropriate dress, food and ways of life for the people of that country. Tse, Belk and Zhon (1989) argue that cultural values conveyed through advertising messages are powerful forces which shape consumer motivations, lifestyles and manufacturing production choices. For example, the commercials on an Indian channel indicate that the people of India like spicy food, that the older generation like to wear traditional clothing and that the younger generation like to wear Western clothing. Television and

advertising therefore simplistically identify the different countries' customs and mentalities. As Barker argues:

Cosmopolitanism is fast becoming an aspect of day-to-day life in modern Western societies. Diverse cultures which had once been considered "alien" and remote are becoming accessible today (as sign and commodities) via our televisions, radios, and shopping centres. As a consequence, we may choose to eat "Indian", dress "Italian", watch "American" and listen "African" (Barker, 1999, p. 1).

However, according to the "hypodermic needle model", Katz and Lazarsfeld (1995) express the view that the media is a dangerous means of capitalism as it communicates an idea because the receiver or audience is powerless to resist the influence of the message. There is no escape or resistance in these models. As both of the terms used to state this theory suggest (a "magic bullet" and "hypodermic needle/syringe"), this theory proposes a powerful and direct flow of information from the sender to the receiver. The bullet hypothesis graphically suggests that the message is a bullet fired from the "media gun" into the viewer's "head", and with equally emotive imagery, the hypodermic needle theory propose that media messages are injected directly into passive audiences that are directly and immediately influenced by the message.

In contrast, Hanes (2000) points out, some theorists have come to believe that the media does not have such a direct effect and power over its audiences. It considers the media as a comparatively weak influence and power in moulding individual beliefs, opinions, attitudes and behaviours. Other factors present in society, such as personal contact, religion and education, are more likely to influence people. The "effects" model is considered to be an insufficient representation of the communication between media and the public, as it does not consider audiences as individuals with their own beliefs, opinions, ideals and attitudes. As Abercrombie argues, "audiences are not blank sheets of paper

on which media messages can be written; members of an audience will have prior attitudes and beliefs which will determine how effective media messages are” (1996, p. 140). As will be argued in the latter half of this chapter and the next, the cultural capital, education and residence of the home area to these Kurdish women will determine how they access and select television programmes, as well as adapt modern Western cultures and behaviours.

Moreover, Waisbord (2004) argues that the marketplace for television programming has changed significantly since the emergence of new technology and multi-channel services. The globalisation and commercialisation of media markets has also changed people’s ideas of local culture, and has made commercial culture and global programming a pertinent topic of discussion in many countries. McAllister argues:

Commercial culture, then, refers specifically to advertising forms of mediated culture: culture designed to sell a product. By this definition, advertisements are commercial culture. Commercial culture also results when obvious advertising and promotional influences intrude on non-advertising forms (2003, p. 43).

The globalisation of media markets has also changed the concept of local culture, as the distribution of global programming has become a subject matter for debate in many countries. The dominance of American programmes has meant that almost all the same programmes are available in all markets, including programmes provided on local channels. Partly as a result of this, local authorities now have difficulty in combating global media services and global cultures. Programming quotas have loopholes that allow foreign ideas to enter as long as they are produced domestically. This means that globalisation can progressively transform the individual and quickly involve them in a modern way of life due to a globally linked world system: “while some observers

celebrate the effects of media globalisation on states, others find this deeply troubling. Optimists believe that cross-border technologies open up new possibilities for more people around the world to have better and faster access to modern information” (Morris and Waisbord, 2001, p. 8).

It should be noted that globalisation can make it more difficult for people to “find themselves” and discover their “self-identity”. Shah examined Nepalese women facing globalisation and reported that:

Since Nepal is in the face of globalisation, women find it much more arduous to discover their self-identity. Thus, as a traditional society entering a modern era, women struggle to explore their self in midst of cultural change along with the package of complicated version of self that comes from being a traditional woman of a patriarchal nation (Shah, 2008, p. 4).

Amin, in an examination of the impact of satellite television broadcasting on women facing globalisation and its problems, concluded that:

Satellite broadcasting has begun to influence all walks of public life in the Middle East and to influence Arab women in particular. As with all alterations, there are those who see the negatives as outweighing the positives and will oppose its functioning. Satellite broadcasting has huge potential for Arab women: as a medium for the exchange of thoughts and ideas, as a means to increase the public platform for development and empowerment, as a medium for education that overcomes barriers of distance and time, and as an instrument to develop communities, speed up progress, and improve development (2001, p. 1).

Katz (2000) points out that the huge increase in the number of available channels, together with the wide range of higher technological and information services provided, has changed the relations between technological progression and cultural development and change. The global flow of cultural media products means that cultural distinction has become less influential than the free flow of information and the spread of commercial programming. According to Sparks (2005), there is a general agreement that the modern world

is best understood through the “prism” of globalisation. Opinions differ as to whether globalisation is a positive or a negative process, but there is general consensus that whatever is going on right now it is either a symptom or a consequence of Western-centric globalisation.

In Kurdish society, due to its traditionally tribal nature, the basis of a woman’s identity has been her local community and family, her individualism being submerged by this and the dominance of the male. In the face of globalisation, this tribal society and the traditional Kurdish family have lost their role and position and can no longer be the basis of an identity, as in the past. In modern society, many of the traditional sources of identity – religion and the family – have lost their authority, especially for young people. Consequently, individuals increasingly fall back on their own resources for identity building. As Thompson and Comstock argue:

Components of identity reflect and result from social interactions with family, friends, peers, authorities, and others as well as from mass media images and values. Indeed, since the mass media influences how people treat one another, as clusters of demographic and cultural characteristics, social interactions are in part informed by the shared understandings or stereotypes about people that the media provide (1995, p.75; 1993, p. 311).

Lanuza (2003) showed that today the most powerful catalyst for modernising youth culture is the mass media, rather than peers and the school. The mass media is responsible for shaping the consumption patterns of youths – their dress, leisure and political predispositions, delinquent behaviour, and even religious affiliations. Lanuza also argues that:

The mass media exhibits an ambivalent character in relation to the formation of youth culture. While it carries modernising currents, at the same time it also promotes traditional Filipino values. Hence studies on youths and values promoted by television, show the elimination of

traditional Filipino values such as respect for elders, family solidarity, and reverence for authorities (2003, p. 25).

As part of a traditional or tribal society incorporating itself into the modern era, Kurdish women in this society struggle to find a space to express and locate themselves in the midst of cultural changes, and find themselves at the heart of a socio-political conflict between modernity and tradition. McQuail argues that the “media can serve to respond so, as to liberate and unite as well as fragment society; both to promote and to hold back changes” (1994, p. 64). Kurdish women now have the freedom to work in either public or private sectors and do not have to limit themselves only to household work. In the past they were assigned to work only in the household domain because most of them, especially older women, lacked formal education, and were therefore disinclined to work outside the home. Thus, the situation is different for women when they try to improve their role: “Women are actively trying to improve their role. This is just a beginning and it might take decades until some sort of gender equality might be achieved. But a first important step is complete: the problems of women in Kurdish society are being addressed” (Von, et al., 2006, p. 13).

Shah describes the changes in the attitudes and identities of women in India facing globalisation:

With globalisation exposing these women to multiple ways of being and providing multiple choices of lifestyle and roles, self-discovery has become a much more demanding and frustrating process for them because the globalisation process has extended the dialogical voices of women. Women now think, “I am a mom, a wife, and a caretaker. I am all that, but I don’t know who I am”. In order to understand and formulate one’s self-identity, one needs to understand all of the self’s roles and qualities (2008, p. 6).

Moreover, due to their new-found acquisition of freedom and the introduction of global television, today, Kurdish women are fighting and struggling in the

political arena to eliminate gender-based laws and to obtain the right to divorce, inherit income, choose husbands and to determine their own paths in life. Even the marriage process has changed. In the past marriage in Kurdish society was done by arrangement and most traditional Kurdish marriage arrangements were very complex and defined by tribal traditions in both rural and urban areas. Hassanpour (2001) points out that Kurdish women are forbidden the right to choose their spouse and to divorce them. Men alone are entitled and permitted to initiate marriages, by sending an intermediary to the family of a girl to ask for her hand in marriage or to require a girl to become a bride. More recently, there are less of these arranged marriages.

All these changes and achievements on the part of Kurdish women do not, however, indicate that women necessarily live well, today. The influence of global and international television has been significant; however, they still face various troubles and much violence when they attempt to reject the patriarchal culture and follow the culture which is provided by the foreign television soap operas and programmes. As such, they may be forced to accept male domination, polygamy, domestic violence, beatings and neglect. This is in conflict with the lives of the characters and female actors they see on television.

Mojab (2003) referred to the situation faced by Kurdish women in this region when they tried to reject the traditional norms of society:

The Independent Women's Organisation (IWO), formed in May 1993, has been active in exposing honour killing and other forms of violence. In March 1998, it opened a women's shelter centre in Sulaimani (one of the biggest cities in the Kurdistan Region), which saved many lives. According to their newsletter, the shelter handled 233 cases in six months in 1999: 18 women were murdered, 57 threatened with killing, 38 committed suicide, 69 suffered from different pressures, six were raped, and three were dismembered (2003, p. 24).

Moreover, since the popular uprising of 1991, women's non-government organisations in the Kurdistan Region have increased. It can be argued that these NGOs have contributed to the consciousness of women, as well as the men in this society, of the dangers of serious abuses such as honour killings, female circumcision, forced marriage, under-age marriage and domestic violence, as covered in Chapter Six.

Thus, a generation with local and globalised (but nonetheless Western-centric) cultural worldviews has been created, but national, traditional, local and unique identities still dominate the worldview of the majority of Kurdish people. This has the potential to stir up very potent social and inter-generational conflicts in the future. One important force which affects the development and multiplicities of these women's identities is the internationalisation of television programming. In a similar study, Butcher examined the awareness of multiple identities in urban Delhi:

There is an awareness of multiple identities, which includes for more cosmopolitan young people in urban Delhi the ascription of "globalness", a sense of being an "international" or "global" citizen. They feel connected to the global, and simultaneously belonging to other referent groups based on social roles, occupations and religion. For example there is an increasing contextualisation of identity, requiring the dichotomisation of space and the need to adapt to each space differently (2003, p. 268).

Kurdish women, therefore, have access to a way of life to which women previously rarely aspired. They desire a lifestyle different to that of their mother or grandmother in terms of material possessions, levels of education, family life, social arrangements, gender roles, spousal relationships, marriage, ways of dressing (more Westernised clothing), ways of thinking, and financial independence. These thoughts are found in their lives today. Women identify with the characters in Western television programmes and they are beginning to

look for an escape from traditional life by adopting modern ways of life and Western feminine identities. This is particularly the case for young urban women, due to their education and income, which is generally better than in the more rural areas. Blumler and Katz (1974) suggest that:

There were four chief needs of television audiences that are satisfied by television. These included – diversion (a form of escaping from the pressures of every day), personal relationships (where the viewer gains companionship, either with the television characters, or through conversations with others about television), personal identity (where the viewer is able to compare their life with the lives of characters and situations on television, to explore, re-affirm or question their personal identity) and surveillance (where the media are looked upon for a supply of information about what is happening in the world) (in Hanes, 2000, p. 2).

Butcher came to a similar conclusion when examining women in India facing globalisation, and the difference between urban and rural women in accepting and adapting values. To illustrate: “Urban young people, particularly [the] upper incomes and males, are more likely to adapt the external accoutrements of Westernisation but, at the point of nebulous, undefined values, stand in opposition to the West” (Butcher, 2003, p. 268). Butcher also argues “for some of the audiences, particularly lower income and rural young people, there is a strong resistance to the foreign” (2003, p. 268).

Moreover, Sen (1993) argues that the consumption of US popular culture in India will most likely continue to expand the gap, not only between the rich and the poor, but also between the urban (where tradition is slowly eroding) and the rural (where tradition is strongly rooted).

Today Kurdish women are viewers of the foreign mass media, the compare their lives with those that they witness in the films, soaps and cartoons of Western television productions. This causes confusion in terms of

how to adopt this culture, which is so opposite to their traditional culture, and how to find a balance between the two. In the face of globalisation and the international flow of information, the Kurdistan Region is struggling with a dilemma brought on by an awareness of multiple identities and relationships. Butcher argues that “this adoption and awareness of multiple identities requires the dichotomisation of space to accommodate new roles and relationships” (2003, p. 197).

Kurdish women worry about their traditional social and cultural values; the majority of the interviewees in this research indicated that they wish to follow modern ones (reviewed in the following chapters). For example Shawbo, a 38-year-old employer, noted:

I would like to adopt some things to my life, for example I always ask my husband to treat me like Muhannad treats his wife Noor, but he does not agree. In addition, he cannot because he grew up in a society where the man has to treat his wife harshly, because in this society this is the symbol of the strong man.

Interviewee 13, see Appendix.

Harbi (1996, in Amin, 2001) argues that there is a positive connection between satellite exposure and the adoption of Western values and morals. By the same source, it has been asserted that satellite television viewing causes superficiality, vagueness and distortion in terms of identity. High school girls in the Arab world who are exposed to satellite television channels, particularly American satellite television programmes, wish to travel to the Western world, specifically the United States and Europe.

Women in the Kurdistan Region are also incorporated into a patriarchal background in Kurdish society, which seems to complicate the development and stabilisation of a coherent identity. Because of their location, which

positions them right in the middle of opposing professed identities, they are at the very core of what amounts to a cultural war, but the inflow of globalisation through international television programmes has influenced their identity. As Koç (2006) explains, such a dilemma exemplifies the connection and relationship between the local and global, which results in neither homogenisation nor heterogenisation. Identities thus become a mixture or “mean” of both.

Robertson (1992, 1995) describes this as the real “globalisation”, an inter-penetration between the local and global rather than a condition wherein local is overridden entirely by the global. He points out that both the local and global can influence each other and that the way the local and global relate to each other is best captured by the phrases “the universalisation of particularism” and “the particularisation of universalism”. However, as Morris and Waisbord (2001) point out, facing globalisation is very different from facing the world, because the world system includes national, local and regional phenomena, whereas globalisation is homogenised and blended.

Women in the Kurdistan Region faced globalisation primarily through the medium of international television because, as discussed in the previous chapter, the higher rate of illiteracy and lower incomes of this region’s women meant that they could not use the internet or read newspapers and magazines to obtain information and they had no other personal contact with the outside world. Sampson (1989) believes that the transformation from the modern to a postmodern era and the globally linked social environment calls for dramatic transformation in the person.

All the above leads us to understand that with the globalisation of media products, identity formation has shifted from being based on fixed concepts derived by tradition to being based on a confusing multiplicity of concepts generated by a global, homogeneous – and paradoxically, also multi-faceted – culture. Globalisation and the commercialisation of television have the potential to change the traditional culture of Kurdish society by making viewers think in different ways about their role in society and the world.

At the same time, for the last eighteen years younger Kurdish women have been integrated via global commercial television into a globalised world, and they are now ready to face the economic and cultural challenges posed by globalisation and the “information society”. For example, satellite broadcasting in the Kurdistan Region now provides Kurdish women with entertainment and educational, cultural and artistic services. Entertainment programmes are the most popular with Kurdish women, particularly movies and soap operas, which usually rank first in terms of satellite television use. This present study has selected the soap opera as a focus of research based on its particular importance as a cultural tool in identity formation, through the comparisons that these shows trigger on the part of their female audience between their traditional lives and the lives of modern Western women.

Women viewers, in particular, see the soap opera genre as being much more realistic than other television genres. Elasmir and Bennent argue that “viewers who perceive television as more realistic are more likely to be influenced by its content” (2003, p. 44). Moreover, soap operas and advertising are the most important medium through which the producer countries influence Kurdish women. Shi considers soap operas a tool for cultural homogenisation:

Foreign investment, the spread of the commercial media system and cultivation of consumerism among a global audience are all indicators of media imperialism and cultural homogenisation... homogenisation happens via genre dominance, for example the dominance of soap operas, talk shows, and reality shows around the world (2008, p. 1202).

The soap opera can also be considered an important television genre for transforming the globalisation of models: “there is a globalisation of models, genres and systems, such as advertising and soap operas, which have spread to most of the world’s television systems” (Morris and Waisbord, 2001, p. 133). However, soap operas are not the only television materials available and are not the only vehicles for cultural change in this region. Due to the relative homogeneity in terms of tastes amongst viewers, this present study has chosen to focus solely on soap operas. Consequently, the following chapter will discuss the term “soap opera”, as a television genre, and it will investigate the formation of a “culture”, as identified by Kurdish women. Before moving on to the next chapter, a brief overview will follow on how Kurdish women were first introduced to soap operas and the reasons for selecting this genre, from the other global commercial television products, as the focus of this study.

Kurdish women and the introduction of foreign soap operas

Kurdish women became exposed to satellite television, at this time they were increasingly introduced to international soap operas, many of which were already dubbed into Kurdish and Arabic, which most Kurdish women could easily understand. The Arabic satellite station MBC4 began to translate a range of soaps into Arabic; soaps have been the most watched type of television programme in the region. However, Kurdish women already had, it must be said, some experience of soaps and serials for a long time with the broadcasting of Egyptian, Syrian, Iranian and other Arabic soaps, especially

after the country developed more extensive contacts through economic and social development.

Today in the Kurdistan Region, however, television dramas influence the formation of new identities for women, they therefore introduce women to modern ways of life, especially as the female Kurdish viewers cannot find this type of television genre within their national products or within the various foreign soaps that dominate the region. Schiller (1976) points out that a society is brought into the modern world structure when its dominating hegemonic layers are pressured, forced and sometimes even bribed into determining its social institutions to correspond to, or even endorse, the values, morals and structures of the dominant centre of the system.

This study examines the relationship between Kurdish women's exposure to global commercial television and consumerism, as well as the changes which occur as a result of exposure to foreign television products, in terms of women's identity formation. For this purpose, the soap opera genre has been chosen because it is one of the most important global and commercial programme types broadcasted in this region. The motivation behind this research is the importance of qualitative reporting about the role of global commercial soap operas in terms of Kurdish women's identity formation. Such soap operas are generating and propagating the tensions which already exist between the forces of modernity and those of traditionalism in Kurdish society in general. "The soap opera provides an ideal example of a popular art form that has evolved to meet the changing social condition of its followers" (Cantor and Pingree, 1983, p. 12).

Gatfield et al. (2002) point out that research commissioned by the former Canadian Broadcasting Standards Council showed that soap operas could guide people from different cultures to understand each other by obtaining knowledge and experience about their lifestyles. Kurdish women, in particular, use the soap opera as a window into the life of a different society. Gillespie's work (2005) has shown that young British people of Punjabi origin were using the Australian soap opera *Neighbours* as a window into a "Western world" of which they did not feel a part. While this may have changed for this group of people over the years, soap operas continue to proffer such a window to other immigrant groups – and indeed the host culture – about the way in which other people live and think. Central to this notion is the way in which most soap operas are centred on the family or family issues.

Partly as a result of this, soap operas are one of the most prominent global commercial television products and they can therefore be viewed as an important source of modern Western value-orientation and a powerful contributor to the formation of identity. As the data from the interviewees of this present study have shown, the majority of participants watched no less than three soap operas during the week – meaning that they are heavy viewers of this genre.

Kurdish women are familiar with some of the European and Eastern soap operas but due to reasons dealt with in the following chapter, a Turkish soap opera has been selected as the focus of this research. Turkish soap operas have dominated this region since 2008. A variety of Turkish soap operas are aired in this region, particularly due to the importance of economic relations between the Kurdistan Region and Turkey. Moreover, Turkey is at an important

stage in its history with Kurdistan. There are now opportunities for a further deepening of economic relations and cooperation between the two states. Cultural and religious proximity and a shared Ottoman history mean that Turkey and the Kurdistan Region are well suited to media exchange in areas such as soap operas, as will be discussed in Chapter Six. Jane (2009), points out that cultural proximity is the reason behind the desire for media products which are similar to one's indigenous products. Thus, even though people often like the cosmopolitan appeal of European and American television, movies and music, they tend to choose media from their own culture or from one very similar.

At the time that the significant economic and trade contracts between Iraq and Turkey were signed, former Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister, Barham Saleh, said: "this new Iraq, which is now projecting a \$70 billion yield from oil revenues in 2008, sees Turkey as a "strategic partner"", and emphasised that with no cooperation and support from other countries it could not meet its vast infrastructure needs on its own (Shko, 2008, p. 4). Saleh also invited Turkish companies to join in restructuring and construction projects and promised that they would be given special treatment: "we are determined to rebuild the Iraqi economy and Iraqi democratic institutions and we see Turkey as a strategic associate and when I say it, I mean it. This is a strategic necessity and Iraq needs to go ahead with it" (Shko, 2008, p. 4).

According to the Kurdistan Islamic Union website (as published on 26 September 2009), exports from Turkey to Iraq had increased by 40% since the toppling of Saddam's regime. Furthermore, the size of current business exchanges between Turkey and Arabic countries has helped to reduce the effect of the world financial crisis on Turkey (Kurdistan Islamic Union website,

2009). As the economic ties between Turkey and the Iraqi regions increase, so too does the transferability of media. The economic relationship between both countries has been growing and Turkey's goods are available on the Kurdistan Region's markets, and this requires Turkey to find media space in this region to advertise and introduce Kurdish viewers to Turkish culture, goods and tourist spots. Soap operas and commercial breaks therefore fulfil this role.

Thus with the increase in the number of Turkish soap operas aired in Kurdistan and their particular popularity with women, it was deemed most relevant for this study to focus on the impact of one of these soap operas. The Turkish soap opera *Noor*, and its themes and messages, will be reviewed in-depth in the following chapters. At the same time, the penetration of Turkish products and culture is linked to these soaps, the effect being particularly important amongst women, as will be discussed in the following chapter.

Before discussing *Noor* and its popularity among Kurdish women, definitions of "soap opera", as provided by the literature and women's relationship with this television genre, will be reviewed. Partly due to the lack of literature on the soap opera genre, and the fact that this is the first research on soap operas in the Kurdistan Region, the researcher will firstly provide information about the soap opera genre and its terminology, its nature as a woman's genre, and its power to effect cultural change. This literature review will also answer the question of why this study selected the soap opera as a significant global commercial television product for Kurdish women, by explaining how they identify with its characters and how this impacts on cultural change.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE SOAP OPERA AND ITS FEMALE VIEWERS

Due to this case study focusing on soap operas, this chapter will provide a general review of what a soap opera is, including the terms associated with it and an explanation of how it has evolved as a television genre. It will also examine the relationship between the television dramas and its female viewers, the consumers' identification with the characters, and the soap opera's role in the "transferral of culture".

The term "soap opera" and its evolution

Why do we find this television genre, which originated from the American radio serial dramas of the 1930s, such an appealing and stylish choice of programme to view in households? And, why are soap operas so popular? This chapter will endeavour to discuss in detail the different definitions of this genre, its evolution and the potential reasons for the genre's popularity.

The soap opera genre developed in America during the 1930s. It owes its name to the sponsorship of the radio programmes by large soap powder companies. As Cantor and Pingree argue:

Since the early 1930s, when the soap opera was first presented on national network radio, daytime serials have continued to engage viewers, maintaining their popularity throughout World War II, and even after radio was supplanted by television (1983, p. 11).

Soaps were targeted at women, particularly housewives; they were designed to entertain them without overly distracting them from their daily chores while their husbands were out working.

The "opera" part of "soap opera" comes from the fact that operas tell a story, just as the soaps do. What makes a soap opera unique is that the story can go on indefinitely. That is why some soaps such as *Guiding Light* can be on

the air (as either radio or TV broadcasts) for more than 50 years (Geraghty, 1991; Allen, 1985).

Most viewers in contact with the medium of television state that they know what a soap opera is. However, when asked to provide a clear definition, the picture is not as clear. Conversation about this story genre takes place directly or indirectly between wide ranges of dissimilar groups with different interests in mind, including: producers and broadcasters, advertisers, spectators, critics, and academics.

Soap operas comprise two basic narrative types: “open” soap operas, in which there is no end-point towards which the action of the narrative moves, and “closed” soap operas, in which, no matter how attenuated the process, the narrative does eventually close (Allen, 1985). Soaps are, initially, serials; their structure is periodic and their narrative is ongoing. Each event presents a more or less logical set of events (Hirschman, 1988).

Moreover, the never-ending nature of the soap opera is another aspect which provides this genre with a unique difference among other television genres.

The most obvious structural feature of daytime serials is that they never begin and never end, they are continuing stories, with competing and intertwining plot lines introduced as the serial progresses, each plot on a given programme develops at a different pace, thus preventing any clear resolution of conflict (Cantor and Pingree, 1983, p. 25).

The term “soap opera” spread and was used especially in countries where a popular soap opera was broadcasted, and where debates and discussions about it were raised. For example, in Britain the term became most popular after discussions about *Coronation Street* were raised.

The term was most clearly used by Terry Lovell (1981) when she discussed the pleasures that *Coronation Street* might offer women viewers. By the early 1990s, the term had become more widely used by British television productions and by the press, while the feminist work of Ang, Modleski and others made it central in academic debates (Geraghty, 2005, p. 6).

As Geraghty (2005) explains, the term had become commonplace by the 1990s in Britain. The soap opera has been the most popular form of television programme since the early days when it emerged in the world, but it became the foremost genre in Britain after *Coronation Street* was screened. This shows that this genre has extended its terms of address beyond the female viewer, and from its origin as women's fiction, when the soap powder companies sponsored and targeted female audiences. Terry Lovell (1981) also describes the pleasure derived by the female audiences; the female characters in *Coronation Street* were strong enough to evoke a powerful emotional response in their female viewers.

The format of the soap opera creates a notion that life continues in the illusory world even when the viewers do not follow every episode or are not watching these programmes, as Habson argues:

Soap opera is a radio or television drama in series form, which has a core set of characters and locations. It is transmitted at least three times a week, for fifty-two weeks a year. The drama creates the illusion that life continues in the fictional world even when viewers are not watching. The narrative progresses in a linear form through peaks and troughs of action and emotions. It is a continuous form with recurring catastasis as its dominant narrative structure (2003, p. 35).

This continues, to make a difference, because the soap opera was one approach to separating the characteristics of television drama from that of the theatre or cinema, and of assessing the distinctions within television drama

itself by positioning soap operas against other broadcasts such as television series. As Geraghty argues, “soaps were of central interest in this debate because they seemed to be the clearest example of television’s difference from other narrative-dominated media” (2005, p. 8).

The lack of action became another aspect which distinguished soap operas from other serials, as Cantor and Pingree explain: “another characteristic of the soaps that distinguishes them from other serial dramas is the paucity of action; what happens in soaps is usually told through conversation (dialogue) and not through the portrayal of events” (1983, p. 24).

The dialogue between the show and the audience, as well as the familiarity that the visual images provide influences the viewer to feel a degree of familiarity and connectedness with the characters and, is liable to make the audience feel concerned, interpreting events from the perspective of characters similar to themselves or people they know. Buckingham (1987, p. 174-175) elaborates on this idea in relation to the British soap opera *EastEnders*:

EastEnders directly invites its viewers to make moral and ideological judgments... However, the kinds of judgments which are invited are more frequently moral rather than ideological ones – that is judgments which relate to the rights and wrongs of individual behaviour, rather than to broader social forces. Nevertheless, in criticising and discussing the characters, viewers may well be using television as a vehicle for working out their own ideological perspectives, or for giving voice to their own needs or desires.

The characters may represent members of the community or the family, and these stories may seem personal to a small group of viewers who debate them. Soaps make consequences more significant than actions because they involve a great deal of complication and avoid providing an ending. Bernard argues that “the direct involvement audience members feel when watching soaps, is aided

by the way the episode is filmed, making (viewers) feel in somehow complicit in the ebb and flow of relationships and emotions” (Bernard, 1987, p. 2). Furthermore, Cantor and Pingree note: “television soaps actually rely on dialogue and portraiture to such an amount that they have been called “radio with pictures”” (1983, p. 24).

The “serial” is not to be confused with the “series”; in a series, the main characters and format remain the same from programme to programme, but each episode is a self-contained plot. In a serial at least one storyline is carried over from one episode to the next. A series is advertised as having a specific number of episodes, but serials are potentially continual. Geraghty explains that “the longer they run, the more impossible it seems to imagine them ending, and there are sometimes allusions to big topical events in the world outside the programmes” (1991, p. 11). Moreover, Cantor and Pingree argue that “soap operas are serious, not satires, comedies, or parodies” (1983, p. 27).

The never-ending nature of soaps and their “sense of [an] unwritten future” is a key feature in setting up different relationships for the audience and apparently refusing the ideological closure of other texts (Geraghty, 1981, p. 12). This means that the longer the soap runs, the more impossible it seems to imagine it ever ending; in addition, because they do not build up towards an ending or closure, viewers can join in at any time. As Flitterman argues, “soap opera, with its lack of closure, has “openness”, multiplicity and plurality as its aims” (1992, p. 217).

This type of genre, although at first designed to entertain and be sponsored commercially, became a popular genre in the early days of commercial television. As Cantor and Pingree explain it was: “created for the

housewife, [the soap opera] has remained a medium through which advertisers and commercial networks try to reach a specific audience” (1983, p. 11). But soaps today also raise a variety of issues, from social and health issues to political and economic problems.

The introduction of the soap opera into the broadcasted media of the Third World can be traced to the influence of American radio soap operas as they spread mainly through Cuba and into South America during the 1930s. These popular short dramatic stories, called “radionovelas” (the Spanish for “radio novels”), became a staple of the airwaves in Latin America during the 1940s (Caparelli, 1982).

The link between advertising, commercial aims and soap operas has a long history. Stern (1991) found that the commercial derived much of its meaning from this genre, for it is itself a result of the historical association between detergent manufacturers, soap operas and advertisements. Advertising and soaps have remained intimately linked for half a century, in spite of criticism on the part of “media snobs” who poke fun at the extremely unrealistic soap world (bizarre events, exotic diseases, incredible coincidences), and also in spite of condemnation from early feminists, who damned the heroines as caricatures. Moreover, Stern (1991) argues that the tendency of theatre audiences to take part vicariously in the lives of the characters on stage suggests that creative identification may be a response to dramatic and remarkable advertisements as well.

Soap opera as a television genre

Television is an especially vital medium through which culture can be accessed for many people, particularly the vast amount of people with impairments who

have little or no access to outside arts venues due to inadequate facilities, low incomes or social and cultural marginalisation. Soap operas were transferred to the small screen in the 1950s. The transition from radio serials to television serials encouraged the purchasing of televisions during the post-war boom. The last network radio soap operas went off the air in 1960; however, some of the soap operas which originated from radio were adapted for the television.

When the last soap opera left radio in 1960, daytime serials were already an established form of television programming. Despite enthusiasm about television's potential, some experts were at first doubtful that television could carry serial dramas successfully, especially in the daytime (Cantor and Pingree 1983, p. 47).

Rogers and Antola (1986) argued that with the diffusion of television throughout Latin America from the 1950s through to the 1980s, *radionovellas* eventually gave way to "telenovelas" ("television novels"). *Telenovelas*, the Latin equivalent of American soap operas, are the dominant genre of television programmes in Latin America. They are extremely popular with television audiences and have generated large profits from sponsors.

Nowadays, television genres have become central to popular debates about television and to academic research, and so the characteristics of soap operas feature widely in such debates. The study of soap operas has been important in the discussion of genres and in the discussions about television as a whole. It has been particularly important when considered in the light of the fact that a soap opera does not exist in space, and that the show's daily output can only be finite. Moreover, soap operas bring families and friends together, as they watch the programme, and this encourages involvement in discussion about the subject of an episode, either during or after the broadcast. So it is no surprise that of all the television genres, soap operas have become central both

to popular discussion about television and to academic research. Nor is it surprising that soap operas should feature in such debates.

The beginnings of the television soap opera can be traced to a number of sources, including: 18th century English novels, newspaper comic strips, traditional melodramatic theatre and the radio soap opera (Cantor and Pingree, 1983; Keller, 1980). Thus, we can safely say that soap operas relate to the novel, particularly in terms of social reform, women's predicaments and the serialisation of episodes, such as Charles Dickens' novels, wherein he often shaped the episodes as they were being serialised, and this practice gave his stories a particular rhythm, punctuated by cliff-hangers designed to keep the public looking forward to the next instalment. The continuing popularity of his novels and short stories was such that they have never gone out of print. Moreover, he challenged the prevailing Victorian attitudes towards women.

Thus, some researchers use the terms "telenovelas" or "novelas", instead of "soap opera". For example, Ferrara (2008) states that political clientelism and a solid marketing strategy had to be complemented with available quality products, this product was the novelas. Ferrara further points out that to this day a typical novela is watched by anywhere between 60 to 80 million viewers. The reason for the enormous success of this television format during the last three decades in Brazil is that the shows are all set up in easily recognisable locations so that viewers can better relate to the story. The context and the issues that novelas deal with always relate to the daily life of the Brazilian population. Moreover, the network reaches viewers by making sure that its novelas use the colloquial language, not that of the atypical middle class (2008, p. 7).

People watch soap operas for pleasure and entertainment, they become involved with the characters which, in turn, influences their perceptions of the world and shapes their behaviours. For example, it was found that viewers who were most exposed to the Indian soap opera *Hum Log* (“We People”) were more involved with its characters and more dependent on Indian television for education and entertainment (Brown and Cody, 1991).

Television transports different cultures and ways of life into our living rooms. They portray values and ideas that may differ from our own, offer sensational experiences and re-shape our routine or culture. The soap opera as a television drama-serial genre has a significant role to play in transporting culture. As Gillespie puts it, “television drama serials and their audiences provide us with fascinating cross-cultural, comparative material with which to analyse questions of media power and audience empowerment” (2005, p. 151).

Taking into account the significant impact of soap operas on individuals and society, it is possible to argue that television, as the most powerful mass media tool, may eventually lead to changes in domestic cultures. Wilkinson et al. argue that “today soap operas routinely cross cultural, political and social boundaries as representatives of a new kind of global media” (1999, p. 112). Whether this is a “good” or “bad” thing varies according to point of view. From a positive perspective, television could be seen as a tool through which society may evolve into a more civilised or harmonious community. From a negative perspective, television could be seen to cause or contribute to culturally sensitive conflicts.

Although the myth is that soap operas were originally produced for housewives and working-class women, viewer demographics show that people

from all economic levels and both genders enjoy an engaging narrative story that never ends. However, in reality, the soap opera genre regards the feminine audience as the greater percentage of its viewers.

Soap opera and the female viewer

Each and every day, millions of people from all over the world tune into their favourite soaps to follow the trials and tribulations of their favourite characters. Lives are portrayed which are tinted with excitement, love and courage; stories are told which exhibit respect for the commendable and they even touch on danger and obvious immorality. Due to soap operas being originally produced to cater to female audiences, there are numerous soap opera studies whose prime intention is to converse over gender, e.g. the ways in which men are represented in society, and ideas of masculinity and femaleness, etc.

Most scholars argue that the soap opera's popularity and fame is due to the fact that it has been measured and considered as the "female genre" on account of its lasting popularity with women. Back in the 1980s, Buckman (1984) argued that the majority of soaps' audiences were adult women. Brown (1994) also points to the genre's emphasis on the home:

Often the home is the setting for soap opera plots. Culturally, domestic areas are familiar settings to women. Women often compare their homes with others' homes and use homes to surround themselves with familiar objects and exercise creative freedom. Also, the home is symbolic of comfort and safety for many women (p. 55).

Despite evidence that soap audiences expanded to include both genres during the 1980s, the soap opera is still generally regarded as a women's genre. As such, it has considerably aided the development of feminist television studies and the expansion of research on the subject that originally centred on the soap opera. Myra McDonald argues that "feminist romanticism

about soap operas helps to preserve gender distinctions in relation to the myth of femininity which should instead be challenged” (1995, p. 72 in Geraghty, 2005, p. 17).

In terms of commercial products and women’s fiction, Cantor and Pingree (1983) argue that the soap opera is a form of dramatic serial mainly intended to entertain; it represents a unique genre of television programming that has very specific characteristics. Three of these characteristics are: first, sponsorship and broadcasting usually controlled by advertisers or commercial networks; second, production costs that are relatively low in comparison to other television serials; and, third, content composed of slow-moving, multifaceted plots of women’s fiction.

The term “soap opera” testifies to the combination of advertising and programming which characterised the first radio serials designed for female audiences in the 1930s. These types of programmes were developed by detergent companies, notably Procter and Gamble, as “tie-ins” with their goods (Ensign and Knapton, 1985). Brown (1994) also points to the structure of the genre in terms of its design to appeal to women.

Most studies on soaps have focused on female viewers due to the fact that the genre has played an essential role in the development of the reader-oriented viewer theories contained within media studies. The reasons for this are multiple, but essentially it stems from the fact that the soap opera is historically a feminine genre (Fiske, 1987; in Livingstone, 1990, p. 52). As Cantor and Pingree argue:

The soap opera, from its origin, has been and remains women’s fiction, of the various forms of fiction, especially for women – such as gothic and romance novels, including the popular Harlequin books, true confessions,

photo novellas, magazine serials – the soap operas have had the largest continuing audience through time (1983, p. 28).

Furthermore, in terms of the contextualisation of the soap opera, Brunsdon states that “just as a Godard film requires the possession of certain forms of cultural capital on the part of its audience to “make sense” – an extra-textual familiarity with certain artistic, linguistic, political and cinematic discourses – so too does *Crossroads* and soap operas” (1997, p. 17). Brunsdon has divided these competencies into three categories: first, generic knowledge, second, serial-specific knowledge, and, third, cultural knowledge. She argues that in *Crossroads* a feminine viewer is implicit, and, moreover, a feminine viewer who is competent “within the ideological and moral frameworks, [uses] the rules of romance, marriage and family life to make sense of it” (1997, p. 18).

Blumenthal (1997) points out that women’s viewing of soap operas has long been thought of by feminists and non-feminists as a waste of time. Blumenthal takes the opposing view, arguing that women’s “indulgence” in these programmes is in fact liberating in overcoming the social resistance to the stigma emotionally involved in feminine satisfaction. Further, by engaging in soap opera viewing, women celebrate their femininity, mainly their gendered identification with romance, relationship-based rationality, intuitiveness, chattiness and other qualities of emotionality.

Stern (1991) describes this programme as a woman’s genre; now soaps are said to affirm a “feminine aesthetics” by offering positive views of feminine culture which provides autonomy rather than the oppression of women. Some soap operas may even serve a positive social purpose by teaching men how women would like them to behave. Even if the soap’s problems seem far removed from everyday reality, the programme may express the supportive

message that individuals are capable of solving problems through their own efforts.

The pleasure of engagement draws female viewers towards more involvement with the soap opera characters' lives. Brown (1994) discovered how the pleasure of and engagement with soap operas produces an opening for women to serve up normative positions in the dominant culture. He also explores how the hegemonic ideas of femininity and womanhood can be accepted, resisted and negotiated in the process of consumption.

Geraghty's study (1991) is the first major study of the role of women in primetime soap operas. In a comparative study of British and North American television soaps, she examined the relationship between the narratives on the television screen and the female audience who make up the traditional soap audience. She argues that inside the construction and structure of many of the most popular soaps, such as *Dallas*, *Dynasty*, *Coronation Street* and *EastEnders*, the split between public and individual life, motive and emotion, work and leisure are essential to the plot. Geraghty further states that these themes are also related to social divisions which involve men and women splitting up, these soap operas both question and develop these sources of conflict as a source of enjoyment. She looked at the tradition of the genre and pointed out that it was promoted to a female audience, as it was first sponsored by soap manufactures. The stereotypically domestic character of women meant that they were the targeted audience of these programmes for the reason that it was women who spent the most time in the home and watched such programmes. Consequently, they also became the target customers for the products which sponsored the shows (Geraghty, 1991, p. 167).

Abercrombie (1996, p. 51) argues that the soap world is a woman's world dominated by the domestic view, and by the emotions and opinions of strong female characters with a strong understanding of these domestic feelings and problems. Men, it seems, are banned from watching these programmes by their very nature. Cantor and Pingree support this view, stating that "all daytime serials qualify as manifestations of women's culture. Occasionally an adventure plot will be included in a soap opera, but most are women's stories" (1983, p. 27).

Livingstone (1990) notes this traditional female genre has been supported by the soaps' history. The format of the genre is that of a serial, an ongoing plot with no predictable conclusion. This, she states, is not appealing to men, who prefer the dramatic tension and conclusion of action dramas.

Geraghty's *Women and Soap Opera* deals with the role of women particularly in primetime soap operas, and "the pleasures and values which are offered to them as the implied audience for these programmes" (1991, p. 6). She is concerned about looking at the way in which primetime soaps have stretched the limits of the genre "by introducing stories which are different from the traditional soap format" (1991, p. 6). The significant point of Geraghty's study is the way she looked at the role of women in soap operas by examining the programmes' narrative organisation and artistic quality as well as audience perspectives.

Rampoldi (1994) found that more women than men are regular viewers. Among women, 26% said they were regular viewers, compared with 7% of men. As for age, although a less relevant variable, younger and older adults are more likely to be regular viewers than middle-aged adults. Among those aged 18 to

24, 19% were regular viewers, and among those aged 50 and over, 20% were regular viewers, but only 13% of those aged between 30 and 49 were regular viewers. If we combine the data on gender and age, the largest viewing groups are found to be younger and older adult women. Among women aged 18 to 29, 31% reported that they were regular viewers, and among women aged over 50, 29% said the same. Both groups contrast strongly with women aged 30 to 49, of whom 21% were regular viewers (p. 1–2).

Another valuable aspect of soap operas for women is the gossip factor: “despite the public negative valuation of soap operas, many women find a space for them in their lives, both because they value the pleasure they bring and because they value the space that soap opera gossip networks provide for the experience of that pleasure” (Brown, 1994, p. 172).

The “gossipy aspect” of soaps invites viewers to engage in dialogue regarding various normative issues which affect our daily lives and the way we act and behave towards each other. Gossip is part of knowing that we belong to a community and that we share a common language: “Gossip is a key feature in soaps, which is usually absent, from other genres” (Geraghty, 1991, p. 17). Moreover, soap operas often generate discussions with friends, this provides the opportunity for women to talk about the plots. People share opinions and use soap operas as a benchmark against which to evaluate their own lives. Discussions of the plot twists with friends, families and neighbours foster greater awareness of social issues. Storylines are not only discussed by the viewers, but also reported in the press. Even within the soap opera itself, women’s talk is an important factor. Brown (1994, p. 179) argues that “talk was

crucial and served multiple functions. Through talk, women were able to verify that their own personal experience fit into pre-existing structures of oppression”.

In some societies, soaps have always been a part of women’s lives, because the stories draw on certain aspects that relate to the women in these societies. Blumenthal states that “the stories draw us in, affecting our emotions strongly, and we talk about them the way one stays in touch with a relative one does not often see, relying on gossip to catch up on the character’s life” (1997, p. 4) Furthermore, soaps present a constant set of values based on personal relationships and on women’s responsibility for the continuation of these relationships.

Pleasure for women in most cultures includes the pleasure of friendship, the pleasure of motherhood, the pleasure of the community, and the pleasure of work, as well as the desire or pleasure expressed in sexual terms (Gilman, 1979; in Brown, 1994, p. 58). Brown describes the pleasure which women can get from watching soap operas: “within the genre of soap opera, women can vicariously experience multiple kinds and levels of pleasure. Additionally, talking about these aspects of life adds another level of pleasure for women” (Brown, 1994, p. 58).

Brunsdon (2000) came to a similar conclusion in her examination of *Crossroads* regarding the idea of a gendered audience. In an attempt to come to terms with the pleasures offered to the female viewer, she argued that the screening of the programme in the late afternoon/early evening and the advertising and spin-offs based around it, such as interviews, cookbooks and knitting patterns, indicated that the soap was addressing the feminine customer. The audience member was firmly positioned in her gender-based role of wife,

mother or housewife, and these additional textual factors suggest that women were the target audience for *Crossroads*. Brown, when looking at the role of women in the family and soap operas, concluded that:

We have seen that the possibility for resistive meaning generation is present and that the discursive struggle happens to a large extent in the process of conversation within the networks generated by soap opera knowledge that challenge dominant discourses about the role of women within family, on the silencing of women's voices and laughter, on the social expectations of women's behaviour, and about the power of women's relationships with other women. At the same time, within such discursive networks, the cultural capital of women's traditional roles is not necessarily rejected (1994, p. 172).

Moreover, promoting gender equality and women's empowerment are at the heart of the production of the soap opera, especially in pro-development soaps. Some experts count levels of gender equality as one of the strongest indicators of the success and health of a society – the provision to women of opportunities for economic freedom, allowing women to have a voice in family decisions, and empowering women politically are prerequisites to transforming a developing country into a developed country. Thus: "Women's empowerment will have positive consequences for society as a whole" (Blumenthal, 1997, p. 4). Providing girls with education and economic participation are the key constituents of ensuring the empowerment of women. For example, a lack of economic opportunities for women creates economic dependency on the husband. This makes a woman extremely vulnerable if something happens to the husband or to their marriage. Empowerment has multiple, interrelated and interdependent facets, such as economic, social, cultural and political ones. For example, the Indian soap opera *Hum Long* promoted the value of family harmony and female equality in India (Brown, 1988).

Television and soap operas have had an effect in terms of changing attitudes towards women and promoting women's empowerment. Jensen and Oster (2007), in *The Power of TV: Cable Television and Women's Status in India*, asked whether the arrival of the popular Indian show called *Because a Mother-in-Law Was Once a Daughter-in-Law* changed attitudes in ways that improved women's lives. Researchers followed women in 2,700 households and in villages across four different states (Bihar, Goa, Haryana and Tamil Nadu), as well as the capital (Delhi), from 2001 to 2003. Contact with television in remote Indian villages has changed significantly over the past few years. Of the 180 villages that the authors studied, 65 had cable in 2001, and by the end of 2003 this number had increased to 86. Not surprisingly, when a village gets access to cable, villagers are likely to watch more TV: 40% reported watching TV weekly before cable came to town, compared with 80% afterwards. What were the consequences of this? In places that were without cable by 2003 and in places that already had it at the beginning of the period studied, attitudes regarding women remained relatively stable. Generally, there were more pro-women in places which already had cable; however, in the 21 villages that were introduced to cable for the first time between 2001 and 2003, women's attitudes and attitudes regarding gender equality changed rapidly and substantially. The authors focused on three measures of gender equality: first, autonomy (whether the woman gets to make her own decisions about having children, shopping, health and whom she visits); second, attitudes towards spousal beating (the number of situations in which women view beating as acceptable); and, third, whether women prefer having male children. After a village had received cable, a women's preference for sons fell by 12 percentile points. The average number of circumstances in which women said that wife beating was acceptable went

down by about 10%. These results show some of the effects of the growth of television in India by illustrating that women's opinions became more empowered after they watched TV. The women depicted on these shows were typically much more liberated and open than the rural women.

Women and identification with characters

The soap opera is a genre which invites the viewer to identify with the characters and to use the programme to aid processes of self-identification. Soap audiences, from the beginning, evidenced such a high level of identification with the characters that this process is frequently termed "involvement" (Fiske, 1987; La Guardia, 1983). As Ellis explains:

The skill of being able to put oneself so intensely into a character and to sense oneself to be so like the character, such that one can sense the same emotions and experience the same proceedings as the character, is elicited (1982, p. 43).

Empathy with the characters can help viewers to reduce their own problems, as they see that other people also suffer – another good reason to watch soaps, as far as the viewers are concerned. Also, watching soap operas and generating empathy with the characters helps people who are tackling these same issues in their own lives, because they witness how the characters in the soaps deal with these situations. Ferrara, regarding soap operas and the effect of television upon individual behaviour in Brazil, argues that:

Novelas, and not just television, affected individual choices. First, people living in areas covered by the signal were more likely to name their children after novela characters. Second, entry of a network that relied on imported shows did not have a significant impact on fertility. Third, the impact of Globo presence was strongest for women close in age to the main novela characters (2008, p. 1).

Identification with the character does not take place in a specific space and it is not necessary to be familiar with the ascribed characteristics of an isolated imaginary character. The characters occupy a specific position within the context of the story as a whole: only in relation to other characters in the narrative is her or his personality brought out. In other words, identification with a character only becomes possible, and indeed probable, within the framework of the whole structure of the narrative (Ang, 1985, p. 29).

Viewers become “glued” to the screens of their television sets with the hope of finding solutions to their problems or with the hope of attaining help when making important decisions. Livingstone (1988) found that identification with characters is the central factor which explains how people differ in their levels of sympathetic understanding of the narrative in soap operas.

Television soaps give the viewer the possibility of engaging in para-social interaction. Para-social interactions help the viewer receive opportunities to interrelate with characters of the opposite sex, and characters of a higher or lower status. This can lead to critical analysis of actions and occurrences, and since these involve no identity loss, such interactions may well provide a model for traditions in everyday social roles and allow the viewer to take roles not yet experienced in real life.

Another point of identification which the viewer enjoys forming with the characters is that of self or personal-identity. Based on personal experiences, it is evident that viewers often use the behaviour of a specific character in order to justify their own behaviour in a similar situation. Women identify with female characters on television when the characters are identifiable human beings to whom the viewers can relate to in some way (Fiske, 1987). This is due to the

fact that the nature of a (female) character is defined by her relationships with her family members (husband, children, parents) and outsiders who interact with the family. Soap characters are identified by family roles such as mother, wife, helpmate etc. (Stern, 1991). Furthermore, Livingstone argues that:

Soap opera owes part of its popularity to the fact that its viewers enjoy forming this kind of participatory “relationship” with the characters, and also like to identify themselves with the plots and characters. In fact, regular viewers of long-running soaps may have already experienced the gratifications of forming para-social relations with the characters, and in doing so, have allowed them to become almost “real” friends and family (1990, p. 57).

Stacey (1994), when studying women’s responses to the Hollywood stars of the 1940s and 1950s, noted that the respondents revealed a variety of different types of identification. She described some of these categories, which narrate activities performed outside the cinema and in which the moviegoer acts out her identification with a particular character. She divided and described these in four ways:

- (i) *Pretending* – this includes child-like games where the participant has the dream of being the star in complete recognition of the fact that the act is only simulation.
- (ii) *Resembling* or being close to the characters – for example, a real physical resemblance to the star may be selectively emphasised in order to suggest a relationship with the star’s image.
- (iii) People may set about *imitating* the stars. In this case, the moviegoer’s resemblance is not actual but acquired through effort.
- (iv) *Copying* – this is another case in which resemblance and similarity are not actual but are acquired. Rather than simply involving the imitation of

particular styles of behaviour of the star, it involves the copying of appearances.

These categories are ways in which activities performed outside the cinema help the moviegoer act out her identification with a particular character (Stacey 1994, p. 176). The significance of Stacey's study is that it provides a means of distinguishing between different types of identification by the viewers with the characters, and in the process it explains the audience's identification as an active practice rather than a passive one. It can explain why women will not at all times identify with the woman in the narrative, and why a middle-class viewer may prefer to identify with an upper-class character than with a character of his or her own class in a story. Women may, for example, identify with the male hero if his actions in a particular case provide inspiration.

Livingstone (1990b) conducted a study of the consequences of this process of identification. Some 66 regular viewers of *Coronation Street* responded to a survey about a selected narrative, one which had unfolded over numerous months. The questionnaire included attitude declarations with indications of levels of agreement and disagreement with certain characters and their actions. The answers were subjected to analysis, and Livingstone created four clusters out of the respondents: first, cynics; second, negotiated romantics; third, romantics; and, fourth, negotiated cynics. Livingstone argues that the question of whether these viewers identified with or saw themselves as being similar to any of the characters was exposed as being important in terms of how viewers interpreted the narrative. Those in the cynical clusters saw themselves as more like the Ken character than those in the romantic cluster. Those in the

romantic cluster saw themselves as very different from the Ken character (1990b, p. 80).

In addition, Stern (1991), writing on the tendency of theatre audiences to participate indirectly in the lives of characters on stage, suggests that creative identification may be an answer to dramatic advertisement as well.

This means that viewers not only participate vicariously in the lives of soap characters in the procedure of identification, but that they also endow these characters with a position in their own personal lives by means of a process which seems more similar to genuine involvement. High involvement is expressed by viewers being unable to differentiate between the performance and the performer, and by the propensity to confuse actual actors and actresses with the characters they portray. Many viewers attempt to get in touch with show's characters, and television networks, producers and writers often get mail, telephone calls, cards and gifts from fans. Moreover, viewers support a wide collection of soap publications, particularly fan magazines, an occurrence not encountered in many other television genres.

In Stacey's study (1994) of viewers' associations to the movie stars of the 1940s and 1950s, she found that the respondents exhibited a diversity of types of identification. She categorised these as: loyalty, love and adoration; sublimation (this describes the moviegoer's wish to overcome the differences between herself and the characters so that she is able to become more like the star); and ambition and motivation (here the moviegoer values the character and behaviour of the star, and sees the star's power and self-confidence as providing her with a positive role model).

Kilborn (1992) argues that this identification will be the strongest, and that viewers will feel particularly close to characters, when they are going through times of pressure, drama or crisis. The level of involvement is such that one might even propose that viewers – in the grip of such opinion – are undergoing a form of catharsis. Kilborn claims that viewers can even derive therapeutic advantage from what is essentially a form of emotional treatment (1992, p. 79).

The illustration of women's culture at a representational level is one of the important factors making soaps attract primarily female viewers and which generates identification with the female characters. Women's culture here refers to practical or symbolic cultural activities which are primarily being engaged in by women. Blumentahal (1997) points out that on a practical level, traditionally female-dominated occupations such as nursing, secretarial work and modelling are examples of women's culture, and at a domestic level further aspects of this culture include leisure time activities, paid and unpaid housework, food and clothing purchasing and shopping. Identification with the characters is the central factor which explains how people differ in their levels of sympathetic understanding of the narrative in soap operas.

In other words, today in most societies, particularly Southern Asian ones and a number of Third World countries, gender is a point of contention over social issues. These issues include: the preference to have sons, the gender gap between men and women, female infanticide, rape, sexual harassment at work and domestic violence. Thus when soaps portray such issues, they serve to help women viewers identify with the characters, and they contribute to the genre's popularity.

Soap operas provide an outlet for an individual to escape the mundane jobs and problems of daily life. The common settings give a sense of stability and the viewer feels part of the world created by the serial producers. The characters provide an outlet for the viewers' tendency to associate themselves with fantasy characters. Events that are particularly recurrent in soap operas include courtships, marriages, divorces, deaths and disappearances. Remarkably, there are a huge number of different characters who all take the spotlight in the soaps. Whilst one episode may particularly focus on one or two specific characters, it is not usually long before the camera focuses on another. This way, the viewer does not become bored with certain characters and their problems.

Soap operas and the transferral of culture

Scholars and researchers alike speak of the power of soap operas in terms of influencing the lives of individuals and communities. They demonstrate the appeal that soap operas can have on public and work life as they provide a powerful intermediary mechanism between the media and everyday life. As Cantor and Pingree argue, "the soap opera is important as a form of popular culture and as an economic commodity, and in comparison to other kinds of television drama; it is unique" (1983, p. 11).

At the same time, soap operas can motivate radical socio-political and cultural changes, such as a societal redefinition of gender roles in family relationships. The most frequently encountered subject of television soaps is family relationships. Even though soaps deal with a broad array of relationships, their focus on the domestic world shuts out many other significant subjects –

among others, work, religion, political passions, ethical causes, intellectual pursuits and current affairs (Stern, 1991).

The impact of soap operas on society is not significant if viewers do not apply them to their daily lives, and soap operas are most notably concerned with the daily lives of people and their problems. For example, the American soaps such as *Dallas* and *Dynasty* are often thought of as a type of “fantasy” by some viewers. The story of *Dallas*, as described by Ang, featured certain key issues: “the story of *Dallas* featured murder, marital crisis, adultery, alcoholism, illness, miscarriage, rape, air and car accidents, kidnapping, corruption, illegitimate children, secret pasts, chance meetings and so on” (1985, p. 53). Viewers thus incorporate the events from the soaps into their own daily lives through a fantasy process. Schroder argues that “it is evident from watching *Dynasty* that the viewer engages in a jigsaw puzzle, thus experiencing satisfaction when he or she succeeds, and this game of reward leads to a weekly rebuilding of self-confidence for the viewer” (1988, p. 63).

British soaps, and indeed Australian soaps, are usually referred to as being “realistic” in so far as they focus on the domestic and the personal, and on daily life concerns and problematic issues such as friendship, marriage, death, romance and divorce. As Brown explains:

The construction and maintenance of family traditions and small events in soap opera give important meaning to everyday life in the cultures of the home where domestic production is valued; women frequently orchestrate these events and pass on particular styles of creating them to their children” (1994, p. 55).

This means that the viewer can often derive pleasure from the idea that daily life in the soaps is real and ongoing, just like their own. Viewers are likely to feel intimately involved, interpreting behaviour from the viewpoint of the characters

that they consider to be similar to themselves or to those they know. It is often difficult to differentiate between real life and the lives of characters in realistic episodes.

Livingstone argues that “the popularity of soap opera appears to rest on its undemanding nature and its preoccupation with everyday concerns” (1990, p. 56). When Dyer (1981) examined how viewers gained pleasure from watching *Coronation Street* and why this soap became so popular and such a pleasure to watch for viewers, he found that viewers could often gain pleasure from the notion that the everyday life of the soaps was “real” and on-going in some fashion, just like our own: “*Coronation Street* gives the impression of leaving a literal gap of time between episodes, and significant days in the outside world such as Christmas Day are celebrated that day” (Dyer, 1981, p. 10).

In the Indian soap opera *Hum Log*, the well-known and highly appreciated film star Ashok Kumar gave short epilogues at the end of each television event highlighting what the audience could learn from the story. Kumar receives 60 to 70 viewer letters every day at his personal residence, many testifying to the changes individual members of the audience had made to their lives in response to his epilogues (Singhal and Rogers, 1999).

This means an ongoing and active response to programmes has occurred and they are now so much a part of the viewer’s daily lives that there are no barriers erected between reality and fiction. Thus, these viewers do not only participate vicariously in the soap characters’ lives through the process of identification, but the actors also connect with the experience of their audiences’ lives.

The soap opera is based on fictional realism and explores and celebrates domestic, personal and daily events. It works because the audience has intimate familiarity with the characters and their lives. Through its characters the soap opera must connect with the experience of its audience, and its content must be stories of the ordinary (Hobson, 2003, p. 35). Thus, a sense of familiarity is created to the characters' lives and the culture observed in the soap. Connections are made and the audience experiences a new culture which has been produced and which becomes reflected in their lives.

Furthermore, the main purpose of change in soap operas is to change culture, as Cantor and Pingree argue:

One of the paradoxes of popular culture as a whole is that although its content changes, the underlying messages remain conservative and rather traditional. By this we mean that most popular art forms, especially those transmitted through commercial television, tend to *follow* social change rather than *lead* it. Soap operas, like their primetime counterparts, help to maintain social integration and value consensus, albeit imperfectly" (1983, p. 13).

Whilst soap operas may not be instigators of social change, they are undoubtedly an essential part of that change as they manage to tackle burning issues which work to encourage change in the traditional family unit throughout society. "From their inception, soap operas more than any other genre, including the evening serials, have reflected the economic and social conditions under which they were and are produced" (Cantor and Pingree, 1983, p. 44).

For example, the Indian drama serial *Atmajaa* tackled the issue of sex selection. *Atmajaa*, or "Born from the Soul" (2004), was a 13-part tele-serial produced in 2004. It was inspired by a short feature film of the same name and was directed by Nila Madhab Panda. It was intentionally launched with the aim of spreading messages of equality and female empowerment. In the same

programme, *Atmajaa* raised and dealt with such issues as female infanticide, rape, sexual harassment at work and domestic violence (Naqvi, 2006).

The introduction of the soap opera has helped some countries to develop, it is therefore important to understand the cultural aims of the programmes. For example, Cantor and Pingree describe the development of American society as it coincided with the introduction of soap operas: “National radio bringing “free” entertainment into the home fit the spirit and context into which it was born. The American society of 1982 was born in the 1920s” (1983, p. 45). Soaps are one of the types of programmes which can have ramifications in terms of how people view and idealise domestic life. The Indian soap *Hum Log* has positively affected viewers’ beliefs regarding the status of women in India. Nowadays, women in India are entering the job market in increasing numbers. They are using their skills, even in non-traditional sectors such as the police force, and in defence, management, media and research fields. For millions of women in developing countries, the benefits of television may well be more substantive and less abstract than some may presume. In terms of media power and audience empowerment, the global process of women’s empowerment has begun.

Mexican soaps often have pro-development messages, including ones that serve to promote the status of women, gender equality and family harmony.

Rogers et al. explain that:

The term pro-development specifically refers to the communication strategy of combining entertainment and educational content to promote development practices and is alternatively called “enter-educate”, “education-entertainment” and “entertainment-education” by other scholars and development specialists (1989, p. 43).

Today, Mexico and India are both producing new pro-development soap operas. According to Rogers et al., pro-development soap operas are more educational, they advocate specific values, and are more coherently moral and realistic in their design than the traditional soap operas which were shaped and produced in the United States (1989, p. 43). Furthermore: "The Mexican soap operas, also called pro-development soap operas, utilised an entertainment-education-communication strategy to induce cognitive and behavioural changes in their viewers" (Brown and Singhal, 1990, p. 270).

According to Rushton (1982), pro-social television content refers to televised performances that depict cognitive affects or behavioural activities that are considered to be socially desirable by most members of a television audience. For example, the television movie *The Day After* significantly changed viewers' attitudes regarding preventing nuclear war (Kulman and Akmatius, 1988). Another example of the pro-development agenda that soaps can serve is Nigeria's *Cock Crow at Dawn*, a dramatic serial which promoted the adoption of modern agricultural practices (Ume-Nwagbo, 1986).

Soap operas modify cultural differences, so that whole societies may become similar to the American community promoted in the dominant American soaps, thereby losing some aspects of their own indigenous cultures. Thus, television may influence society in both positive and negative ways, and in future more attention should be paid to the ways in which the cultural medium is shared and controlled by individuals, families and governments. "There is a globalisation of models, genres and systems, such as advertising and soap operas, which have spread to most of the world's television systems" (Morris and Waisbord, 2001, p. 133).

In general, soap operas affect society through changing the behavioural patterns of viewers. Young and old viewers are influenced by the transmitted images and they tend to accept the viewed behaviour as being similar to, or providing a model for, their own behaviour. Furthermore, the impact is evident in everyday conversations revolving around the latest soap opera instalments, sporting events or news items. With the relatively recent increase in soap operas, individuals spend more time watching them and this subconsciously affects their view of the world. Other activities, such as reading or exercising, are somewhat hindered by the watching of soap operas.

According to a study by Rogers et al. (1999), a radio soap opera with an AIDS prevention message was aired in 1992 in a village in Tanzania. A follow-up study after two years found out that there were significant increases in the use of condoms in that area as opposed to the rest of the country. The people in this village increased the use of contraception, whereas the rest of the country didn't change their behaviours.

The para-social relationship can be acknowledged in its extreme form in terms of when a viewer puts himself so deeply into a character, and/or identifies with them so much, that they can feel the same emotions and experience the same events as the character is posited to be feeling and experiencing (Brunsdon, 1984). Importantly, this deep identification with a character can be seen when a viewer cries over a soap's wedding or funeral, or similarly over a fictional birth or marital break-up.

Young women and girls are hegemonically expected to dream about what their own wedding will be like, to rehearse it in play, and to plan for it well in advance. However, commercially, weddings are big business. Thus each soap opera wedding dress not only reflects something of the character wearing it or has some thematic significance, but it is also usually very expensive (Brown, 1994, p. 57).

Moreover, there is an intimate connection between capitalist consumption and soap operas as commercial media. Brown argues that “soap opera, with its emphasis on romance tied in with weddings, serves capitalism by helping to create an industry based on women’s fantasies of status and security built around marriage” (1994, p. 57).

In other words, soaps have the main and positive role of attracting the viewer and they can aim to change beliefs and ideas in the viewer’s mind and the social milieu which that mind inhabits and contributes to. For example, *Atmajaa* dealt with the myth that daughters are a liability. It aimed to involve the male audience by representing lives of positive male role models. While it attacks female foeticide and the root causes of female foeticide, the series also has strong identifiable characters, and aims at empowering women by shaping individual behaviour, encouraging healthy interpersonal relationships and breaking traditional myths about the female child. A new genre, like soap opera, would try to sell the products that have justified the broadcasting industry in the first place. In addition to a commercial product, it would need to “sell” a national culture, an ideological system, as well (Brown, 1994, p. 41). As Brown (1994) argues:

A popular entertainment genre like soap opera can contribute to the process of change at two levels. The first level is that of generation – a rethinking of the role of women. The interdependent factors that we have suggested operate together to facilitate such a rethinking are boundaries, knowledge and the power to resist cultural conditioning and to break rules (1994, p. 172).

Geraghty (1991) analyses the critical role of female characters within families and goes on to suggest that the utopian potential of soaps can endorse changes and influence attitudes, behaviours and prejudices. Geraghty (1991) also deals with the role of women in the soap opera, and the pleasures and

values which are offered to female viewers as the implied audience for these programmes. The popular Indian television soap opera *Hum Log* attacked the dowry system of marriage and challenged traditional beliefs about women's status in Indian society. Research on the effects of *Hum Log* has indicated that the ethnicity, geographical residence, gender and Hindi language-fluency of *Hum Log* viewers were significant factors in terms of beliefs regarding gender equality (Brown, 1988; Singhal and Rogers, 1989). Soap "values" are understood here as abstract ideals which indicate the ideal modes of behaviour, manners and the outcomes of life decisions (Rokeach, 1973).

To sum up, soap operas are female-character dominated. Several elements lead viewers to generate personal involvement and loyalty for a soap opera and these same things are used as cultural tools in the construction of self-identity.

In this chapter we have touched upon the following: the ability to identify with characters and plots, the introduction of foreign cultures to the viewers, and the effect of this on society, tradition and the viewers' worldviews. However, the soap's aims differ according to its product and country of origin. For example, American soap operas construct themselves with "a generalised content" and "fewer contexts", whereas Egyptian soap operas are placed "squarely within the social and moral national nexus" (Abu-Lughod, 2001). European community soaps challenge social conflicts and class differences by offering an idealised or nostalgic idea of living together. Thus soap operas, from radio to television, and from their original commercial purpose to their pro-development and pro-social purpose, have played a significant role in empowering women in places where the empowerment of women is a prerequisite to transforming the country.

However, the empowerment of women may have a different nature from one country to another. For example, in certain developing countries, like India and some Middle Eastern countries (where women are only allowed to work inside the home and their job is to have children, raise a family and take care of the household), empowerment for these women means bringing them out of the confines within which they have been kept by centuries of tradition. It means improving their access to education, their right to choose their husbands and enjoy equal partnerships, their opportunity to have a job outside the home, and improving their access to well-paid formal-sector jobs. For other countries, women's empowerment means an enhancement of their ability to influence change and to create a better society, or their right to have the power to control their own lives, to influence the direction of social change, or to create a just social and economic order at a national as well as an international level.

Therefore, due to the launch of a higher number of Turkish soap operas and their current dominance in the Kurdistan Region, in terms of preference by the Kurdish women, this study selected one of the most popular soap operas among them, namely *Noor*, which aired recently. This study focuses on the reasons behind its popularity amongst Kurdish women and its impact in terms of transferring culture and promoting social change and development. The next chapter will therefore look at how the show has been used as a tool for identity formation.

**CHAPTER SIX: KURDISH WOMEN AND THE SOAP OPERA *NOOR* – IDENTIFICATION AND
CHANGE**

As discussed in the previous chapter, global television products have, over the last eighteen years, created a shift from local and regional traditions in the Kurdish Region. These products have introduced Kurdish female viewers to a modern way of life, contributing to Kurdish culture and identity as well as the woman's personality. Moreover, the influence of international television has created a predicament for Kurdish women and a clash between modernity and traditionalism, with a resultant confusion in how to achieve balance in the pursuit of a modern lifestyle whilst still keeping to the traditional values that their society imposes on them.

The Turkish soap opera *Noor* is one of the commercial television products, broadcasted in the Kurdistan Region, which has achieved high regard and popularity among Kurdish women. This chapter will discuss and focus on how this soap opera achieved its commercial and profitable aims while at the same time tackling the confusing and tense predicament in which Kurdish women have found themselves when presented with an alternative way of life which combined the traditional Middle Eastern culture with the modern Western culture. How can the conflict between these two cultures be reconciled? The successes of both the male and female characters will be presented with regards to how they act according to traditional Eastern and modern Western norms at the same time. What are the secret elements of success for this soap opera that have made it a cultural tool for change and the formation of identity? Why do Kurdish women prefer this soap opera to others previously watched, even though they were already familiar with and had been exposed to American, Western, Arabic and Iranian soap operas, for many years? These questions will be tackled in this chapter from different angles. However, before

going to on to discuss these factors, the nature of *Noor* along with its themes, scripts and messages will be reviewed.

Themes and script of Noor

The Turkish soap opera *Noor* is a nightly romantic drama which has been broadcast in the Middle East since 2008. By the end of April 2008, *Noor* rose to primetime on MBC4, at 9.30 p.m. *Noor*, the Arabic title of the show, which translates in English to “light”, is also the name of the lead female character. The show began airing in Turkey in 2005. In 2008, the Saudi-owned MBC Group (Al-Arabiya.net’s parent company) dubbed the soap into the Syrian dialect of Arabic and gave it a primetime slot on its popular channel MBC4.

The show focuses largely on the romantic life between the two lead characters: Noor, played by the Turkish actress Songül Öden and Muhannad, the male lead, played by Turkish actor Kivanç Tatlitugl. It is about a Muslim family living in a Muslim country. The cultural divide between modern Turkish culture and traditional Middle Eastern Muslim culture is made evident in the show, which traces the twists and turns in the love lives of a rich upper-class family from Istanbul. *Noor* has become a key socio-cultural phenomenon for millions of people across the Middle East.

The soap opera *Noor* as an entertainment genre portrays a commercially luxurious and elegant atmosphere, introducing the green landscape and tourist attractions of Turkey across the Middle East. According to Watch (2008), the fascination with the show, and the luxurious waterfront villa where it was filmed, has prompted more than 100,000 Saudis to travel to Turkey in 2008, according to Turkish diplomats this figure rose in 2010 by 40,000 visitors. Furthermore, the show provides opportunities for those who wish to see the stars of the show and

some Arab tourists make it their objective to visit the sites in Turkey. Buccianti (2010) in his study entitled “Dubbed Turkish soap operas conquering the Arab world: social liberation or cultural alienation?” refers to this commercial dimension of the Turkish soap opera. It attracts viewers from the Gulf countries, and has increased the number of tourists significantly: Saudi tourists by approximately 34% (including members of royal family), Kuwaitis by 75%, approximately 51% increase in tourists from the United Arab Emirates and more than 1,379% in visitors from Oman, all of whom come to see the amazing atmosphere and location where *Noor* was filmed.

In the Kurdistan Region, the Sumari News Agency had a report conducted by Shilan (2009) on the effects of Turkish soap operas on the economic and socio-political situation of Kurdish viewers in the Kurdistan Region; the report explained the reasons behind these soaps’ impact. For example, this report states that after these shows were aired, dubbed into Arabic and Kurdish, the number of Kurdish tourists to Turkey increased. Sirwan (aged 24), a resident of Duhok (the large city in the Kurdistan Region), who was interviewed for the report, described this effect:

The beautiful nature and green landscape which is shown by the Turkish soap opera, and the modern behaviour and pretty nature of its characters no less than the beauty of the natural area of the soap opera, increases the desire to visit this land and it attracts numerous Kurdish tourists (Shilan, 2009, p. 3).

He argued that Kurdish viewers see the same beauty and green places in American and other Western soap operas; however, these programmes don’t have the same impact as the Turkish ones, due to the cultural proximity and also because those programmes are in the Arabic and Kurdish language.

In another section of this report entitled “TV tourists”, the manager of the Pero Group Tourist Company, states: “After we broadcasted and dubbed these Turkish dramas in Kurdish national television, 80% of Kurdish tourists applied to visit Turkey, and most of them required visiting the place which was shown by the soap opera” (Shilan, 2009, p. 4). He added that the number of their clients visiting Turkey increased every day.

Noor differs from other traditional soap operas previously broadcast in the Middle East which were designed by countries such as the US to attract audiences just for entertainment and to sell commercial products without the presence of any educational message (as discussed in the previous chapter). This is due to the fact that much of their broadcasting content lacks developmental aims, like advertising or entertainment programmes that encourage consumerism and create frustration among poor and disadvantaged viewers in reaching material goals. As Brown et al. argue:

Traditionally soap operas were designed primarily to attract large audiences and sell commercial products. Even the coining of the term “soap opera” was derived from the major soap manufacturers that sponsored them. The attraction of large audiences achieved by producers of American soap operas is almost exclusively through entertainment. Education has not been of much concern to American soap opera producers (1989, p. 44).

Rogers et al. argue that:

Recently there have been encouraging signs that indicate television can become a useful tool for development in the Third World. Producers, writers, and government leaders have created an innovative kind of television programme called the pro-development soap opera. Unlike traditional soap operas that are designed primarily to entertain, pro-development soap operas are designed to educate, as well as entertain (Rogers et al., 1989, p. 43).

As Rogers and Singhal put it, “pro-development television soap operas in Third World nations are quite different from television soap operas in the United

States” (1988, p. 111). Most of them, despite their commercial goals, have pro-social and pro-development aims. They seek to create a unique combination of education and entertainment, as Rogers and Singhal also point out: “pro-development soap operas are one bright spot in the generally unfulfilled potential of contemporary television in the Third World. They represent a unique combination of education and entertainment-style programming” (1988, p. 110). Along with its entertainment value, *Noor* incorporates pro-development, pro-social and educational messages, such as familial harmony, the promotion of women’s status, gender equality, women’s empowerment and social change. As Skuse et al. explain:

Edutainment is a term coined to reflect the contemporary coupling of education with various popular entertainment genres. Used extensively throughout the developing world to address a wide range of development issues – from landmine awareness to gender-based violence – the most widely used edutainment genre by far is the radio and television serial drama or soap opera (2007, p. 1).

Rogers and Singhal define the pro-development soap operas’ aims as: “pro-development soap opera is a melodramatic serial that is broadcast in order to entertain and to convey subtly an educational theme to promote” (1988, p. 111). Brown and Singhal (1990) describe pro-social programmes as portraying cognitive, affective or behavioural activities that are deemed socially desirable by the intended audience. Singhal and Rogers (1989c) also argue that the desired pro-social changes may range from the adoption of family-planning methods to the promotion of adult literacy, the elevation of the status of women, or a combination thereof.

This means that *Noor*, despite its commercial aims which relate to its commercial sponsors, combines both an entertainment and educational message – “edutainment”. As Singhal et al. argues:

The entertainment-education strategy in mass communication represents an innovative approach to addressing problems of development. Entertainment-education is defined as the process of putting educational content in entertainment messages in order to increase knowledge about an issue, create favourable attitudes and change overt behaviour concerning the educational issue or topic (1993, p. 1).

For example, in the episode focusing on the married life and relationship of the two main characters, the husband is kind, faithful, loving and understanding. He brings his wife flowers after an argument and surprises her with presents and romantic vacations. He is romantic and attentive to his wife, cares about her, and is helpful and supportive of her independence and ambitions as a fashion designer – in short, he is an unusual role model in a conservative, male-dominated context. He is a role model for male beauty and passion, becoming the standard against which many Kurdish men are being judged by Kurdish women, much to the former's dislike. Some of the people interviewed for this present research favoured the male lead's behaviour and wanted to see this in their own marital life. In the words of Asia, a 30-year-old engineer:

I want a romantic husband who treats me like the Muhannad character treats his wife. Sometimes, he brings her flowers and tells her romantic words. I think life would be a pleasure if a husband treated his wife like that.

Interviewee 9, see Appendix.

Moreover, this show promotes social changes such as sexual equality, women's empowerment, freedom and living in a family without violence and it encourages viewers to change their behaviours and attitudes and have good relationships with others. This fits in with Rogers' definition of development as "a widely participatory process of social change in a society, intended to bring about both social and material advancement (including greater equality,

freedom, and other valued qualities) for the majority of the people through their gaining greater control over their environment” (1976, p. 133).

Singhal and Svenkerud (1994) describe entertainment programmes that carry pro-social messages in developing countries, as:

Entertainment media programmes are (1) popular, because everybody likes to be entertained; (2) pervasive, because they have a wide and growing reach; (3) personal, because they can present pro-social message in a manner that is more personal (by depicting the joys and sorrows of media characters) than might be possible in real life; (4) persuasive, because they can encourage viewers to change their attitudes and behaviours regarding a pro-social issues; (5) passionate, because they can stir strong audience emotions about a pro-social issue; (6) profitable, because they can attract the support of commercial advertisers; (7) practical, because they are feasible to produce (1994, p. 21).

Rogers and Singhal in their study “Television soap operas for development in India” describe how the Indian soap opera *Hum Log* played a pro-development and commercial role for Indian viewers and it identified the cause of its popularity. *Hum Log* sparked a programming and commercial revolution of sorts at Doordarshan, the public television broadcaster of India:

The reasons for *Hum Log*'s popularity with its audiences and with its advertisers and draw[s upon] the impacts that *Hum Log* has had: (1) in the explosion of soap opera broadcasts on Doordarshan; (2) in commercialising Indian television and; (3) in the possible threat posed by television to the Bombay movie industry. Moreover contributed to: (1) a proliferation of domestically-produced television serials on Indian television; (2) increased commercialisation of the Indian television industry; and (3) a move of talent from the Bombay movie industry into television manufacture. Prospects for pro-development television soap operas in other Third World countries, illustrating the Indian experience, seem promising (Rogers and Singhal, 1988, p. 110-111).

On the other hand, in the same study Rogers and Singhal describe how *Hum Log*, India's first long-running television soap opera, despite its commercial aims, influenced viewers' beliefs in terms of their perception of women's

status, their freedom of choice, and family planning. The soap opera was intended to promote pro-social beliefs about women's role in Indian society.

Rogers et al. describe another soap opera, the Peruvian *Simplemente María*, telling the story of a migrant girl: "Was a black and white telenovela (television soap operas) broadcast in Peru five times per week for 21 months from April 1969 to January 1971. Each of the 448 episodes was one hour long" (1998, p. 5).

The title character, Maria, succeeded in achieving socio-economic status as a result of her hard work and sewing skills with a Singer sewing machine. The television series depicted certain real-life problems faced by migrants in urban areas, and portrayed issues such as the liberation of low-income migrant women, inter-class conflict and intermarriage between the urban rich and the migrant poor (Rogers and Singhal, 1988). Moreover, this soap opera was broadcast to other Latin audiences, with success depicted in the series as the fruit of hard work and idealism, providing a positive role model for upward mobility. Many young women in Mexico, Venezuela and Columbia identified with Maria, enrolling in adult literacy and sewing classes in order to achieve upward social mobility (Gonzales, 1992; Brown and Singhal, 1993, in Singhal and Svenkerud, 1994, p. 17). On the commercial side of things, *Simplemente María* achieved very high television ratings both in Peru and when it was exported, in the early 1970s, throughout Latin America. The sale of Singer sewing machines boomed accordingly. The Singer Company purchased advertising in the broadcasts of *Simplemente María* in most Latin American nations.

Thus, the soap opera *Noor*, aside from its commercial aims, themes, qualities, structure and pro-social and pro-educational messages, must have had other factors which made Kurdish female viewers prefer this show and set it apart from other soap operas that they had previously watched. These factors are discussed below.

Cultural relativity

Culture is the most important element and the factor that distinguishes this soap opera from the other foreign soap operas that were previously watched by Kurdish women. Culture refers to many aspects, including: cultural proximity, cultural capital, cultural discount, cultural affinities, linguistics and cultural share ability. All these aspects help viewers to access and select media materials by being able to find relevance and resemblances with their own lives; as such, they perceive a link between their own society's culture and the television programme's culture.

Haddock defines culture as:

A medium through which we live our lives, a dimension of our subjectivity as social agents; it shapes and forms the myriad details of our beliefs, attitudes, expectations and behaviour; it is embedded in social practices, our sense of history, the conventions that regulate public life in what we take to be normal (2003, p. 32).

Moreover, Elasmr points out that "culture is an elusive concept that is defined by some as encompassing all aspects of human life as experienced by those living in a specific geographical location" (2003, p. 158). Some nations, according to Morris and Waisbord, use culture as a means by which they can reaffirm their own local culture: "culture is the heart of a nation, and globalisation is manifesting itself in the reaffirmation of local cultures" (2001, p. 12). This means that culture is rooted at the very heart of the process of

integration. It is not an end, an outcome, a consequence or even a by-product, but a starting point, a rationale, and means by which it can be achieved. At the same time, it is a sense of belonging and creative exchange.

Straubhaar argues that “language, cultural capital, and cultural proximity do seem to be significant moderators of television flows between countries; it does seem that language, culture, and class can either facilitate or bar the internationalising and globalising flows of television” (2003, p. 104). For example when *Noor* was dubbed and not just translated to Arabic, and it represented an extended Muslim family as discussed above, it gave the soap opera a higher viewer rating among the Arabic and Kurdish people, who found it familiar and close to their lives, especially when the words and the names of the characters were substituted for Arabic ones. Buccianti (2010) counts dubbing as the main element accounting for the success of *Noor* over the other Turkish soap operas previously broadcast because, as he argues, *Noor* is a successful model of hybridisation. He notes that Syrian dubbing did not only translate, but transposed and adapted, with many important modifications, beginning with the “Arabianisation” of the characters’ names (e.g. in the Turkish version the main character’s name is “Mehmed”, but in Syrian dubbing it became “Muhannad”, an ancient and common Arabic name). However the question about language was not asked in the data gathering phase of this research. The Syrian dialect is different from the Iraqi dialect and the Kurdish language, but none of the interviewees complain about a lack of understanding. This is because the dubbing of the show to Arabic helped Kurdish women’s understanding and comparison with other soap operas previously watched like American and Mexican soaps which were not translated or dubbed into Arabic or Kurdish.

Moreover, in terms of cultural proximity Straubhaar explains that “audiences will tend to prefer programming that is closer or has most proximity to their own culture” (2003, p. 80). For Kurdish viewers, Turkish culture is closer in terms of religion, language, norms and history than American, Western or Mexican culture. This brought about the conversion of Kurdish women in this region to *Noor* from those soaps produced by countries removed from their own culture. For example, Ziad (2008) describes the soap’s success and its positive development, and argues that it is a form of artistic communication with friends and neighbours, bringing the best from the films of other continents and countries.

Straubhaar had a similar idea when examining the Dominican Republic’s import of cultural-linguistic regional programming. He argues that when the audience of small countries like the Dominican Republic cannot find regional programmes, it “shows clearly a second layer of a search for culture proximity, a preference first for national materials, but when that cannot be filled in certain genres, a tendency to look next to regional Latin American in other regions, [the] Arab world, Asian, or African productions” (2003, p. 81).

Jan (2009) points out that cultural proximity is the desire for cultural products as similar as possible to one’s own language, culture, history and values. Thus, even though people often like the cosmopolitan appeal of European and American television, movies and music, they tend to choose media from their own culture or from one that is very similar. This attitude is reflected in the answers provided by the people interviewed about *Noor* for this present research. For example, Shanaz, a 40-year-old housewife, says:

I watched some soaps like American or Mexican ones, but after I watched Noor I found it was my favourite; I am interested in this show because it is

closer to our life and our family relationships, and they practice some aspects of the Muslim faith that are required in the same way.

Interviewee 3, see Appendix.

Asia, a 30-year-old engineer, also referred to this cultural proximity with Turkey:

This is the first time that a Middle Eastern soap opera provides a positive modern role for Turkish women in a Muslim country, inviting us to stronger viewer attention than Western TV imports.

Interviewee 9, see Appendix.

Furthermore, cultural discount is another concept which helps viewers access foreign programmes:

A particular programme rooted in one culture, and thus attractive in that environment, will have diminished appeal elsewhere as viewers find it difficult to identify with the style, values, beliefs, institutions and behavioural patterns of the material in question. Included in the cultural discount are reductions in appreciation due to dubbing or subtitling (Straubhaar, 2003, p. 80).

All societies share common human traits, natural myths and legends which make the sharing of programmes possible. However, as Head (1985) argues: “total share ability of television programming is impossible, even between closely-linked societies with a common language” (in Singhal and Svenkerud, 1994, p. 20). But in terms of cultural sharing potential, language constitutes an important factor. Singhal et al. (1994) note that “successfully exported television programmes often share a language” (in Straubhaar, 2003, p. 89).

Barker also argues this point:

Language is taken to be at the heart of culture and identity for two central and related reasons: first, language is the privileged medium in which cultural meanings are formed and communicated. Second, language is the means and medium through which we form knowledge about ourselves and the social world (1999, p. 11).

Moreover, Singhal and Svenkerud (1994) have discovered a relationship between cultural share ability and cultural proximity, arguing that the concept of cultural proximity represents an important factor in the determination of the degree of share ability of television programmes. This is supported by Staraubhhar (1991), who defines cultural proximity as the active option made by an audience to view international, national or regional television programmes.

Another important factor is that *Noor* is a cultural hybrid that is close to the Arab region with regard to customs and traditions, much more so than American and Mexican alternatives. Furthermore, due to the fact that the Kurdistan Region and Turkey were part of the same empire (the Ottoman Empire), a shared religion, history, common experience and knowledge-base has facilitated the Kurdish viewers to access this programme, as they found familiarity and close identification between their lives and those of the show's characters.

As for the term "cultural capital", it is defined by Bourdieu:

Cultural capital describes how a person's class and social status are reflected in bodies of acquired knowledge, or cultural capital can come from schools, but most often it is a result of being brought up in a family or social group that already possesses it. (1994, p. 44).

This means that class, background knowledge and social status shape the audience's preference for local and national productions. Straubhaar points out that:

Cultural capital, identity, and language tend to favour an audiences desire for cultural proximity, which leads audiences to prefer local and national productions over those that are globalised and/or American. However, cultural proximity is itself limited by social class stratification. Groups united by language and/or culture seem to be increasingly fragmented by both economic and cultural capital in the senses defined by Bourdieu (1984) (2003, p. 78).

Cultural capital is defined as knowledge, experience or skills and/or connections that a person has had during the course of their life enabling them to achieve greater success than others with less experience and knowledge. Thus, what a viewer knows about other countries and cultures can lead people towards or away from cultural proximity and the tendency to prefer media products from one's own culture or the most similar possible culture. Mirus and Siwek argue that:

Cultural capital reinforces the use of this access to imported media and TV programming by giving elites and upper middle classes the ability to understand and enjoy programming imported from outside their cultural-linguistic region. This kind of cultural capital is clearest with language ability, which has been emphasised in economic studies, but also includes education, travel abroad, familiarity with the ways of life of other countries, education abroad, work with international companies, and the kind of family life that is produced by and reinforces these kind of advantages (1988, in Elasmir, 2003, p. 105).

For instance, the Kurdistan Region's working class has the greatest interest in local and regional television programmes, less in national ones, and very little in international ones. For most of them, television is the only source of information and means of accessing it can be limited due to lack of literacy, education and low income. For example, Chro (2008, p. 12) argues that "poor and illiterate Kurdish women are more dependent on local rather than international radio and television, because it is easy for them to understand". On the other hand, middle-class Kurdish families have a lot of supplementary options beyond television: other media access such as newspaper, magazines and the internet. This is the result of superior education, literacy levels, travel experience, and personal contacts or networks of acquaintances from school or abroad. The sum of this guides Kurdish women in their choice of and access to media materials. As Straubhaar states, "cultural capital reinforces the use of this

access to imported media and TV programming by giving elites and upper middle classes the ability to understand and enjoy programming imported from outside their cultural-linguistic region” (2003, p. 105).

In terms of cultural affinities, Straubhaar points out that:

Cultural affinities create forms of cultural capital that inform cultural proximity. Such affinities could be seen in very specific factors such as linguistic commonalities, shared religious histories, gender roles, moral values, common aspirations, and common histories with colonialism, shared music forms, similar forms of dress, character types and stereotypes, and ideas about genre, storytelling, and pacing (2003, p. 88).

To the Kurdish viewer, shared religion and history are of primary importance due to the fact that Kurdish people have affinity with the Turkish and Islamic cultures, despite the fact that the largest portions of the Kurdish territory are in Turkey.

This is especially relevant when we consider that *Noor* depicts a Muslim family in a Muslim country. As Straubhaar says, “fewer viewers will watch foreign programmes than a domestic programme of the same type and quality or the audience will tend to prefer programming that is closest or most proximate to their own culture: national programming if it can be supported by the local economy” (2003, p. 80). For example, most people interviewed for this present research referred to the Muslim and Islamic identity of the show as the main reason to choose the show, as discussed below.

Amalgamation of cultures

With *Noor*, for the first time Kurdish women were exposed to a soap opera produced by a Muslim country, but it was inviting them to identify themselves with a modern Western way of life, offering an amalgamation of different cultures. *Noor* reconciles the modern Western culture and traditional Middle

Eastern culture, with both of the main characters participating in a marriage arranged by the male lead's grandfather. The show is broadcast during the fasting of Ramadan, depicting the extended family all living under one roof with the elders often having the last word. However, at the same time they practice equal partnerships, independence and empowerment for women. Muhannad, the main male character, is faithful to his wife and follows an Islamic role, but at the same time he has children from his ex-girlfriend, this clashes with traditional and Islamic norms in Kurdish society.

This fusion was important for Kurdish women because the show was broadcast during a period when women in the Kurdistan Region already had some knowledge of Western and modern ways of life after having been exposed to global media for eighteen years. They now clearly realised their problems with traditional Kurdish culture, their struggle to follow the modern lifestyle and their rejection of the traditional. They desire a modern lifestyle but in a society which requires them to keep to the traditions. This is exemplified by the feedback of the participants interviewed for this research. For example, this is how Shirn, a 25-year-old employer, answered the question "Do you think the characters' behaviours resemble your real life? If yes, how?"

In some aspects I can say yes, for example I am an employer like the female character, and live inside a big family with respect, but I cannot compare our life with the female character, who is self-reliant, independent, and has equal partnership; we live in the male-dominated society, we need to fight to change this situation.

Interviewee 10, see Appendix.

Soma, a 38-year-old shop assistant, also drew this comparison:

I like the qualities of this show, such as: equal partnerships, modern married life and a positive role for women, and attention from the

husband to his wife gives power to women inside the Muslim families, in the future.

Interviewee 2, see Appendix.

This show importantly highlights the struggle of the conflicts and dilemmas faced by the Kurdish women with regards to the cultural context in which they live and where their traditional values conflict with modern ones – the men dominate the patriarchal society which is their life and more women are now demanding empowerment and independence. The issues focus on leaving a traditional and patriarchal or tribal society, dominated by men, and entering a more modern way of life which is non-traditional where power is not related to age and sex – as discussed in the previous chapter with relation to family relationships.

Noor shows them how to achieve a balance in terms of observing some of the traditional norms whilst simultaneously following the modern way of life. At the same time, *Noor* has promoted the change from a traditional society to a more modern one as a result of global commercial television. Viewers had been unable to obtain such guidance from the other soap operas previously watched, such as the Mexican, American, Iranian or Arabic ones. For example, until recently the Iranian and Arabic soap operas guided women to maintain a traditional role (as discussed below). In contrast, the American and Western soap operas did not represent the Muslim way as the family promoted the status of women and encouraged them to work outside the home. This aspect of the show distinguished it and made it preferable to Kurdish women viewers. The interviewees from this research referred to this difference with various

views and expressions; this is how Roza, a 30-year-old, answered the question:

“What aspects or things do you like about the show?”:

The content of this show is very useful because it encourages us to protect the traditional family life along with modernity, such as equal partnership or females taking a lead role.

Interviewee 6, see Appendix.

Moreover, by depicting the two cultural lifestyles, Noor encourages the viewer to combine both, promoting a shift from the traditional society to a modern society that is based on trade and industry and where power does not exist as a result of age or sex. However, some aspects of the patriarchal society are included, like the final word from the elder male member of the family. The narrative of the show is based on an amalgamation of culture, but at the same time, women are presented as having the power and right to make decisions. Thus, power in the family of this show is displayed as existing both horizontally and vertically and not just representing the patriarchal or traditional families. However, the patriarchal model is essential in several episodes, especially when Noor and Muhannad found themselves at the hospital: “The patriarchal model is essential and is emphasised in several scenes through the domination of the wise head of the family; in *Noor*, this happens to be Muhannad’s grandfather, Fekry Bey. All episodes include scenes of family meals headed by Fekry Bey as well as Turkish coffee gatherings where he plays the lute” (Buccianti, 2007, p.4).

The fusion depicted by these two cultures creates mixed reactions from viewers, dividing female viewers into three groups: first, those preferring the traditional aspects in the fictional family’s life; second, those preferring the modern Western values and aspects, and third, those preferring a combination of both kinds of values and qualities in their lives. Whilst the show presented all

viewers with the same amalgamation of cultural aspects, as touched on above, cultural capital in terms of educational status, class and area of residence (urban or village) are all at work in creating these differing viewpoints. With regards to these points, it should be noted that the interviewees all came from different backgrounds; this will be discussed in more detail below.

Family and family relationships

Noor represents the extended Muslim family as they all live under one roof in a Muslim country, they show respect to their elders and the final word is always granted to the man/elder family member. This reflects the spirit of the East and makes Kurdish viewers relate to the show better.

Other Turkish soap operas have been aired in the Kurdistan Region in recent years, such as *Wa Tamdi Al Ayam (The Day Passed By)* dubbed by MBC4 into Arabic and broadcast in the Kurdistan Region in 2009. This show was about three orphaned children: Asmar, Ali and Ghazal. Asmar joined the mafia, Ghazal became a successful surgeon and Ali became a policeman who married a rich upper-class girl. Another popular Turkish soap opera was *Sanawat al-Dayya'a (The Lost Year)*, launched in 2008 and broadcast in the Kurdistan Region. It tells the story of an ambitious man from a poor family ("Yahya" in Arabic, "Yilmaz" in Turkish) who is in love with a girl, ("Lamees" in Arabic, "Rafif" in Turkish) from his neighbourhood in Istanbul. She leaves him for another man who is very rich ("Omar") and marries him. Broken-hearted, Yahya starts hanging out with Omar's sister ("Lamees" in Arabic, "Filliz" in Turkish) in an attempt to make Rafif jealous, but ends up falling for Lamees and she falls in love with him too. The central theme of the series is the love story

between Yehia and Lamees, a bright youthful woman born to an upper-class family.

However, *Noor* seems particularly effective in changing attitudes because it provides images of new lifestyles in a familiar setting. This may be attributed to the fact that the main challenge facing Kurdish women, in this region for the last eighteen years, has been their family structure, with their actual rights being missing and their husbands and male family members dominating and controlling their lives. This soap opera has shown these women the same structure as that of their traditional Muslim families, with the same aspects such as arranged marriages, respecting elders and granting them the final word. But, at the same time it shows them the concepts of independence, having a career, receiving respect, having a supportive husband in an equal partnership and living in peace without domestic violence, unlike what the majority of Kurdish women experience from their families. This violence is not just limited to killing and so-called honour killings, it also takes many other forms from rape within the marriage to physical violence and mental and emotional abuse, as discussed in Chapter Four and below.

As Karim (2009) describes the violence which Kurdish women face in their family lives and the Kurdish concept of family is the same as that of other cultures, seen as a “safe castle” against the dangerous outside world. However, many crimes occur behind closed doors and within that safe castle, with no interference from the criminal justice agencies.

This aspect of *Noor* is where Kurdish women find Muslim and traditional family elements that are similar to those in their own family life, but at the same time the show portrays the fictional characters as living differently: the women

have equal partnerships, are independent and rely on themselves to achieve socio-economic status. This contrasts with the Arabic, Kurdish and Iranian soap operas, which were centred on traditional Middle Eastern cultures and only portrayed women as obedient and loving and with no rights to make their own decisions on such issues. The people interviewed for this present research noted this quality of the show, such as Shanaz, a 40-year-old housewife:

This show is different from Arabic or Kurdish soaps because Kurdish and Arabic shows do not encourage women to work outside the home and it centres on some routine problems which are apparent in life. This show encourages women to be good mothers for their kids and have a job outside the home.

Interviewee 3, see Appendix.

Demian, a 20-year-old housewife, sees this quality in *Noor* as the element distinguishing it from American and Mexican soap operas:

I think this soap is different from others; it is close to our life and culture. Not like American or Mexican soap operas broadcasted here; it is about a Muslim family living in a Muslim country but they live differently.

Interviewee 11, see Appendix.

However, there are some similarities and differences between this show and other Western shows. Compared with American and Western soap operas, this show can be described as exhibiting both British and American soap opera styles. For example, it is realistic in that it is centred on domestic, personal and family life and everyday concerns such as marriage, divorce and relationships. However, *Noor* is unlike British soap operas such as *East Enders*, which depict the working classes, because *Noor* deals with the life of an upper-class family. It portrays family romance in a fictional home which is representative of rich upper-class Istanbul families and upper socio-economic groups who can solve

everything with money because they come from wealthy cultural backgrounds. In this sense it is more similar to *Dallas*, which depicted the lives of oil tycoons: “Although it seems that viewers like to identify themselves with, or as soap characters, the problem remains of how we can identify ourselves with the American soap opera characters in luxury and represent the world of the rich and powerful oil tycoons” (Livingstone, 1990, p. 115).

The soap opera *Coronation Street* is well known for its independent and assertive female characters and attracts wide audiences in some countries. However, *Noor*'s characters tend to be mainly upper class, unlike *Coronation Street* or other European soap operas, where their characters are largely working class. Buccianti argues that “Turkish soap operas can be considered as hybrid by combining typical characteristics of classic American soaps as well as new cultural inputs” (2010, p. 11).

Moreover, the equal romantic relationship between the two lead characters, Muhannad and his wife Noor, shows the importance of this kind of relationship to soap operas. As Brown states: “relationships between people are the essence of the soap opera plot; relationships between women are important in soap operas, but relationships between women and men receive the greatest amount of attention, and soap operas emphasise heterosexual romance” (1994, p. 55). But at the same time this spousal relationship is another aspect of *Noor* which deals with the particular challenges and dilemmas which Kurdish women in the Kurdistan Region are facing due to the influence of global television. They realise that there are some things missing in their lives which women outside their countries have, even in a Muslim family like the one depicted in *Noor*. This is particularly the case with this type of relationship of love, romance and

tenderness, which differs substantially from Kurdish women's marital life; consequently, they feel that they are lacking. In Kurdish society, family authority is usually related to age and sex; the male is held as the leader of the household, and most of the oppression and inequality comes from this unequal relationship. Cantor and Pingree note: "The content of a soap opera reflects its intended audience. The stories are women's stories, focusing on love, romance, childbearing, health and illness, manners and morals" (1983, p. 28).

Kurdish women therefore see a different image of marital partners from this show. Although they had already been subjected to this image from the soap operas that they had previously watched, particularly Western ones, they could not identify as easily with them as with *Noor* because the latter represents both Muslim and Western family life. This aspect of the show has been noted by the participants interviewed for this research, such as Dlnia, a 20-year-old university student:

The TV shows tell romantic stories that suit us. In Noor, the characters present Westernised lives but have Muslim values. Viewers who were used to watching Mexican series realised that Noor was closer to their concerns.

Interviewee 7, see Appendix.

Demam, a 20-year-old housewife, also found a close correlation between her life and the lives of the show's family:

I watch several different soaps because I spend all my time at home and they help me to pass the time. I think this soap is different from others; it is close to our life and culture. Not like American or Mexican soap operas broadcasted here; it is about a Muslim family's living in a Muslim country but they live differently.

Interviewee 11, see Appendix.

Moreover, women realise their problems and discover their rights in this soap, and at the same time the show guides and encourages women to ask for their rights and different treatment by their husband, in likeness to the characters' lives. They ask themselves questions such as "I am a Muslim like the female character, Noor, and I have a Muslim husband like hers, but why do I not have rights like Noor?", or "Why does my husband not treat me like Muhannad treats his wife Noor?" Signorelli and Bacue (1999) described soap operas as "acting as an agent of socialisation". In other words, the soap opera provides audiences with a framework against which their daily lives are judged.

Noor particularly portrays an idealised husband in a very modern married life acting in an equal partnership – a powerful, supportive, romantic and loving man named Muhannad "Mehmet", tells the viewers "I am a Muslim and we have a culture and norms which are very close to those of the Middle East". This attitude constitutes a different personality from that of most Kurdish husbands. Today most of the social issues relating to Kurdish women arise from the treatment which is often harshly endured at the hand of the husband as he controls his wife's life. When the Kurdish woman moves from her father's house to her husband's, she becomes a dependent of her husband and relies on him, suppressing many instincts, feelings, emotions, dreams and aspirations.

Therefore, since this show began broadcasting in this region, the women have found themselves fighting more with their husbands, comparing them with Muhannad, the show's idealised husband. The wives hope that their husbands will treat them like the show's character treats his wife. Thus, *Noor* provides women a medium through which to escape the daily routine of their lives and the potential stress of family while encouraging them to be critical of their

society and family life. This is particularly the case because the family life in this show is similar to their family life in terms of religion and culture. But they live differently and they do not have the rights that the women in the show have. As Buccianti argues, “the escapist dimension of soap operas is even more noticeable in war-torn societies such as Gaza or Yemen and those facing daily violence, as in Iraq, where streets were deserted during the daily broadcasting of *Noor*” (2010, p. 25).

More specifically, Kurdish women have found that their husbands fall short of the ideal, they are now aware that they are not being treated the way they should be and that there are other options. Romance and love were not part of their lives, but they were attracted to the episodes focusing on love and romance and the way a man treats a woman. This was expressed by the women interviewed for this research. For example Dlnia, a 20-year-old university student, noted:

I can learn some things from the show, because it gives us some things which are absent in our spousal life such as love, tenderness, romance and a husband who allows us to be independent.

Interviewee 7, see Appendix.

Ashti, a 28-year-old housewife, feels the same way towards the show:

Every time I watch the series of this show, I try to adopt some things for my life; for example I wish once my husband would treat me with kindness like Muhannad treats his wife, but most of the time I get difficulties, because our culture does not accept this behaviour.

Interviewee 12, see Appendix.

This reaction was not limited to the Kurdistan Region, but was found across most Middle Eastern countries. Moussley (2008) points out that the show

sparked a spate of divorces in countries across the Middle East as women compared their real-life husbands to the TV heartthrob and demanded their husbands to be like the lead male character of the show. Moussley also noted the incident of a husband divorcing his wife after she uploaded Muhannad's picture on her cell phone. A Syrian website also reported that there were four divorces in Aleppo (the second largest city of Syria, located in the north of the country) because of the soap. Narmin, a 16-year-old interviewee, mentioned her own demand to her husband to follow Muhannad in his treatment of her:

Watching this show helps us find a modern way for our married life and it solves some problems, however it is difficult. For example, every time I would like to treat my husband as characters in the show treat each other, I fail because society does not allow that.

Interviewee 16, see Appendix.

This means that *Noor* has an educational message, seeking to educate a man on how to treat his wife, but at the same time this has created conflict and crisis between women and their husbands when they refuse to emulate Muhannad. Thus, this soap has exerted considerable influence on female viewers to follow a modern way of life, but, as can be seen, it is not always possible to successfully educate husbands into having a modern relationship with their wives. Brown and Cody (1991) conducted a study and found that viewers who watched the *Hum Log* soap opera exhibited stronger beliefs about a woman's status in society. However, while *Hum Log* enjoyed a large audience, the messages on women's socialisation were disproportionate, because an analysis of the female characters in the soap opera reveals that, in many cases, the self-sufficient, career-oriented women experienced negative social consequences, while characters who pursued more traditional female roles were rewarded.

Thus, while there is no evidence that *Hum Log* is making a significant contribution towards changing the way women are viewed in India, its popularity has paved the way for future pro-social programming (Brown and Cody, 1991).

The same attitudes towards hybrid culture and the reasons discussed are apparent in the responses of this present study's interviewees. Some of them prefer Muhannad as an idealised husband, some prefer the grandfather as their favourite male character – a strong man, and others want to have both a traditional and modern quality of life. These three positions are visible in the following responses obtained from the participants:

The best female character has to be independent and have a professional career to protect her social role and the best male character has to be a handsome, supportive partner to an independent woman and he has to be faithful to his wife like Muhannad.

Roza, 30-year-old teacher, Interviewee 6, see Appendix.

My favourite female character in this show is the grandmother who very much loves her grandson and granddaughter and all the family members respect her. As for males, it is the grandfather who arranged the marriage for his son, and he has the final word inside the family.

Shanz, 40-year-old housewife, Interviewee 3, see Appendix.

My favourite male character in this soap is Muhannad, he is Muslim and a faithful husband, obedient to his grandfather in his marriage process and at the same time romantic and helpful to his wife Noor, being loving, supportive of her independence and practicing an equal partnership.

Asia, 30-year-old engineer, Interviewee 9, see Appendix.

Images of women

Kurdish women seem mystified about their self-image. This is partly due to the fact that they have lived most of their lives raising children, managing the household and fulfilling their responsibilities as wives, mothers, daughters-in-

law and so forth. A woman should marry and many women are still restricted to the role of wife and mother. The majority of women in the Kurdistan Region are still unemployed and have a low level of literacy and education; they do not belong to labour unions and are not members of political parties or any other organisations or clubs, with their main responsibility being that of a housewife. However, in the face of globalisation, as discussed in the previous chapter, this role has partially shifted from this restricted householder to working outside and being a caretaker. Thus, this has created a conflict and dilemma for Kurdish women on how to reconcile these two duties. Arabic and Iranian soap operas centred around traditional Middle Eastern culture only and encouraged women to focus on their household duties. And as will be discussed below, American, Mexican and other Western soap operas provided them with an image of women that was totally different from their lives.

Noor's lead female character is a young intellectual woman who is independent, has a professional career, is married to a supportive husband and is an ideal housewife. Furthermore, she is faithful towards her family and respects the family's elders, which guides female viewers to clearly identify with Noor and compare their lives with hers. Shah came to a similar conclusion when examining the Indian Bollywood heroine characters: "these soap opera heroines in spite of being an "ideal" housewife are shown as someone who is able to adopt Western values. Consequently, they have formulated their sense of self/identity. Thus, these characters serve as an ideal role model who can guide the viewers to do likewise" (2008, p. 7).

Kurdish local and national broadcasters have failed to develop dramas due to insufficient professionalism, government interest and financial resources

for the production of national dramas (as covered in Chapter Three). Today's Kurdish media does produce some short-running serials and dramas, but nothing as effective as the show *Noor*. Due to these shows' weak topics and themes, the image of women does not represent the current situation that Kurdish women face in this region. These shows examine what is going on in Kurdish traditional society instead of providing an alternative or modern way of life. This, due to the patriarchal background of the society, has affected and controlled the intellect and mind of the writers and producers.

The majority of Kurdish dramas portray women as victims: subservient, having household responsibilities, making sacrifices and as objectified sexualised women dependent on their husbands. For example one Kurdish serial that aired in the Kurdistan Region, in Ramadan in 2007, was *Arazw*, a drama where its female character falls in love with a man in her village. In the show, on just one occasion she spoke with her beloved alone and someone saw them as a result her family killed her. Another Kurdish drama which was produced by the local Kurdish XAK TV was *Jwmaa*, which aired in 2004. The female character fell in love, but because her family did not allow her to get married with her beloved, she burned herself. She did the same thing that thousands of women do in this country as a reaction to their society's traditions. The viewers react to this type of soap opera differently. For example, for the writer and intellectual people, it is raising a debate; but, for the illiterate and uneducated people, due to they do not fully understand the meaning and intent of the show as intellectual people – they are watching it as a way to spend their time.

A more recent example is the 2010 Kurdish drama *Gramianw Kwestan*, written by the Kurdish producer Dihad Husain, which tells the story of the “Al-Anfal Campaign”. This was an attack on some villages in the Kurdistan Region during the Saddam regime. Adult males were captured and disappeared en masse, women and children were displaced, and to this day hundreds of thousands of women lost their husbands and families and now live alone in this part of Kurdistan. This soap opera was aired in the Kurdistan Region by Kurdsat Satellite TV (national satellite television), but after a number of episodes it was stopped because it was giving the “Al-Anfal” tragedy a bad name and complaints came in from viewers, especially from people who found the plot offensive to the female victims. The show was giving women a negative and weak image, as discussed above.

In other words, when the popular issues of the Kurdish people are reflected in the arts and drama, the themes and structures deal with historical events or borrowed historical settings, as a result of Kurdistan being a non-nation state. There are some historical dramas set around the political situation from the past, or they portray the challenge the Kurdish nation is facing in gaining its own state. For example, the popular long-running drama *Gardalwi*, a Kurdish drama produced by Kurdsat Satellite TV adapted stories from the days when Kurdish people were fighting for their rights and independence against the Saddam regime. Unfortunately, this creates conflict as the elder people have a desire for these issues, but the younger generation have no feelings about the issue of the past instead they want to know about the world outside their borders. This new generation has had far more contact with the world beyond

the Kurdistan Region, interacting with numerous other cultures and dissimilar versions of modernity, leading to a mixture of hybrid identities.

Thus, the portrayal of Kurdish households in these dramas represents a traditional Kurdish life that is not agreeable to the generation that has grown up entirely under Kurdish traditions, but which has been far more in touch with the world beyond Kurdistan through global television and interaction with numerous other cultures and different versions of modernity. Delap (2008) arrived at a similar conclusion in her examination of the Iranian soap opera *Narges*, which aired in Tehran in 2008. The show revolved around two families in present-day Tehran and portrayed the social problem of when two young people fall in love and keep it secret because they fear their families will not allow them to get married. Here, the two characters “Nasrin” and “Behrozz” fall in love; they meet secretly and plan to marry. Delap argues that *Narges* generally, and specifically through its stars, highlights a deep discomfort with the collective public identity constructed through the “official culture” of the Islamic Republic.

Almost 30 years after Iran’s 1979 revolution, the uncertainty surrounding the construction of identity persists. The question is further complicated by a new generation that has grown up entirely under the Islamic Republic, but which has had far more contact with the world beyond Iran, interacting with numerous other cultures and dissimilar versions of modernity, via the media which is leading to “hybrid/hyphenated identities”.

El-Omar (2006) puts forward a similar view on the image of women, as being weak and in traditional roles, when examining the social image of women in Syrian dramas. The general image of the woman’s role as a housewife has crystallised in her being dependent and reliant on her husband. At the same

time, she loves him and takes care of him and is calm with him. The main image of the woman's role as a wife is secondary to that of being a dependent of her husband, who decides her fate. She is obedient and loving without having any right to decide her own fate. The general nature of the mother's role is summarised as loving and caring. However, the picture differs depending on whether she is the mother of boys or girls. El-Omar notes that mothers often pampers their sons so much so that she prefers them to her husband; in contrast, the girl's role is inadequate and is limited to her having a marriage arranged and a suitable bridegroom being found. The common image of the daughter is of being obedient and respectful to her parents. Nevertheless, El-Omar adds that the main alliance in her life is the man, the lover or the husband-to-be. Most frequently, the woman is looked upon as being a female before being a human being. Arab media frequently portrays that the working woman works just to fill her free time, for fun, to meet an economic need, to get familiar with people, or simply because it is better than staying at home. Work does not appear to have real or genuine value in a woman's life and women seldom get positions as managers and leaders.

All this illustrates that the main female roles portrayed by Middle Eastern soap operas are different from those portrayed by Western soap operas today. Western soap operas encourage women to be independent, work outside the home, be managers, be self-reliant and have careers. However, the image of women in both Western and Middle Eastern dramas, unlike the female roles in the *Noor* soap opera, which portray women's duties as a: good mother, faithful housewife and nice daughter-in-law, along with having a professional career and adapting to Western modern values such as independence and self-

reliance, have helped Kurdish women to see themselves and their identity in relation the narrative of the show. As Gillespie argues: “television drama has encouraged us to see our lives as narratives and to view ourselves as the key subjects in the narratives that we construct of our lives” (2005, p. 149).

However, there are some other female characters in *Noor* which Kurdish female viewers can identify with, not just the lead character Noor. Most of the other female characters are representative of traditional Kurdish and Middle Eastern women’s lives. It is possible to have a role model for Eastern female viewers that is representative of their traditional lives. As such, all of them want to get married, but these decisions have usually been made by their families. The rich women in the show wear very high quality clothing which Kurdish women today emulate because this is what the Eastern and Kurdish girls want in order to attract a man to marry her. Kurdish social norms dictate that a man should look for the girl and have a chance to look and ask for her hand in marriage. It brings shame for a girl to ask and look for a man to marry. To illustrate, other stories in *Noor* include other female characters, generally young girls where their fathers and mothers plan to arrange marriages for them; however, the girls often don’t want to marry these men. This topic is common within the Middle Eastern traditional model and sometimes the stories will feature other young men who will fight for the love of a girl. One of this research’s interviewees, Rahma, an 18-year-old university student, identified closely with the situation of women in her society and the role of this character:

I find some things which are close to my real life. For example, a young girl whose father or mother plan on marrying her to a man she is unhappy with and whom she does not want to marry, which is the norm in Kurdish traditional society, and she is in love with another man.

Interviewee 5, see Appendix.

The Kurdish women find it easy to identify with the female character Noor because this character helps them deal with the cultural conflict/dilemmas and the identity crisis in which Kurdish women have found themselves since their exposure to global television (both traditional and modern) for the past eighteen years. As Brown states, "identification is achieved by structuring the narrative to include one or only a few main characters" (1994, p. 51).

Furthermore, this different image of the female character Noor helped Kurdish women viewers identify with her from different aspects. For example, some of them identified with the image of the female role and certain qualities and aspects that they liked in the show. Some saw these aspects as the key distinguishing factors which meant this show was more appealing than the other shows previously watched. Some women wanted to apply some of Noor's behaviours to their actual lives, while others found that most of her behaviour resembled their actual lives. At the same time, some of the interviewees wished that their younger daughters would follow Noor's behaviours.

Moreover, Kurdish women are now more able to realise their positions within their families and society. In addition, they are now aware that their rights and other aspects had been missing from their lives when compared with other Muslim families like the one presented in *Noor*. As such, these women now try to apply some of Noor's (the female characters') behaviours to their actual life. Women also try to have luxurious houses, like the Noor family home, with bedroom or kitchen furniture like Noor's and they change their hairstyles and clothes in order to be more like her.

Even if the Kurdish women find it difficult to follow the female character Noor's behaviour, a number of interviewees expressed their wish that their

daughters could have these qualities and behaviours in their future lives. For example, this is how Layla, a 39-year-old housewife, answered the question “Would you like your children to behave like the characters in this show?”

I would like my daughter to have some qualities of the heroine, and follow Noor’s behaviour, and also for my son to be a handsome, supportive and attractive husband for his wife like Muhannad.

Interviewee 1, see Appendix

Thus, this show has had a significant impact as it has created the belief for change and even when the women are not practicing it themselves, they hope for it for the future generations. Sharan and Valente (2002) examined the change on Pakistani women after the launch of some radio and television dramas which were being used to broadcast and transmit health information to Muslim women, particularly with regards to AIDS and family planning. They collected data from 1994 to 1999 and found that women exposed to the programme were more likely to believe that their spouse would accept family planning and that they could, at least, discuss family planning with their husband. Those who communicated with their spouse had increased chances of using family planning. In addition, among the spouses that had not previously been discussing family planning, the exposure helped communication which in turn led to more use of family planning. Over time, the husbands’ domination in making family planning decisions gave way to combined and joint decision-making and an increase in women’s decision-making power.

Skuse, in examining the BBC World Service for an Afghan radio drama *New Home, New Life*, stated how this soap opera attracted 35 million listeners which represented 70% of the Afghan population. The soap provided certain things that were missing from their lives and played a vital role in assisting

democratisation, especially after the destruction of the whole country and freedom being restricted by the Taliban regime, which banned television, music, theatre and dance, and forced it to drop its plan to outlaw radio (1999, in Gillespie, 2005, p. 146). This radio soap opera aired in April 1994 and has since been aired weekly. It was designed and produced for broadcasting in Afghanistan as a series with both a practical and informative purpose to cover the situation of conflict in Afghanistan. It covered an entire range of subjects from women's issues to the conservation of oral traditions and historical monuments, income-generation activities, ways of conflict resolution and decrees, awareness of mines, community participation in development, livestock raising and agriculture, farming, and personal and environmental hygiene (BBC Afghan Education Drama Project, 1997).

The influence of this soap opera comes from the characterisation of problems in human conflict and dilemmas by utilising dialogue to rise above these problems – this is all part of the soap opera “genre”. In other words, the show was perfectly suited to carry educational messages about new problems. Cases for discussion naturally arise as the drama unfolds and provides material for issues of concern, such as women's employment and girls' education, which are missing during this regime.

Moreover, the Kurdish female viewer uses the role of Noor, the main female character of the show, as an escape element, where the Kurdish society is a patriarchal society which is male dominated and the women are oppressed by the men and as such usually operate in opposition to this culture and dominance in subtle ways. While the soap opera *Noor* wanted to be a beneficial medium for an idealised portrayal of modern married life, as an equal

partnership which revolves around family issues, it aims to include the male audience with positive male role models by providing something which is lacking in the Eastern woman's life and family life.

For example, Brown argues that the context of resistive pleasure must be one in which a subordinated group recognises its oppression and reacts to that oppression, in this case male domination, while also involving the non-rejection of the connection women often feel toward women's cultural networks and concerns. Brown (1994) also recognises that these concerns often occur out of the women's inability to completely control their own lives. Moreover, the resistive pleasure around soap operas is also concerned with the fact that the genre was considered and developed to appeal to women and their place in society. One may think of that place and the concerns it involves: home, relationships and emotional dependency; thus, it is constructed for women in a patriarchal and capitalistic discourse.

At the same time, Kurdish women now try to criticise their society and its traditional roles, which in the past would have been strange and unacceptable. As Das (1995) points out, the reflection of this "wavering character" and the conflict evident between characters of different viewpoints represents the main source of dramatic tension. Resolution happens when the "wavering character", more often than not, is seen to adopt a positive attitude, thereby communicating a positive option or behaviour to the audience. Also, Rogers (1962) argues that the "diffusion of innovation" approach was equally linear, influential and powerful. Here a five-stage procedure is envisaged in which: first, awareness of an issue/problem is raised by the mass media; second, individuals are "empowered" with knowledge and information about this issue/problem; third,

organisations are empowered with knowledge and the individual decides if they should change their performance and behaviour connected to this issue/problem; fourth, the individual decides to examine and trial a different behaviour; and, fifth, the individual decides to accept and adapt or reject the behaviour in the longer term. Shrin, a 25-year-old employer, referred to this criticism when she answered the question “Do you think the characters’ behaviours resemble your life and your family relationships? If yes, how?”

In some aspects I can say yes, for example I am an employer like the female character, and live inside a big family with respect. But, I cannot compare our life with the female character, who is self-reliant, independent, and has an equal partnership; we live in a male-dominated society and we need to fight to change this situation.

Interviewee 10, see Appendix.

However, as expressed in the interviewees’ answers, Kurdish women compare their lives with those of the female characters’ and now have a higher regard for this new image of women. But, at the same time, due to their cultural capital, different backgrounds and the mix of duties of the main female characters, Kurdish women are facing conflict between the traditional life and modernity. The comparison, preference and desire to aspire to the image of the female character Noor and the other female characters of this soap opera are mixed. Some women prefer her when she is successful in carrying out both roles in her family and career. Others prefer her as a modern woman who has independence and is a professional designer; among them some have a preference for her when she is a good mum and good daughter-in-law. Here are some examples of these answers and mixed reactions:

I like the female character, being a good mother and taking care of her children and obeying her husband, and I like the grandfather in this show who has the final word in the family and every one respects him.

Rozhgar, a 40-year-old housewife, Interviewee, 4, see Appendix.

Dlnia, a 20-year-old university student, prefers Noor's modern behaviour:

My favourite female character in this show is Noor, a professional fashion designer, and modern idealised woman not thinking only about family life.

Interviewee 7, see Appendix.

On the other hand, Layla, 39-year-old housewife, likes both attitudes:

I would like to follow some aspects of the soaps in my life, such as: live independent, a positive female role, and be a good mother and have a career.

Interviewee 1, see Appendix.

The soap opera *Noor*, as a developed television entertainment programme exported to the Middle East, attempted to provide entertainment to its audience while strengthening social values of a pro-development nature. It has combined commercial entertainment and education whilst addressing many of the important social and moral issues challenging Middle Eastern society, such as the improvement of women's status, family relationships, harmony, and the combination between modern, Western, and traditional, Middle Eastern, ways of life. The programme also advertised luxury items and Turkey itself as a beautiful location for tourism with its green landscapes and goods. This luxurious and elegant atmosphere surprised the viewers and made everyone want to visit Turkey, resulting in an increase in millions of tourists. At the same time the mixed messages and hybridisation of the traditional Middle Eastern views with the Western modern images of women has encouraged the female Kurdish viewers to clearly see differences between these two cultures. These women now realise that there are things missing in their lives and they are more likely

to criticise their traditional family lives and relationships with their spouses. The programme raised concerns for them and caused them to question their lives in relation to the characters of *Noor*; thus, the closeness of the programme in terms of culture, religion and family structure has created a degree of confusion for these women. Women in this region, despite already being conflicted between modernity and traditionalism, found that, following the broadcast of this soap opera, their thinking about family life and relationships had changed – trying to reshape and restructured their family relationships to fit the pattern of *Noor*. To illustrate, some of the women wished that their children would adopt the same behaviours and attitudes towards family life; these notions appeared in the interviewee responses in the conducted research.

These women now think about equal partnerships, independence (especially financial) and self-reliance. They have started to criticise their traditional lives, particularly as *Noor* promotes a shift towards change among the female Kurdish viewers. The show portrays people differently, they have higher incomes, can take luxurious vacations abroad and have a choice between the two different lifestyles; previously, soap operas did not cover these topics.

The show also deals with issues relevant to viewers without any kind of identity, individuals who are disempowered and seek: power, respect, independence and equality. It then provides them with solutions to their problems and needs, showing them a path away from this traditional life to a modern one. Women in Kurdish society are oppressed by their family and society, and this soap opera shows them empowerment. Currently, the main problem facing Kurdish women is in them trying to find a balance in their pursuit

of the modern way of life while also maintaining the traditional forms – if this is not done sensitively they could end up facing violence and blame from their society. However, it must be noted that their reactions, when comparing their lives with those of the show's characters, varied. While some women preferred the traditional characters others preferred the modern ones and some liked a bit of both, which, as argued above, reflects the differences in cultural capital, background and educational status.

These differences and mixed reactions appear in the following nine codes. The coded analysis was captured from the women's responses to understand more about their thinking with regards to aspects of the show which reflect the modern and the traditional. This research did not use quantitative techniques to gather the data, because this research focused on understanding behaviour, describing phenomena and attitudes rather than taking accounts which depend on statistics. However, because this research focused on the different ideas and thoughts about traditional and modern ideas and life, the researcher needed to obtain results, from the majority and minority of women, with regards to traditional and modern thought. Thus, by analysing and coding the responses against these two ideas, some quantitative results emerged, including: the percentage of women who preferred the traditional to the modern way of life. The words modern and traditional referred to aspects of the show which represent the traditional and modern qualities of life. In addition, the numbers of words repeated by the women, regarding these two aspects, were counted to understand changes and the direction of change from the traditional to a more modern society. Thus, in interpreting and analysing these codes, quantities were used to determine how often the women referred to the words

or similar aspects of the soap operas with regards to these two different life qualities.

Finally, because the researcher is native to the Kurdish Region and has experience of growing up in this society, she was able to reflect from her own view-point when analysing these results, and during some of the discussions in this research. Clearly this raises some issues of balance and objectivity but the benefits of bringing this perspective to bear made it necessary and useful. These analyses were discussed with additional colleagues and supervisors in order to avoid the kind of 'blind-spots' that might otherwise occur.

Code 1: Respect

In the Kurdish language, "respect" is called *rizi gawra grtn*. Within the Kurdish culture, respect within the family life deals with relationships among family members who treat each other in accordance to specific rules and traditions. For example, respect towards the elder members (grandparents, for example) is a must. According to the Kurdish language, respect to elders is expressed as *rizi gawragrtn*. Nearly 50% of the Kurdish women interviewed used this phrase in their responses and they expressed that respect was a good attitude in their society.

The hierarchy or social ladder of superiority is followed by all members of the Kurdish society: the teenager must respect the parents; the student must respect the teacher, and so on. If there is respect in the Kurdish family, the family is recognised by society as good.

The people interviewed referred to this quality in the show *Noor*. For example, Shanaz, a 40-year-old housewife, in response to the question, "Do

you think that you can follow the characters' behaviour or adapt it to your everyday life? If yes, in what ways?" noted the following:

I think I can apply some things to my life, for example family respect and care of children and respect of the elder, but others not.

Interviewee 3, see Appendix.

Rozhgar, 40-year-old housewife, expressed the hope that her children would adopt respect in their behaviour:

I would like my daughter to adopt the female character's ways such as respect for everyone and the best for the family, and also for my son to be a strong man who has the respect of and final word in the family.

Interviewee 4, see Appendix.

Interestingly, respect is held in high regard by both the women who want to lead traditional lives, in accordance with Kurdish culture, as well as those who want independence and a modern life. One example is Roza, a 30-year-old teacher, who expressed her opinion in the following words:

I would like my daughter to have independence and at the same time respect her in-laws, and for my son I would like him to be like Muhannad, who is handsome, romantic and takes care of his wife.

Interviewee 6, see Appendix.

In addition, the feedback from these Kurdish women reveals that they project images of their lives, as well as the lives of their children, onto the main characters of the soap operas they watch.

Code 2: The traditional Kurdish family

In the Kurdish language, the "traditional Kurdish family" is called *zhiani ashairi kurdawari*. This code stands for the traditional Kurdish family life, Muslim family life or Middle Eastern family life; it is extremely different to the modern-style that families of other Middle Eastern countries lead. Therefore the values of the

Muslim family, which for them means traditional family life, is one of the aspects that has a great influence on Kurdish women. In addition, it is important to add that whilst most of the Kurdish people live traditionally, they have for some time demonstrated a preference for American, Mexican and other Western soap operas representing the Western or modern lifestyle. But one of the distinguishing features of the soap opera *Noor* is its unique mix of Western and Middle Eastern traditional lifestyles within a single family unit. The women interviewed for this research referred to this aspect of the show, such as Nashmil, a 30-year-old housewife:

This show tackles family issues such as marriage, divorce and abortion, but we can say that Noor seems particularly effective in changing attitudes because it offers new content in a familiar setting: Turkey is a Muslim country, inviting stronger viewer identification than Western TV imports.

Interviewee 15, see Appendix.

Around 35% of the Kurdish women interviewed found the representation of the Muslim or Middle East traditional family lifestyle in *Noor* a significant reason for its popularity.

Code 3: The modern way of life

In the Kurdish language, “the modern way of life” is called *peshkawtn* or *zhyani sardam*. According to the Kurdish meaning, the modern way of life refers to life inside the family which includes equality among men and women in terms of rights, roles and responsibilities. The modern way of life is perceived by Kurdish women as characterised by family relationships where the man does not dominate every aspect of life. Many Kurdish women have a high regard for this definition of a modern lifestyle and believe that by following it, they may rescue

themselves from the patriarchal domination according to which man has the final word on all issues.

During the interviews conducted for this research, many of the participants referred to “the modern way of life” repeatedly, even though different words were used to mean this. One of the reasons for the popularity of this soap opera among Kurdish women is, as it is contended here, the modern way of life it portrays. This is evident, for example, in the response of Ashti, a 28-year-old housewife, who commented on the difference between *Noor* and other soap operas:

The success of Noor shows that Middle Eastern Muslim viewers want to follow a modern Islam rather than the more traditional style we can see in regions of the Middle East.

Interviewee 12, see Appendix.

Overall, 35% of the respondents supported the modern way of life aspect of the show. This was particularly so after the female character in *Noor* became a role model for Kurdish women in claiming their rights, independence and equal partnerships. Their desire to follow the modern way of life was reinforced by the fact the actress herself achieved socio-economic status in her acting, and that the soap opera had some pro-social messages, such as family harmony, promoting women’s status and gender equality. As discussed in the previous chapters.

Code 4: Violence

In Kurdish, “violence” is called *twndwtizhi*. The vast majority of Kurdish women face domestic violence on a daily basis and many commit suicide in response to rape, sex trafficking, forced and early marriages, murder and abduction.

“Women are frequently victims of violence – domestic violence, forced marriages, and threats of “honour killings”. In traditional Kurdish society, women are legally the subjects of men, and disobedience may be revenged by murder. Disobedient women are considered sinners” (WADI Project, 2008). Also, Mojab (2008) points out that nearly one in seven women (13.7%) encounter violence on a daily basis, and 7.11% have been threatened with honour killings. The majority of these threats (63.85%) come from the family. Some of the statistics regarding the type of violence Kurdish women face in their homes were discussed in-depth in Chapter Four.

The soap opera *Noor* gives Kurdish women an insight into a completely different life, where violence is not present and where women live in equal partnerships with men or independently of men. The interviewees of this study referred to the peaceful life of the show in their responses.

For example Narmin, a 30-year-old teacher, in the response to the question: “Would you like your young children to behave like the characters in this show?” referred to the type of violence in her society:

I would like them to but they cannot because we live in the traditional and patriarchal society; they do not agree, for example, in this show the girl or female character can talk about the guy in front of their family, but if a girl in our society talks about her boyfriend... her family kills her.

Interviewee 16, see Appendix.

In other words, there was no agreement among the Kurdish women interviewed on the issue of violence. Moreover, if young people behave like the show’s characters they may become endangered due to the violation of the accepted social norms. Deman, a 20-year-old university student, stated the following in

response to the question “Do you think that you can follow the characters’ behaviour or adapt it to your everyday life? If yes, in what ways?”:

Not really because you know the nature of our society, it does not change. If one girl falls in love with a guy, as you know, her family may kill her. So I love my cousin, but I cannot talk about it because I think my family would kill me.

Interviewee 11, see Appendix.

Some 30% of the participants referred to this aspect as being in the nature of Kurdish society.

Code 5: Equal partnership

In the Kurdish language, “equal partnership” is expressed as *yaksani hawsargiri*. Kurdish society is male dominated and the vast majority of women assume that equal partnerships are unattainable. Family authority in the Kurdish society depends on age and gender, with males always leading the household. Nevertheless, the show *Noor* sends a powerful message to Kurdish women because it presents equal partnerships between men and women. Approximately 70% of this study’s participants referred to equal partnerships during the interviews which means this type of relationship was held in high regard. For example, Shawbo, a 38-year-old employer, in response to the question, “Which aspects and elements do you like about the show?” noted the following:

The modern married life and equal partnerships which the show portrays.

Interviewee 13, see Appendix.

Similarly, Narmin, a 30-year-old teacher, in response to the same question, said:

I live in a patriarchal society in which we have a big gap between the wife and husband and love-less marriages, so I would like love, romance stories, independence and equal partnerships; I would like love and romance stories.

Interviewee 16, see Appendix.

In addition, Gashaw, a 40-year-old engineer, while talking about her favourite character, noted that:

The best male character is someone who treats his wife as an equal partner.

Interviewee 9, see Appendix.

Code 6: Love, romance, tenderness

In the Kurdish language, “love, romance and tenderness” are referred to as *xoshawisti*, *romansiat* and *barahmw bazaie*, respectively. These are the three elements that were reported by the Kurdish women of this study as missing in their family lives. The show *Noor*, on the other hand, is filled with these elements, from the very beginning and in every word and action, from the lead male character Muhannad towards his wife. The average Kurdish man thinks that it is natural to treat his wife without due respect or without expressing his love. Moreover, it appears that Kurdish society prefers it when men treat their wives without kindness. Shawbo, a 38-year-old employer, described the difficulties Kurdish women encounter in this respect:

I would like to adopt some things [from the show] to my life; for example I always ask my husband to treat me like Muhannad treats his wife Noor, but he does not agree. In addition, he cannot because he grew up in a society where the man has to treat his wife harshly, because in this society that is the symbol of a strong man.

Interviewee 13, see Appendix.

In many Kurdish families, it is considered shameful for a man to tell his wife “I love you” or to describe his wife as a beloved one. Bahar, a 24-year-old housewife, shared her opinion on the lack of expressed love while replying to the question “What is the difference between the other soaps you are watching and the *Noor* series?”

This is the first time that Middle Eastern soaps are portraying something we are missing in our lives, such as romance, love and equal partnerships. I watch too many soaps, especially Iranian ones, but I prefer the Turkish ones.

Interviewee 17, see Appendix.

Consequently, expressions of love and care are the qualities in the show *Noor* that appeal most to Kurdish women. This is clearly visible from the answers of the women interviewed for this research. For example, Ashti, a 28-year-old housewife, in response to the question “Do you think that you can follow the characters’ behaviour or adapt it to your everyday life? If yes, in what ways?” noted the following:

Every time I watch the series of this show, I try to adopt some things to my life; for example I wish once my husband would treat me with kindness like Muhannad treats his wife, but most of the time I get difficulties, because our culture does not accept this behaviour.

Interviewee 12, see Appendix.

Similarly, 75% of the Kurdish women in this research referred to the “kind” treatment of the wife and accepted this as their preferred relationship. Kindness and an attitude based on love and respect were noted by the interviewees as the qualities which they would attempt to adopt in their own spousal lives. However, this preference was not shared by some of the women. For example,

Shanaz, a 40-year-old housewife, rejected this type of behaviour because she believes that society will not accept it:

I do not want my daughter and my son to behave like the show's characters because their attitude is not acceptable in our society; I prefer to follow our traditional family life and norms.

Interviewee 3, see Appendix.

Gashaw, a 40-year-old engineer, described equal relationships as unrealistic and noted that they would contradict with her family's culture:

I think some things that this show portrays are unrealistic because we live in the real world; you know the real world includes both pleasure and pain, not like this show where everything revolves around comfort, love, romance and without any problems.

Interviewee 19, see Appendix.

The interviews indicated that the women have a higher regard for this type of show due to the quality of the content which represents themes that are lacking in their actual lives. But, the interviewees are aware that this is not real life; the show represents a life with romance without any problems and the behaviour by the male character Muhannad, where he generally treats his wife romantically and tenderly, is not realistic to the Kurdish Region. However, none of the interviewees referred to whether the show was actually realistic; however, the data gathered from the interviewees indicates that it is unrealistic. But, because it was not noted by the interviewees, this aspect will not be discussed in detail.

Code 7: Independence

Basically, men and women in modern society hope to enjoy equal, social, economic and political rights and to own property with no interference from

others, and to be equal in responsibility as well as freedom. In Kurdish society, the family laws are based on the Islamic laws and the man is obliged to support women before and after marriage, by providing them with property. For example, a woman can get full financial support during her marriage as well as during all the stages of her life as a daughter, sister and mother. Women are also entitled to receive inheritance.

Today, the Kurdish family laws grant men the right to own property and the freedom to buy, sell, mortgage, lease, borrow and lend. Nevertheless, the wives, even if they have a job and receive a salary, must ask their husband's permission for all business ventures. Nowadays, with the global entry of women into the workforce, Kurdish women are becoming a powerful force for change in Kurdish society. Despite being aware of the liberalisation of women throughout the world, Kurdish men use their rights and authority to punish their wives and daughters whenever they do not obey the man's demands, they may even deny providing financial support for them.

During the interviews, the women identified financial independence as an aspect of the show *Noor* (in which the lead female character is independent with her income) which they favoured. They described the main female character as a positive role model for a modern female. However, Layla, a 40-year-old housewife, noted that her favourite character was Noor's husband Muhannad, because he supported the independence of his wife. Nevertheless, she still confirmed her high regard for the female character's behaviour, and Noor's independence as one of the aspects of the show she would like to adopt in her own life (Interviewee 1, see Appendix).

Soma, a 38-year-old shop assistant, shared this idea while Rozhgar, a 40-year-old housewife, expressed an opposing view, saying:

I like the female character, being a good mother and taking care of children and obeying her husband, and she likes the grandfather in this show who has the final word in the family and everyone respects him.

Interviewee 4, see Appendix.

However, in response to the question “Would you like your children to behave like the characters in this show?” Dwnia, a 28-year-old university student, noted that for her, the whole issue of financial independence is about the woman not having to ask the husband for money:

I would like my daughter to behave like the female character Noor, to get education, depend on herself, not to ask her husband to give her money, and have the right to make decisions about her life and future, with a supportive husband who is good-looking like Muhannad.

Interviewee 14, see Appendix.

Thus, 65% of women referred to financial independence in their responses.

Code 8: Female leadership roles

In Kurdish, this concept is called *rolî sarkrdai bo zhn, wazifa*. Despite widespread belief, Kurdish history is devoid of female leaders who have become the heads of villages and tribes. Today, Kurdish laws allow women to take on certain public and political positions. Nevertheless, in reality the majority of Kurdish women are limited in their leadership to household responsibilities and taking care of the children, while the men have the leadership roles in all aspects of political, social and family life. Thus, women are far removed from decision-making privileges.

Female leadership roles and careers were referred to by the Kurdish women in this study, in relation to the show *Noor*, because it gave them an example of female leadership in life and business. Leadership was described by Kurdish women as: power, positive and modern roles for females, and strong leading women, etc.

Soma, a 38-year-old shop assistant, said:

I would like the qualities of this show such as: equal partnerships, modern married life, a positive role for women and attention from the husband to his wife because this gives power to women inside the Muslim family in the show.

Interviewee 2, see Appendix.

On the other hand, Shirin, a 25-year-old employer, described female leaders as strong in response to the question “Who is your favourite male or female character? Or who is the best character for you?”

The attractive female character is a strong female character, a leading female character – the independent, aspiring fashion designer, and for the male, it is being handsome, attractive and being a supportive partner to his independent wife.

Interviewee 10, see Appendix.

Nashmil, a 39-year-old-housewife, however, was not interested in leadership roles for women and focused her attention on the housework done by women in the show *Noor*:

My favourite female character is Noor because she is very faithful towards her family and respects the elder family members; she must go through many hardships to win her husband’s heart, because I think family responsibility is everything for women and it is the main role for her.

Interviewee 15, see Appendix.

Only 20% of the respondents in the study mentioned leadership roles for females as an important element.

Code 9: Religion or Islam

One of the reasons why the show *Noor* was chosen for this research is the fact that it was produced by a Muslim country which is close to the Kurdish culture. Consequently, the high degree of understanding of the show and its popularity among Kurdish women was attributed to its Muslim origin. The show *Noor* is produced by Turkey and it represents the Western lifestyle within a Muslim context. For this reason, Muslim women are attracted to the show because they have a common understanding of Muslim values. Moreover, Kurdish women find strong similarities between the Kurdish culture and Turkish society.

During the interviews, the respondents referred to and discussed the Muslim values and the traditional Middle Eastern cultural qualities of the show. Of the women interviewed for this research, Dlnia, Deman and Eman (Interviewees 7, 11 and 18, see Appendix) mentioned the Muslim values in response to the question: "What is the difference between the other soaps you are watching and the *Noor* series?"

Asia, a 30-year-old engineer, also shared a similar opinion:

This is the first time that a Middle Eastern soap opera provides a positive modern role for Turkish women in a Muslim country, attracting stronger viewer attention from us than Western TV imports.

Interviewee 9, see Appendix.

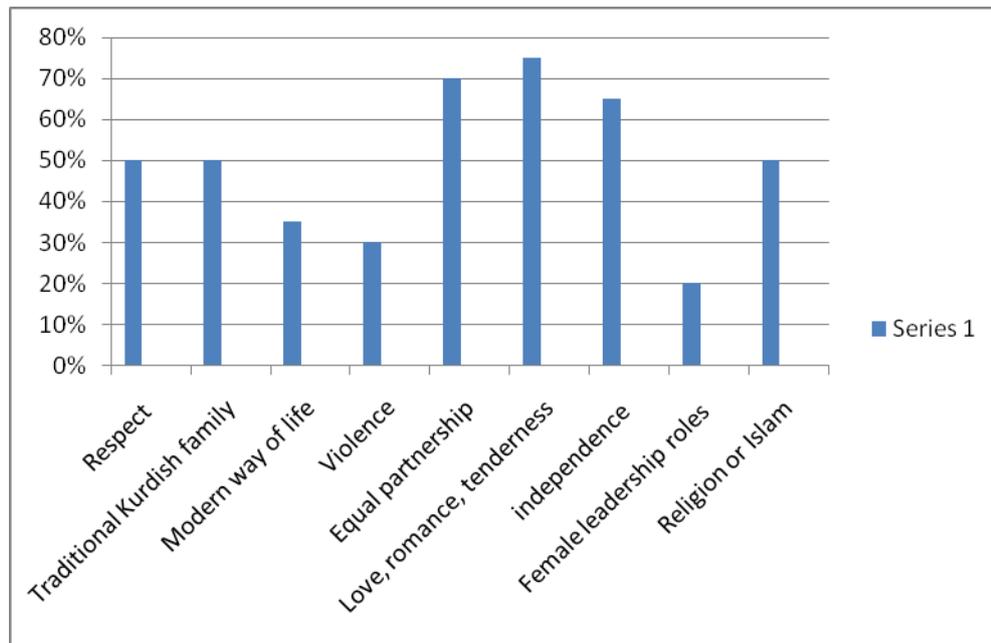
At the same time, Shanaz, a 40-year-old housewife, described the presentation of the image of Muslim life, through the main characters of the show, as unrealistic. She goes as far as to suggest *Noor* does not represent the Muslim

life at all. Nevertheless, 60% of the respondents in this study referred to the Islamic religion as one of the main factors behind the popularity of the show (Interviewee 3, see Appendix). Table 3 and Figure 1 identify the results from this research with regards to understanding the interviewees' responses concerning aspects of the show which were deemed to be traditional or modern.

Table 3: Statistics of qualities

Codes	Percentage of women referring to the quality	Number of times the word(s) were repeated
Respect	50%	25 times
Traditional Kurdish family	50%	40 times
Modern way of life	35%	10 times
Violence	30%	13 times
Equal partnership	70%	17 times
Love, romance, tenderness	75%	40 times
Independence	65%	23 times
Female leadership roles	20%	5 times
Religion or Islam	50%	10 times

Figure 1: Statistics of qualities



Analysis and interpretation of interview results

Based on the coding scheme explored in the previous section, three versions of different “ideal woman” types emerged: first, traditional; second, modern; and, third, transitional (a mix of traditional and modern ideals). This differentiation stems from the participants’ responses, which fell into three categories. A number of women preferred the traditional aspects of the show and their thinking was of a traditional nature. They valued Kurdish traditional life and wished their children to follow it. On the other hand, a number of them preferred the modern aspects and qualities of the show, and their responses showed that they favoured a modern way of life and rejected their society’s traditional mode of life. The rest of them evinced responses which were situated somewhere between the traditional and the modern. Thus, the viewers have started to think and follow change towards a more modern way of life; however, the responses from the viewers towards this change vary according to the criteria of status and their background, such as: whether they come from an urban or rural environment, their class and income, and their level of literacy and intelligence,

etc. For example, a university student will be different from an illiterate housewife in their response towards change and modernity. Thus the different status' and backgrounds of the women interviewed for this research and the mixed messages portrayed in the Turkish soap opera *Noor*, which combines both traditional Middle Eastern and modern Western ways of life, create a variety of reactions from the viewers. Viewers can grasp and easily compare the two lifestyles, and also realise that they can be Muslim and yet follow modern trends, as the characters of this show do. At the same time, these three types of attitude show how the Kurdistan Region is starting to change from the "traditional" to its own version of the "modern", albeit gradually.

1) *Traditional ideal*

The traditional ideal of the Kurdish woman is based on the strong support of or loyalty to the traditional Kurdish married life and the relationship between the man and woman. However the interpretative analysis revealed that, among those interviewed, very few agreed with their traditional role and identified themselves based on their duties and life inside the traditional family circle. The majority of women favoured and hoped to adopt and obtain the modern way of life inside their family life and to have modern relationships with their husbands.

Interestingly, the Kurdish women interviewed identified themselves as advocates of the traditional Kurdish family life and talked optimistically about it. Despite the predominant point of view on traditional family life and the women's preference for the modern lifestyle, they nevertheless expressed their hesitation regarding the adoption of the modern way of life. One of the widespread opinions expressed by these women was that the acceptance of the modern

family life or the adoption of their role models' behaviour in *Noor* would endanger their lifestyles or even their lives.

2) *Modern ideal*

Some Kurdish women fear facing violence and society's recrimination if they follow the modern way of life and reject their traditional Kurdish life. Some women indeed refer to this fear in their answers but this, significantly, did not prevent them from favouring the modern ideal of family life. According to the interview results, numerous Kurdish women have a higher regard for modern married life and equal partnerships than for traditional Kurdish family dynamics. In particular, these women's comments on traditional married life were rather pessimistic, and it was clear that they were in search of missing elements such as love, romance and independence.

It is important to add that the modern ideal does not necessarily conflict with traditional Kurdish family values. On the contrary, Kurdish women would like to maintain the partnership based on respect towards their husbands, but would also enjoy more expressions of love and more romance in their relationships. Thus, the Kurdish women in this study favoured the modern family values as presented in *Noor* and talked optimistically about them. Moreover, they found that *Noor* portrays the modern marriage values and provides a different insight into an ideal woman, an image which is not present in the current married lives of Kurdish women: equal partnerships, independence, self-reliance, and love and romance.

3) *Transitional ideal*

Several women in this study indicated that a combination of both traditional Kurdish and modern values was the best option for them. The ideal woman, in

the opinion of these Kurdish females, is one who embraces both Kurdish traditional family life and the modern way of life into their own family life. Nevertheless, the women who were ready to try and adopt the transitional ideal into their own lives were afraid and they worried about facing recrimination from society for their modern views. Consequently, these Kurdish women did not want their daughters and sons to accept the values and behaviour of modern married life into their own lives.

The transitional ideal woman understands both ideals but does not want to commit exclusively to one or the other. Instead, the transitional ideal woman tries to keep to Kurdish traditional life while bringing in the modern aspects of married life. These Kurdish women seek a balance between the traditional Kurdish family life and the modern way of life by staying in the traditional family while becoming more independent and having a career, but without escaping the traditional life imposed by their society. To further understand and appreciate the results obtained from the primary research, as well as the three attitudes identified as being held by Kurdish women towards *Noor*, a discussion will follow in the next chapter.

CHAPTER SEVEN: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Discussion

The analysis of this study shows the fact that international commercial television soap operas, despite their educational, pro-social and pro-development messages, appear to play a role in heightening the knowledge and experience of multiple identities and cultural changes by paving the way for the comparison of viewers' lives with those of soap opera characters. The participants of this research showed that they were able to recognise the differences between the traditional and modern (or Western) way of life, expressing a preference and desire for the modern way of life. Although, they equally had opinions about which aspects of their own lives they would prefer to be modern and the elements they would like to keep traditional. This divided them into three groups (traditional ideal, modern ideal and transitional ideal), every woman could identify herself with the show, describe both the modern and traditional qualities, and understand themselves and their environment.

Thus, the Kurdish women on all social strata have been subjected to the influence of international television. The participants of this research constitute a cross-sectional representative of all the Kurdish women in the Kurdistan Region, from different backgrounds, statuses and geographical areas. This research did not focus on a specific group or specific place. This is due to the spread of satellite television throughout this region, even in the remote areas, which meant that every woman viewing these programmes has been affected in terms of globalisation and modernity. However, their reaction and attitude might differ depending on their cultural capital and status, as discussed in the previous chapters.

This study explains that the previous international television soaps exposed these women to only the Western or modern way of life; whereas the soap under study showed both traditional and modern cultures and gave them a choice that they could easily identify with. The viewers can more easily determine the difference between both worlds and compare which aspects they agree or disagree with, helping them to evaluate the negative and positive sides of both and supplying grounds for acceptance or rejection while providing the possibility of combining both.

The analysis above clearly shows that despite the respondents' desire for the Western or modern way of life, certain indigenous cultural factors such as traditional family life, religion, giving the "final word" to elders, arranged marriages and compulsory marriage for women, are still markers of identity for some of them, even though they did not necessarily describe themselves as religious or "traditional ideal" women. Salwen argues that "foreign TV cannot be viewed as a direct cause of individuals losing their indigenous cultures, [but it does] account for different responses to foreign media messages" (1991, p. 36). However, the soap opera *Noor*, challenges the traditional ways of thinking, lifestyle, religion, and even the structure of families and the relationship between its members.

Through this study, we can ascertain what happened to participants of this research in terms of their identity in the arena of globalisation, especially since technology and the internationalisation of television programmes have been discovered by the research community to be important factors in the development of consumer identity.

The interviewees indicated that they watched a high number of soaps each week; to illustrate, in response to the question: "How many soap operas do you watch in a week?" the majority of interviewees indicated that they watched more than three soap operas each week. Thus indicating that the interviewees were heavy viewers and were being influenced by the international soaps, especially the Western and Turkish soaps. This has made them generate a new or mixed identity between their traditional Kurdish culture and the modern culture, portrayed in the foreign television programmes and soap operas, possibly at the loss of their local identity. In comparison, their parents or grandparents sensibly consider and desire the protection and preservation of their traditional way of life.

Researchers like Schiller (1993) and Sinclair et al. (1996) argue that cultural imperialism may be a result of exposure to American television programmes with the consequence of loss of local identity and culture, or identity crises. In this regard, it is not unreasonable to suggest that this change and influence is unavoidably accompanied by capitalism and imperialism, as most of the participants of this research clearly shared many behavioural characteristics adopted as a result of viewing international television. Schiller (1993) points out that "a society is brought into the modern world system when its dominating stratum is attracted, pressured, forced and sometimes bribed into shaping its social institutions to correspond to, or even promote, the values and structures of the dominating centre of the system" (1976, p. 103).

Tomlinson (1991) characterises such a situation as a "cultural loss", which is mainly the result of the "cultural weakness" of capitalist modernity. He underlines that the increase of capitalism and modernity contributes to and

shares in an important cultural shift resulting in cultural imperialism, which aims to satisfy the cultural desires and needs of people.

This descriptive analysis proves that the interviewees not only watch soaps for entertainment, or to develop their identities, but in some cases also to apply them to their everyday lives and adopt them for their sons and daughters or other members of their families. For example, most of the participants' responses refer to the fact that they want to persuade their husbands to follow Muhannad (the male lead of *Noor*) in how they are treated. However, some of them have hesitated or failed to adopt this due to fear of society's response, being blamed and facing violence.

On the other hand, this analysis shows that two different identities, local and global, have been created by globalisation's influence on this region. In terms of the Western modern aspects of the show, "local" women will be more likely to refuse the choices presented by the show; some of them said these are simply not acceptable in their society. The more "global" women, on the other hand, referred to the modern way of life and wished that this could be adapted to their actual lives. Despite the ambiguous identity construct between the local and global, for others this may be the place that they find themselves best situated. For example: "Media culture provides the materials to create identities whereby individuals insert themselves into contemporary techno-capitalist societies, which is producing a new form of global culture" (Kellner, 1995, p. 1).

A high percentage of remarks from the respondents showed a desire to follow the characters' behaviours and they described things that were lacking in their lives such as equal spousal partnerships. In addition, most of the participants thought of this soap as their favourite. Thus, the producers of this

soap opera discovered what their audiences, especially women, were interested in; however, *Noor* not only targeted Kurdish women, the soap actually had a significant impact on them: “Television and video producers experiment with different genres and over time develop their expertise in genre production, and, perhaps most importantly, gain a sense of what their audiences are most interested in” (Elasmar 2003, p. 79).

The discussions with the interviewees were valuable in comprehending what happens to identity in this age of globalisation and in the face of the messages received from international television programmes. Thus indicating that creating the modern individual is the central aim of cultural imperialism and modernity, especially for developing countries. Most of the soaps and foreign programmes now running in this region are trying to create modern individuals, as explained by Butcher: “The perceived role of television in creating the modern individual led to a charge of cultural imperialism” (2003, p. 148).

Hesitation shown by the respondents and the fact that they thought about keeping the traditions of their society in some areas supports the argument that, irrespective of whether Kurdish society is at the initial stage of a major cultural shift, in some ways it is hard for Kurdish society to allow Kurdish female viewers to completely follow the messages conveyed from foreign television and have their behaviour shaped by these channels. For example, in answering the questions “Would you like your young children to behave like the characters in this show?” and “Do you think that you can adopt the characters’ behaviour to your everyday life?”, some respondents hesitated or did not find it easy to adapt these changes to their everyday life, nor did they want their sons and daughters to follow these themes.

Moreover, despite the historical and political conflict between Kurdish people and the Turkish government, which meant that in the past Kurdish people in the Kurdistan Region rejected anything that came from Turkey, today globalisation has changed this and the majority of participants have found a close relationship between themselves and the Turkish society. Rantanen argues that “globalisation challenges the traditional ways of thinking about nationalism, which are based on the idea that people who live in a given geographical territory share a national identity that they feel they belong to the same nation” (2005, p. 82). Also, Elasmr argues that “exposure to foreign TV increases the strength of audience beliefs about the country originating the foreign message” (2003, p. 150).

This merging and ambiguousness between the modern and traditional cultures, or the desire to combine both (adopting globalisation while keeping some local aspects), is gradually expected for the new generation. This is in order to generate a new identity for them or at the same time to fuse the local and global to create a new identity that transcends traditional racial and cultural boundaries. Chung and Morran (2008) came to a similar conclusion in their study of the role of Viacom on identity formation amongst children in a global context. They found that new generations of children were developing a third identity (a fusion of the local and global), one that transcends traditional ethnic and cultural boundaries.

The interviewees’ responses show that the soap *Noor* has made them identify themselves with the same religion and culture, while at the same time creating new layers of practice and new networks of relationships by providing some aspects which are similar to the Muslim and traditional Middle Eastern

family. For example, in terms of new practices, a change in lifestyle is evident, as the participants wanted to adopt this modern way of life to their actual lives and lifestyles. The aspiration drawn from the show in terms of a new lifestyle, level of education, social actions (such as marriage or gender roles) and more independence is evident. Moreover, the soap *Noor* is not just challenging ways of thinking or family relationships, but it is also challenging religion in terms of worship and religious practices. For example, Kurdish people observe fasting but never have wine with dinner when they break their fasting, unlike the soap opera's families.

This analysis explains that, as expected, Kurdish women use soap operas as a cultural tool to reformulate and develop their identity and to be more harmonious with the modern world. This show is structured and designed to show interaction with society in a way which represents modern family life. Furthermore, the women interviewed stated that they preferred some other aspects of the show, for example, respect for in-laws and elders, household duties and motherhood, thus suggesting that individuals are always going to be influenced by the positions they hold in their own society, as discussed above.

Through the narrative analysis of the interviewee's description of an ideal woman, it was found that the "traditional ideal" woman was held as a standard by a minority of women, while the "modern ideal" woman, was preferred by the majority as she has modern behaviours such as independence and equal partnerships. The "traditional ideal" women hesitated to follow modern culture because they feared penalisation by their society. Finally, the "transitional ideal" category represents the women who want to negotiate and combine the traditional and the modern ideals. This means that this soap opera has created

a belief of change and the change is towards the modern which either rejects or shifts the traditional notions.

The soaps and television advertisements which were previously broadcast in this region succeeded in generating simple changes, such as the wearing of Western clothes and the introduction of fast-food and more modern lifestyles. Today, the majority of women, especially the young urban women, wear what they feel comfortable in and not just traditional clothes, even at parties and wedding ceremonies, etc. These soaps have created a change in thinking, beliefs, attitudes, familial lifestyles and relationship styles, by even challenging some of the taboos which have been discussed in the previous chapters. Women have changed their views and now prefer the spousal behaviours and relationships represented by the show's characters. However, some attitudes are not allowed in their society – for example equal partnerships do not fit with the traditional and accepted role of the Kurdish husband.

The interview analysis identified that some participants express a desire for the modern values and aspects presented in the show. To illustrate, when talking about themselves, they often criticised their lives; for example, in response to the question “Would you like your children to behave like the characters in this show?” Ashti, a 28-year-old housewife, said:

I would like my daughter to get a high degree in education, not like me to just stay at home, doing housework without any wages.

Interviewee 12, see Appendix.

However, in terms of exposure to foreign soaps, according to the research, the participants were generally heavy viewers and watched several soap operas. At the same time, in response to the question “What is the difference between the

other soaps you are watching and the *Noor* series?” they all preferred to watch *Noor*. It is important to consider that despite the other shows providing some of the things that were lacking in their lives, it is important to note the knowledge and beliefs of the country (out-group) producing the *Noor* show. The cultural proximity of Turkey to the Kurdistan Region has helped viewers to prioritise the watching of *Noor* over other shows; especially as some aspects of their lives are very close to those presented in the Turkish show, i.e. the same religious background. When comparing the two societies, the respondents stated that Turkey is a Muslim and Middle Eastern country, just like their own. Authorities such as Elasmari argue that “if local viewers perceive an imported TV programme to be produced by an out-group, then prior information about that group (knowledge, beliefs, and or attitudes) will influence the manner with which these viewers will process the content of the TV programme” (2003, p. 166).

Furthermore, research studies explain that despite it being gradual, change is occurring and a modern society with an identity and culture which is more “Westernised” is emerging. Butcher, in describing culture change in India, argues that “whether it can be held that contemporary change is towards an identity and culture that is more ‘Westernised’ is what is contested by those who wish to control the direction of change” (2003, p. 267).

In particular, this group of respondents represents the audience of *Noor*. The majority of Kurdish women focused on being more comfortable with Westernisation, with a more modern family structure and relationships: 70% referred to an equal partnership as their favourite aspect of the show, and 65% preferred the independence of women rather than a traditional family life.

This research indicates that the impact of exposure to the foreign media and the show *Noor* has resulted in the hypothesising that the audience will negotiate their identity through a process of globalisation or they will create a hybrid identity that is influenced and affected by global and local forces. As Chung and Morran (2008) argue, the consequences of audience exposure do not necessarily mean a loss of local culture, but the development of a new reality as a result of exposure to foreign programmes in a local context.

Moreover, discussions with the interviewees showed that the impact of international commercial soaps on identity formation produced an ambiguous identity, a new tension, and also a pull between the “local” and “global” women, with local women trying to keep their society’s values by rejecting the adoption of certain features of international television soaps. On the other hand, global women are defined as women who embrace the practices of international soaps by adopting the behaviours of the characters. Women with much more openness to receiving modern and non-traditional information might choose foreign soaps because they are dissimilar from their local culture. However, they may feel torn between a global and local identity, which consecutively may result in the generation of an ambiguous identity that is not in harmony with their local culture.

Conclusion

This study identified a one-way flow of information and cultural products from developed countries into the Kurdistan Region, in the form of modern and contemporary media production technologies. Particularly after the arrival of satellite, the region became immersed in a wider network of change, encouraging people to introduce themselves to globalisation, modernity, a new

lifestyle and a different culture. On the other hand, financial insufficiency, lack of government interest and the inadequate professional knowledge of producers for the production of national television programmes have made the Kurdish audience of this region depend on foreign television programmes. In particular, soaps and entertainment and films have been watched despite this mass media exhibiting contradictory characteristics in relation to the formation of the Kurdish viewers' culture. Whilst they carry modernising currents, at the same time, they also clash with the traditional Kurdish values which results in a cultural shift. Thus, traditional identities and gender roles readily become fluid and volatile.

This region is faced with globalisation as cultural and media imperialism, the tools of Americanisation and Westernisation, produce conflicting effects in the changing relations of power and lifestyles. Kurdish viewers have been unconsciously and automatically influenced by the transnational mass media and television programmes through the main flow of entertainment and popular cultural commerce. This has impacted on Kurdish society and has labelled the political and economic centre of cultural domination and control. This study, of the global commercial television and its impact on the Kurdistan Region through a one-way flow of information, has evidently revealed an outline of media dependency on broadcasting technology and cultural products from the West and the US which are influencing Kurdistan both economically and politically.

Moreover, the one-way flow of information and use of international television programmes without state control, along with the gradual change in lifestyle and with the lack of a coherent Kurdish culture, has resulted in a cultural shift as a consequence of globalisation. Tomlinson (1991) argues that

globalisation leads to the situation where a continually growing number of people share the same “cultural fate”; for example, they are influenced by similar cultural trends that are typical of capitalist modernity. In particular, cultural imperialism has become possible thanks to current achievements in science, technological developments, and the transfer of media and, in fact, as a result of the lack of countries’ ability to resist the worldwide economic and cultural hegemony of the US.

Through global crises and a one-way flow of information, the Kurdistan Region has been affected by global commercial television production. New values, behaviours and habits in this society are replacing the old with a cultural system that has mainly resulted from the development of media and communication technology. Kurdish women have largely been affected by this impact, which has generated an ambiguous identity for them in formatting their identities based on the behaviour of the soaps’ characters and qualities. Despite this gradual change in culture and identity, this impact has led to cultural and spiritual products embodying the ideology of capitalism which are determining and shaping the market, state and culture.

This soap opera is therefore one of the commercial television products that has introduced Kurdish women to the modern world and modern Western way of life. These viewers now realise what is going on outside their country and clearly identify and examine their indigenous culture’s problems and negative aspects; as a result, they are creating multiple identities resulting in them changing towards modernity. Cultural change and imperialism form part of the procedure of globalisation and, of course, may be viewed as the essential part of economic globalisation or as an independent or more important process;

but, in reality, it is a complex combination of socio-economic, political and cultural processes that are intimately interlinked and result in the increase of the US's influence in different spheres of life, including the cultural one.

Furthermore, this study shows that national and domestic dramas and entertainment programmes are rather minor when compared to the increasing impact of Western and foreign soaps. The domestic television channels have produced various entertainment programmes, however most of them have weak themes and ideas. This leads Kurdish viewers, particularly women, to desire foreign soap operas, especially from countries which are close to their own in terms of culture, religion and history. As a result, the Turkish soap operas are currently the most favoured by Kurdish women.

On the other hand, there is a lack of production companies or units, and high production costs for national programmes in general and soap operas in particular. International television has become the main source of Kurdish women's knowledge about social issues. This one-way flow of hardware, software, and television materials has therefore produced different effects on the social and cultural life of Kurdish women, with the formation of self-identity dependent upon these foreign media sources. Younger women are now exposed to greater external stimulation and considerable information saturation; they are now facing tough questions and tough new realities. Some of the questions they are tackling are: whether or not they can adopt and create a new identity, or whether they must maintain their traditional identity; can they situate themselves within the fusion/combination of East and West – traditional and modern – even though their traditional Kurdish identity is opposed to the West? Thus, Kurdish women, their culture and identities are now so ambiguous that

they extend beyond the tension of modernity and tradition. Today, Kurdish culture is being transformed by the new cultural waves of recent modernity, particularly when the majority of participants prefer the Western woman's behaviour, such as independence, self-reliance and females in leading roles as the modern ideal. Thus, Kurdish society is likely to face further cultural integrity threats as international television continues to increase and they remain dependent on this one-way flow of information via satellite mean from the Western, Europe and the US in the form of entertainment programmes, soaps and films.

In this region, the media and international television, influenced by Western values and lifestyles, have in some cases replaced parents, families, peers, schools and religious organisations as primary socialising agents in Kurdish society. As Barbara et al. argue, "in this globalised world, media are the parents and teachers, unfettered by local custom or local control, and influenced by values, lifestyles and points of view from throughout the globe" (2008, p. 6).

When suddenly faced with technological developments and the acceptance of new technologies, it is almost expected for developing countries to become involved in the modern world system. However, the Kurdistan Region, like certain other developing countries, seems to be adopting new communication technologies as ready packages instead of improving the custom of technology according to the desires of their own innovative social and economic environment.

Through the process of information technology, Kurdish women can have an insight into and share the culture of women from different geographical regions. At the same time, the accelerating speed of new information

technology and the international one-way flow of information has created unprecedented problems for women and society at large.

This study found that Kurdish women's identities are strongly influenced by foreign television programmes, where they redefine and identify with what is global via media globalisation. Also, through the influence of global commercial television soaps, women are persuaded every day to incorporate the ideology and identity of certain television characters into their own lives. The effect of this, along with the awareness of trying to adopt a preference for this relationship and attitude, provides them with the space for cultivating new roles and relationships while trying to reshape and restructure their family life and relationships around the soap characters' lives.

The influence of international commercial television soaps on the identity of Kurdish women is now becoming more ambiguous. An ambiguous identity is defined as being tied to a traditional local culture, but one in which Western values such as modern married life, equal partnerships, a leading female role and independence for women, are a privilege. This ambiguous identity is not the same universally. It is informed by locality and tradition, so that a woman in Kurdistan may incorporate different elements than a woman in Turkey or Europe. What is common is that women are viewing modern or Western values and behaviours and incorporating these in a way that is relevant to their traditional values and lifestyles. It is for this reason that their "new identity" is ambiguous. In the end, this ambiguous identity creates a new tension: the pull between the modern women and the local traditional women.

Furthermore, this study shows that the Kurdistan Region, like certain other developing countries, is influenced by Western culture while the national

culture tends to be oppressed, bringing about resistance and conflict. This is often represented by nationalistic or radical behaviours, but these national cultures are incapable of resisting the international impact because of their own countries' economic weakness. In other words, the lack of cultural coherence and cultural loss as a result of globalisation will lead to circumstances where there is a continual production of a new generation that shares the same "cultural fate". For example, they will be influenced by the same cultural trends that are characteristic of capitalist modernity, finally resulting in culture loss.

This conflict between local traditional life and the impact of modern culture explains a notable phenomenon; despite the fact that there is a hegemony as the West and the US extend their cultural impact all over the world by creating the "problem" of Americanisation and Westernisation. This study found that small nations, which lack national media products, are influenced by their neighbours, just as the Kurdistan Region is influenced by its neighbour Turkey. This influence has led to domestic conflict between the local and historical traditions and has had a cultural impact on the local communities.

Thus for future research efforts, it is suggested that focus be placed on the impact on this region of the media from neighbouring Eastern countries and the resulting cultural changes, as well as on establishing statistics for these changes. For instance, in terms of education, this study has discussed that Kurdish women in this region, following exposure to global television and especially after watching the soap opera *Noor* and being introduced to a modern way of life, have turned to study and have tried to obtain higher education qualifications and get jobs. Thus, their thinking is now different from that of their mothers or grandmothers. It should be determined how the women

have turned to study education and whether illiteracy is still as common since the exposure to globalisation. It is also important that any other changes that have occurred, as a result of the impact of watching these foreign programmes, be identified.

In general, this study has discovered that this type of media, in particular the soap opera *Noor*, has affected Kurdish women's lives, their views and their thoughts on many different aspects: firstly, culture in terms of values, religion and attitudes; secondly, their views on stages in their lives, in terms of dependence, independence or interdependence; and, finally, family relationships, in terms of spousal relationships and marriage, which divided them between traditional, modern and transitional views. Future research needs to focus on each aspect separately to clearly discover the stage of these changes and to fully understand the intricacies of the changes, as well as to identify what they have been replaced with; this is particularly important as, discussed above, the traditional Kurdish values have shifted.

This study examined a number of different ages and states; future research could be more focused by investigating restricted or specific age groups, states, or geographical areas. The results of this could indicate whether the differences are dependent on the person, their age and whether they are educated and employed, or whether they are a housewife or illiterate.

Furthermore, it would be interesting to determine the changes affecting youths and the younger generation's behaviours and modes of thinking, as this research was limiting in that it only focused on women.

This study discussed the global commercial media effects in general; however, the genre of the soap opera was chosen for this case study. The

Kurdistan Region does not just import soap operas, it also has international television products, including talk shows and dramas, etc. Thus, future research could focus on the other foreign television products in terms of their impact on culture and identity formation among the Kurdish viewers.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Questions asked to women in Kurdistan Region

Table 4: Questions asked to women in Kurdistan Region

1-	What is your name and age?
2-	Are you married?
3-	If, yes, when did you get married?
4-	How many children do you have?
5-	Are you working?
6-	If yes, what kind of work do you do?
7-	What kind of television programmes do you like?
8-	What channel do you like to watch; do you like Kurdish channels or international channels and why?
9-	When did you start watching satellite television?
10-	How many soap operas do you watch in a week?
11-	What type of behaviour or clothing do you like from the soap characters or commercial programmes?
12-	If you had to choose one show that you preferred what would that show be, and why?
13-	What is the difference between the other soaps you are watching and the <i>Noor</i> series?
14-	Do you ever talk about the soaps with others?
15-	Could you tell me about your favourite soaps?

16-	What aspects or things do you like about the show?
17-	Do you think the characters' behaviours resemble your real life? If yes, how?
18-	How are the soaps like the society you live in? Or, do you think that by watching the soap or any other international television programmes, fashion and lifestyles will change?
19-	Do you think people in this region like to watch more international television than national television? If yes, what type of programmes do they like to watch?
20-	What makes a character preferable to the viewers, or persuades them to follow or adopt her/his attitudes?
21-	Why were you drawn to these particular programmes? Or, what else do you like from international satellite programmes?
22-	Who is your favourite male or female character? Or, who is the best character for you?
23-	Would you like your young children to behave like the characters in this show?
24-	Do you think that you can follow the characters' behaviour or adapt it to your everyday life? If yes, in what ways?
25-	Why do you watch the soaps? Or, why do you choose a Turkish soap opera to watch?
26-	Can you tell me the names of the soap operas which you watch?
27-	Are you happy with the <i>Noor</i> soap opera?
28-	What are the other soap operas you watched, except <i>Noor</i> ?
29-	Do you watch all <i>Noor</i> soap opera episodes?

30-	Do you agree with the way <i>Noor</i> soap opera characters behave?
31-	Are you watching all Turkish soap operas or just <i>Noor</i> ?
32-	When you watch soap operas, do they affect your other activities such as study, housework...?
33-	Did you enjoy the soap opera's language, when translated to Kurdish and Arabic?
34-	Why are you attracted to this Turkish man as you know, regarding Kurdish national issues, most Kurdish people do not like Turkish people?
35-	Do you think this show represents actual Turkish lives or not?
36-	Do you watch soap operas as a way of spending your free time or for getting knowledge about other people's lives?

- 1- Questions translated and used to clarify other question ■
- 2- Questions translated and analysed ■
- 3- Questions not relevant asked to help answer the other questions ■

Appendix 2: Interviewees

Interviewee 1: Layla

Demographics

Age: 39

Marital status: M

Occupation: housewife

No. of children: four

Codes

Question 1 Could you tell me about your favourite soaps?

Answer: Noor and some other Turkish soap operas.

Question 2 Why were you drawn to these particular programmes? Or, what else do you like from international satellite programmes?

Answer: I would like to watch dramas, not a simple drama like Kurdish dramas, because I want to learn from dramas about life outside our society or country, how people live, how they think, how they behave. Not just for laughing or wasting time. I need to learn about the other society's life. And also commercial programmes because we can decide what can be used for our betterment from advertisements.

Question 3 What aspects or things do you like about the shows?

Answer: I love this show because it is about living in peace without fighting and difficulties between the members of the family.

Question 4 What is the difference between the other soaps you are watching and the Noor series?

Answer: Noor seems particularly valuable in shifting attitudes because it offers new content in a family situation, and girls can talk about love and guys in front of their families.

Question 5 Who is your favourite male or female character? Or, who is the best character for you?

Answer: The best male characters are those with positive roles, like the leader's role. Female characters are independent, she has to care for her family and the male character has to be respectful and supportive of his wife in terms of her independence.

Question 6 Would you like your young children to behave like the characters in this show?

Answer: I would like my daughter to have some qualities of the heroine, and follow Noor's behaviour, and also for my son to be a handsome, supportive and attractive husband for his wife like Muhannad.

Question 7 Do you think that you can follow the characters' behaviour or adapt this to your everyday life? If yes, in what ways?

Answer: I would like to follow some aspects of the soaps in my life, such as: live independent, a positive female role, and be a good mother and have a career.

Question 8 Do you think the characters' behaviours resemble your life and your family relationships? If yes, how?

Answer: No, I do not think so, because the characters present an imaginary spousal relationship, without any problems or violence and they show full love, respect and somehow it manages to show a love story without being nasty. It is difficult to find this attitude in real life, as you know men are men and women are women, both have different responsibilities how can they be equal?

Question 9 How many soap operas do you watch in a week?

Answer: Depending on time, some weeks two or four.

Interviewee 2: Soma

Demographics

Age: 38

Marital status: M

Occupation: shop assistant

No. of children: four

Codes

Question 1 Could you tell me about your favourite soaps?

Answer: Noor.

Question 2 Why were you drawn to these particular programmes? Or, what else do you like from international satellite programmes?

Answer: *I like this show because it gives us another way of life, modern life and women's lives in other societies. We do not have anything like this soap in Kurdish television programmes.*

Question 3 What aspects or things do you like about the shows?

Answer: *I like the qualities of this show, such as: equal partnerships, modern married life and a positive role for women, attention from the husband to his wife and it gives power to women inside Muslim families, in the future.*

Question 4 What is the difference between the other soaps you are watching and the *Noor* series?

Answer: *Noor seems particularly effective in changing attitudes because it provides new information in a familiar setting: Turkey is a Muslim country which welcomes stronger viewer identification than Western TV imports.*

Question 5 Who is your favourite male or female character? Or, who is the best character for you?

Answer: I think the attractive female character needs to be someone who is self-reliant, independent and the male needs to support his wife to be independent.

Question 6 Would you like your young children to behave like the characters in this show?

Answer: Of course I would like my daughter to behave like this show's female character who has independence and power, not like me. I would also like my son to be like Muhannad who is attractive and supports his wife by caring for her.

Question 7 Do you think that you can follow the characters' behaviour or adapt this to your everyday life? If yes, in what ways?

Answer: I do not think so, how can we be independent while we live in this male dominated society, where the men have the final word on every thought and decision?

Question 8 Do you think the characters' behaviours resemble your life and your family relationships? If yes, how?

Answer: If we look at this show, we can find large differences that are strange to our life; for example, they have a drink with dinner and sex outside marriage. Muhannad, while faithful to Noor, had a child with a former girlfriend, and the abortion issue is also raised.

Question 9 How many soap operas do you watch in a week?

Answer: At least three.

Interviewee 3: Shanaz

Demographics

Age: 40

Marital status: M

Occupation: housewife

No. of children: five

Codes

Question 1 Could you tell me about your favourite soaps?

Answer: I watched some soaps, like American or Mexican ones, but after I watched Noor I found it was my favourite.

Question 2 Why were you drawn to these particular programmes? Or, what else do you like from international satellite programmes?

Answer: I am interested in this show because it is closer to our life and our family relationships, and they practice some aspects of the Muslim faith that are required in the same way.

Question 3 What aspects or things do you like about the shows?

Answer: I like this show because it talks about some family issues, and is centred on family life and problems and it provides respect for family life. Thus, it includes some similarities with our family life.

Question 4 What is the difference between the other soaps you are watching and the Noor series?

Answer: This show is different from Arabic or Kurdish soaps as they do not encourage women to work outside the home, and this show centres on some problems which are in our lives. This show encourages women to be good mothers for their kids and have a job outside the home.

Question 5 Who is your favourite male or female character? Or, who is the best character for you?

Answer: My favourite female character in this show is the grandmother who very much loves her grandson and granddaughter, and all the family members respect her. As for the males, it is the grandfather who arranged the marriage for his son as he has the final word inside the family.

Question 6 Would you like your young children to behave like the characters in this show?

Answer: I do not want my daughter or my son to behave like the show's characters because their attitudes are not acceptable in our society; I prefer to follow our traditional family life and norms.

Question 7 Do you think that you can follow the characters' behaviour or adapt this to your everyday life? If yes, in what ways?

Answer: I think I can apply some things to my life, for example the family's respect and care of their children and respect for the elders, but other behaviours are not appropriate.

Question 8 Do you think the characters' behaviours resemble your life and your family relationships? If yes, how?

Answer: Not really, this show presents an unrealistic image of Muslim family life.

Question 9 How many soap operas do you watch in a week?

Answer: No less than three.

Interviewee 4: Rozhgar

Demographics

Age: 40

Marital status: M

Occupation: housewife

No. of children: five

Codes

Question 1 Could you tell me about your favourite soaps?

Answer: I like soaps in general, Iranian and Western ones, but my favourite is Noor.

Question 2 Why were you drawn to these particular programmes? Or, what else do you like from international satellite programmes?

Answer: I like this show, because unlike other foreign soaps it is about the Islamic religion and traditional family life in some ways. I do not like other programmes because my family do not allow me to adopt such Western ideas, like the style of clothing which symbolises freedom and authority for women from control.

Question 3 What aspects or things do you like about the shows?

Answer: This show represents a Muslim family, I like it because they are fasting during Ramadan, and it is about family issues.

Question 4 What is the difference between the other soaps you are watching and the Noor series?

Answer: I like this show because unlike Western soaps, it is talking about some issues close to our society.

Question 5 Who is your favourite male or female character? Or, who is the best character for you?

Answer: I like the female character, being a good mother and taking care of the children and obeying her husband, and I like the grandfather in this show who has the final word in the family and every one respects him.

Question 6 Would you like your young children to behave like the characters in this show?

Answer: I would like my daughter to adopt the female character's ways, such as respect for everyone and wanting the best for the family and also for my son to be a strong man who has respect and the final word in the family.

Question 7 Do you think that you can follow the characters' behaviours or adapt this to your everyday life? If yes, in what ways?

Answer: Not really.

Question 8 Do you think the characters' behaviours resemble your life and your family relationships? If yes, how?

Answer: With respect to the family and the mother's role; I got married to my husband by arranged marriage by our grandfather, like Muhannad and Noor.

Question 9 How many soap operas do you watch in a week?

Answer: About three to five.

Interviewee 5: Rahma

Demographics

Age: 18

Marital status: M

Occupation: university student

No. of children: 0

Codes

Question 1 Could you tell me about your favourite soaps?

***Answer:** Turkish soaps in general and Noor in particular.*

Question 2 Why were you drawn to these particular programmes? Or, what else do you like from international satellite programmes?

***Answer:** I like this programme, and any other Western programmes, because they are about modern life, they teach us how to be a modern society or modern person, or how modern men and women should behave. Not like our traditional life, where the woman has no independence, or is not allowed to be a leader or to do business.*

Question 3 What aspects or things do you like about the shows?

***Answer:** I like love, romance and independence for females, equal partnerships and a Western style of life.*

Question 4 What is the difference between the other soaps you are watching and the Noor series?

***Answer:** I like this programme, and any other Western programmes, because they are about modern life, they teach us how to be a modern society or modern person, or how modern men and woman should behave. Not like our traditional life, where women are not independent, or are not allowed to be leaders or conduct business.*

Question 5 Who is your favourite male or female character? Or, who is the best character for you?

Answer: The good woman is someone who can fight for her independence, rights and self-reliance. I like the male character who treats his wife as an equal partner.

Question 6 Would you like your young children to behave like the characters in this show?

Answer: I do not have a son or a daughter. If I marry and have children, I would prefer them to live a modern life.

Question 7 Do you think that you can follow the characters' behaviours or adapt this to your everyday life? If yes, in what ways?

Answer: Of course I will attempt, after I graduate, to get a professional career and be an independent woman like Noor.

Question 8 Do you think the characters' behaviours resemble your life and your family relationships? If yes, how?

Answer: I find some things which are close to my real life. For example, a young girl whose father or mother plans on marrying her to a man she is unhappy with and whom she does not want to marry as she is in love with another man, is often the norm in Kurdish traditional society.

Question 9 How many soap operas do you watch in a week?

Answer: Normally three to four.

Interviewee 6: Roza

Demographics

Age: 30

Marital status: M

Occupation: teacher

No. of children: one

Codes

Question 1 Could you tell me about your favourite soaps?

Answer: I prefer Noor among all I have watched.

Question 2 Why were you drawn to these particular programmes? Or, what else do you like from international satellite programmes?

Answer: I like modern life, I like to know how the women outside our society live, behave and think. Particularly the advertisements and commercial breaks that occur every 15 or 20 minutes during the broadcasting of this show, they show us what the new fashions, make up, furniture and what people in other countries are wearing.

Question 3 What aspects or things do you like about the shows?

Answer: The content of this show is very useful because it encourages us to protect the traditional family life along with modernity, such as equal partnerships or females taking a lead role.

Question 4 What is the difference between the other soaps you are watching and the *Noor* series?

Answer: I like this show because it created the case of a female character who is a strong independent individual, a high-level administration worker, yet is also a good mother and a wife, and obeys her husband.

Question 5 Who is your favourite male or female character? Or, who is the best character for you?

Answer: I like this show because it created the case of a female character who is a strong independent individual, a high-level administration worker, yet is also a good mother and a wife, and obeys her husband.

Question 6 Would you like your young children to behave like the characters in this show?

Answer: I would like my daughter to have independence and at the same time respect her in-laws and, for my son, I would like him to be like Muhannad, he is handsome, romantic and takes care of his wife.

Question 7 Do you think that you can follow the characters' behaviours or adapt this to your everyday life? If yes, in what ways?

Answer: I think some things are unrealistic in comparison with normal life, but this show offers new content in a familiar setting, of some things around the family like good relationships between the two spouses, respect towards each other, which I try to apply to my life.

Question 8 Do you think the characters' behaviours resemble your life and your family relationships? If yes, how?

Answer: Not really, despite the aspects which represent family life.

Question 9 How many soap operas do you watch in a week?

Answer: Between four and six.

Interviewee 7: Dlnia

Demographics

Age: 20

Marital status: S

Occupation: university student

No. of children: 0

Codes

Question 1 Could you tell me about your favourite soaps?

Answer: *Noor soap opera.*

Question 2 Why were you drawn to these particular programmes? Or, what else do you like from international satellite programmes?

Answer: *Every time when I watch a new foreign drama, I learn some things which I did not hear or see before. So, from this show Noor, I learn some things which are not allowed in our society. I feel pleasure when I see the practices of someone else, especially advertisements, because they help us to choose what products to buy and how to behave and act. Despite this, some traditional Kurdish values remain significant, the international satellite has changed the content of Kurdish television as well, Kurdish television is full of stories of teenagers who have fallen in love but are too scared to tell their parents, or parents who cannot deal with their children having boyfriends or girlfriends.*

Question 3 What aspects or things do you like about the shows?

Answer: *I can learn some things from the show, because it gives us some things which are absent in our spousal life such as love, tenderness, romance and a husband who allows us to be independent.*

Question 4 What is the difference between the other soaps you are watching and the *Noor* series?

Answer: *The TV shows tell romantic stories that suit us. In Noor, the characters present Westernised lives but with Muslim values. Viewers who were used to watching the Mexican series realised that Noor was closer to their concerns.*

Question 5 Who is your favourite male or female character? Or, who is the best character for you?

Answer: *My favourite female character in this show is Noor, a professional fashion designer and modern idealised woman who not only thinks about family life, and the male is someone who believes in equal partnerships and independence of his wife.*

Question 6 Would you like your young children to behave like the characters in this show?

Answer: *I've not thought about this yet.*

Question 7 Do you think that you can follow the characters' behaviours or adapt this to your everyday life? If yes, in what ways?

Answer *I would like to have independence in my income and not depend on my family or husband in life; I would like to have a professional career.*

Question 8 Do you think the characters' behaviours resemble your life and your family relationships? If yes, how?

Answer: *I think some characters' behaviours resemble with my life; for example, the young girl who is also in university or just graduated and has most of her scenes taking place at home or going to work. She is a young girl who is "eye-candy" for the central character, young man wanting to marry her.*

Question 9 How many soap operas do you watch in a week?

Answer: *At least four.*

Interviewee 8: Roshna

Demographics

Age: 40

Marital status: M

Occupation: housewife

No. of children: four

Codes

Question 1 Could you tell me about your favourite soaps?

Answer: Of course Noor.

Question 2 Why were you drawn to these particular programmes? Or, what else do you like from international satellite programmes?

Answer: I like this show because it is about family life, especially how wealthy families live in peace and can solve everything with money: luxuries, nice furnishings and wealthier classes of women.

Question 3 What aspects or things do you like about the shows?

Answer: I like this show because it includes family life, which in some aspects is close with our life.

Question 4 What is the difference between the other soaps you are watching and the *Noor* series?

Answer: This show includes some things which are close to our life, or family life, such as: divorce, arranged marriages, fasting in Ramadan and respect to elder members of the family.

Question 5 Who is your favourite male or female character? Or, who is the best character for you?

Answer: *I prefer the female character who is a good woman, and the male who is a faithful husband to his wife.*

Question 6 Would you like your young children to behave like the characters in this show?

Answer: *Of course I would like my daughter to behave like the heroine who is a good mother for her kids and respects her in laws, and also, I would like my son to be a good husband for his wife.*

Question 7 Do you think that you can follow the characters' behaviour or adapt this to your everyday life? If yes, in what ways?

Answer: *I do not know.*

Question 8 Do you think the characters' behaviours resemble your life and your family relationships? If yes, how?

Answer: *Yes, I think Noor resembles my life: in this show, Muhannad is forced to marry Noor by his grandfather. The soap opera traces the hardships Noor must go throughout to win her husband's heart. I cried when I saw this because this is like my life.*

Question 9 How many soap operas do you watch in a week?

Answer: *Actually I watch about four or five.*

Interviewee 9: Asia

Demographics

Age: 30

Marital status: M

Occupation: engineer

No. of children: two

Codes

Question 1 Could you tell me about your favourite soaps?

Answer: I have watched several soaps, but I found Turkish soaps, especially Noor, to be my favourite show.

Question 2 Why were you drawn to these particular programmes? Or, what else do you like from international satellite programmes?

Answer: I like watching these soaps because through such dramas or films we learn about Western, modern life, the achievement of which is the dream of many people like me. By watching the Western channels and advertisements they help women to adopt and wear Western clothing and the new fashions.

Question 3 What aspects or things do you like about the shows?

Answer: Modern married life, equal partnerships, supportive partners to independent woman, positive roles and a peaceful life for the family.

Question 4 What is the difference between the other soaps you are watching and the Noor series?

Answer: This is the first time that a Middle Eastern soap opera provides a positive modern role for Turkish women in a Muslim country, inviting stronger viewer attention than the Western TV imports.

Question 5 Who is your favourite male or female character? Or, who is the best character for you?

***Answer:** My favourite female character is Noor, who is a beautiful woman, independent and self-reliant as a professional fashion designer. Also, my favourite male character in this soap is Muhannad, he is Muslim and a faithful husband, obedient to his grandfather in his marriage process and at the same time romantic and helpful to his wife Noor, by being loving, supportive of her independence and practicing an equal partnership.*

Question 6 Would you like your young children to behave like the characters in this show?

***Answer:** I would like my daughter and my son to behave similarly to modern spousal life, such as we see in this show. With a professional career, financial independence, a woman who has both house and career duties and has her own income, not asking her husband to give her money like most of the Kurdish women do and traditionally when they do not obey their husbands, women without these things face a potential penalty of a denial of money and support.*

Question 7 Do you think that you can follow the characters' behaviour or adapt this to your everyday life? If yes, in what ways?

***Answer:** I want a romantic husband who treats me like the Muhannad character treats his wife. Sometimes, he brings her flowers and tells her romantic words. I think life would be a pleasure if a husband treated his wife like that.*

Question 8 Do you think the characters' behaviours resemble your life and your family relationships? If yes, how?

***Answer:** In same way yes.*

Question 9 How many soap operas do you watch in a week?

***Answer:** No less than three.*

Interviewee 10: Shirin

Demographics

Age: 25

Marital status: M

Occupation: employer

No. of children: one

Codes

Question 1 Could you tell me about your favourite soaps?

***Answer:** Noor and the soaps which are about family issues.*

Question 2 Why were you drawn to these particular programmes? Or, what else do you like from international satellite programmes?

***Answer:** Our country is changed: we have opened towards the world and we need to adopt or learn the new life from different societies. The Kurdish dramas do not tell us a different way of life; they represent our society, nothing new. Today, through international or national satellites, we see a variety of programmes. You can learn how to behave and act from such things they show.*

Question 3 What aspects or things do you like about the shows?

***Answer:** A modern married life with equal partnerships, and respect inside a big family, where the elders have the final word.*

Question 4 What is the difference between the other soaps you are watching and the *Noor* series?

***Answer:** Noor creates an idealised portrayal of modern married life as equal partnerships – clashing with the norm of usual Middle Eastern societies, where elders often have the final word on whom a woman must marry and many are still confined to the role of wife and mother. So, this soap opera is different from the soaps which we have watched before.*

Question 5 Who is your favourite male or female character? Or, who is the best character for you?

Answer: The attractive female character is a strong female character, the leading female character is an independent, aspiring fashion designer, and also, the male is a handsome, attractive and supportive partner to his independent wife.

Question 6 Would you like your young children to behave like the characters in this show?

Answer: I would like my daughter to follow the role model of Noor, who is a good mother with a professional career. As for my son, I would like his to be like Muhannad, to believe in equal partnerships.

Question 7 Do you think that you can follow the characters' behaviour or adapt this to your everyday life? If yes, in what ways?

Answer: In this show, I can learn some modern treatments and behaviours from between the wife and husband, and apply them to my life.

Question 8 Do you think the characters' behaviours resemble your life and your family relationships? If yes, how?

Answer: In some aspects I can say yes, for example I am an employer like the female character, and live inside a big family with respect. But, I cannot compare our life with the female character, who is self-reliant, independent, and has an equal partnership; we live in a male-dominated society and we need to fight to change this situation.

Question 9 How many soap operas do you watch in a week?

Answer: About four.

Interviewee 11: Deman

Demographics

Age: 20

Marital status: M

Occupation: housewife

No. of children: 0

Codes

Question 1 Could you tell me about your favourite soaps?

Answer: I like soaps among other TV programmes, but I like Noor's character and behaviour.

Question 2 Why were you drawn to these particular programmes? Or, what else do you like from international satellite programmes?

Answer: I like to know what woman do in the Western world, such as wearing clothes, hair styles, dress styles and make up. We also watch television advertisements for all kinds of products, such as make up and clothes. Because of advertising, I am conscious of the quality and prices of goods.

Question 3 What aspects or things do you like about the shows?

Answer: I just watch this show for the female character's clothes and make up styles. I do not like its quality, sometimes, I watch it just to pass the time and escape from a stifling, love-less marriage. I do not like its quality and characters attitude though.

Question 4 What is the difference between the other soaps you are watching and the Noor series?

Answer: I watch several different soaps because I spend all my time at home and they help me to pass the time. I think this soap is different from others; it is close to our life and culture. Not like the

American or Mexican soap operas broadcasted here; it is about a Muslim family living in a Muslim country but they live differently I think this soap is different from others; but, it is close to our life and culture.

Question 5 Who is your favourite male or female character? Or, who is the best character for you?

***Answer:** I like Noor's behaviour because she is very beautiful, and her clothes are very nice; also I like Muhannad because he is handsome, good looking and attractive, and because of his love and the way he treats his wife.*

Question 6 Would you like your young children to behave like the characters in this show?

***Answer:** I do not have children and I have not thought about this.*

Question 7 Do you think that you can follow the characters' behaviour or adapt this to your everyday life? If yes, in what ways?

***Answer:** Not really because you know the nature of our society, it does not change. If one girl falls in love with a guy, as you know, her family may kill her. So, I love my cousin, but I cannot talk about it because I think my family would kill me.*

Question 8 Do you think the characters' behaviours resemble your life and your family relationships? If yes, how?

***Answer:** No, we have a big gap between us and the show's life. For example: we do things in our lives like those shown in Noor, but we don't talk about them, so many girls get pregnant and they have abortions, but we cannot talk about it. When we watch this on TV, it's such that we see something that we cannot usually watch or discuss. It provides us a chance to breathe.*

Question 9 How many soap operas do you watch in a week?

***Answer:** Some week about three or four.*

Interviewee 12: Ashti

Demographics

Age: 28

Marital status: M

Occupation: housewife

No. of children: two

Codes

Question 1 Could you tell me about your favourite soaps?

Answer: Of course Noor, now it is near to the end of the soap I hope I start watching from the beginning.

Question 2 Why were you drawn to these particular programmes? Or, what else do you like from international satellite programmes?

Answer: I watch this soap because I would like to do something, but our society does not allow us. So, we feel pleasure when we see someone else behaving how we would like to. I especially like to see advertisements, however we cannot afford to buy many of the things that are shown.

Question 3 What aspects or things do you like about the shows?

Answer: Muhannad and Noor had their marriage arranged; respect is shown to elders; and, the family all live together in one house.

Question 4 What is the difference between the other soaps you are watching and the *Noor* series?

Answer: The success of Noor shows that Middle Eastern Muslim viewers want to follow a modern Islam rather than the more traditional style that we see in other regions of the Middle East.

Question 5 Who is your favourite male or female character? Or, who is the best character for you?

Answer: *I like the respectful woman, independent and the handsome supportive husband to his independent wife.*

Question 6 Would you like your young children to behave like the characters in this show?

Answer: *I would like my daughter to get a high degree in education, not like me to just stay at home doing housework without any wages and I would like her to marry a handsome man like Muhannad who treats his wife in a modern way.*

Question 7 Do you think that you can follow the characters' behaviour or adapt this to your everyday life? If yes, in what ways?

Answer: *Every time I watch the series of this show, I try to adopt some things for my life; for example I wish once my husband would treat me with kindness like Muhannad treats his wife, but most of the time I get difficulties because our culture does not accept this behaviour.*

Question 8 Do you think the characters' behaviours resemble your life and your family relationships? If yes, how?

Answer: *No, because you know this is TV, not real life. However, we can find some differences in comparing our lives with soap operas. For example: abortion and love, we just don't talk about them like the girls do with their parents in this show, even though many girls in Kurdish families fall in love.*

Question 9 How many soap operas do you watch in a week?

Answer: *Depends of my spare time, normally about three to four.*

Interviewee 13: Shawbo

Demographics

Age: 38

Marital status: M

Occupation: employer

No. of children: three

Codes

Question 1 Could you tell me about your favourite soaps?

Answer: I watch several different soaps, but Noor is my favourite.

Question 2 Why were you drawn to these particular programmes? Or, what else do you like from international satellite programmes?

Answer: I like to watch every soap however I haven't any free time. For me and my family, watching television is their chief leisure activity. We find out about goods from the television and want to use products that we see advertised.

Question 3 What aspects or things do you like about the shows?

Answer: The modern married life and equal partnership which the shows portray.

Question 4 What is the difference between the other soaps you are watching and the Noor series?

Answer: Noor's male hero has been stealing hearts across the Middle East, because he appeals to female viewers. He is romantic and attentive to his wife, Noor, and supportive of her independence and ambitions.

Question 5 Who is your favourite male or female character? Or, who is the best character for you?

Answer: *I prefer a woman who can talk about her love, relationships outside the home and is independent, and a husband that treats his wife with romance, love and as an equal partner.*

Question 6 Would you like your young children to behave like the characters in this show?

Answer: *I would like my daughter and my son to behave like these modern characters and have equal relationships, but I do not think they can do so in this society, if I allow them the society does not, because you know if the girl falls in love with a boy then society blames her and she may face violence.*

Question 7 Do you think that you can follow the characters' behaviour or adapt this to your everyday life? If yes, in what ways?

Answer: *I would like to adopt some things to my life, for example I always ask my husband to treat me like Muhannad treats his wife Noor, but he does not agree. In addition, he cannot because he grew up in a society where the man has to treat his wife in hardship, because in this society this is the symbol of the strong man.*

Question 8 Do you think the characters' behaviours resemble your life and your family relationships? If yes, how?

Answer: *In reality no. This soap, however, presents strong characters and positive roles with independence for women. At the same time, it tackles some family issues which are close to our life, which cannot be found in most of the Western soaps.*

Question 9 How many soap operas do you watch in a week?

Answer: *Normally three.*

Interviewee 14: Dwnia

Demographics

Age: 28

Marital status: M

Occupation: university student

No. of children: three

Codes

Question 1 Could you tell me about your favourite soaps?

Answer: I like realistic soaps that represent actual life.

Question 2 Why were you drawn to these particular programmes? Or, what else do you like from international satellite programmes?

Answer: I don't just watch this soap, but I like to watch every foreign soap, especially Western soaps, because I would like my society to change to be modern. So, I think this programme and any other foreign film or talk show can change our society.

Question 3 What aspects or things do you like about the shows?

Answer: Actually I do not like some aspect of this show. For example, this show is about an upper class, rich family in Turkey, dream-like setting with beautiful locations, luxury houses and characters wearing the most expensive designer clothes. As a woman, I do not have a vision to gain those things; I would like to be a woman who has self-identification with the leading role and a professional career, independent, and not having to ask her husband for everything, so strong and self-trusting. Such as Noor's character in this show, she wants him to leave her alone, she wants to work and doesn't want anything from him. This means any woman who separates her husband can work and become self-reliant. She has housework responsibilities and a professional career.

Question 4 What is the difference between the other soaps you are watching and the *Noor* series?

Answer: *I think in this show there were no conflicts between our traditional and modern lives. While it gives us some things which are lacking in our life, for example equal partnerships, love, romance and supportive partners, they have big families with respect to the elders, they fast during Ramadan and Muhannad, while remaining faithful to Noor, had a child with a former girlfriend; and, a cousin undergoes an abortion.*

Question 5 Who is your favourite male or female character? Or, who is the best character for you?

Answer: *Intellectual woman, independent, professional career and handsome, faithful husband like Muhannad.*

Question 6 Would you like your young children to behave like the characters in this show?

Answer: *I would like my daughter to behave like the female character Noor, to get an education, depend on herself, not to ask her husband to give her money, and have the right to make decisions about her life and future, with a supportive husband who is good looking like Muhannad.*

Question 7 Do you think that you can follow the characters' behaviour or adapt this to your everyday life? If yes, in what ways?

Answer: *Maybe because it is an Eastern show, not Western, so it provides the women and girls in the Middle East with the sensation that things may occur that way, and it could be real and possible with our own traditions.*

Question 8 Do you think the characters' behaviours resemble your life and your family relationships? If yes, how?

Answer: *Yes, I can identify myself with some qualities in this show. For example, I live in a big family, my grandfather is like the grandfather, Fikhryin, in the show who looks after the whole family, decides*

everything and solves all the issues and problems. Everyone respects him and the final word is his.

Question 9 *How many soap operas do you watch in a week?*

Answer: *At least four.*

Interviewee 15: Nashmil

Demographics

Age: 39

Marital status: M

Occupation: housewife

No. of children: four

Codes

Question 1 Could you tell me about your favourite soaps?

Answer: Noor and other new Turkish soaps.

Question 2 Why were you drawn to these particular programmes? Or, what else do you like from international satellite programmes?

Answer: I like life with love, so, this soap presents love inside family life which we rarely find in our family life. Also, the commercial programmes from the satellite because these commercials are often attractive and our family turns on the television before a programme starts so that we can watch the commercials.

Question 3 What aspects or things do you like about the shows?

Answer: This show presents a sense of romance and love, so I like it in this aspect, especially in the family life because family is everything for women.

Question 4 What is the difference between the other soaps you are watching and the *Noor* series?

Answer: This show tackles family issues such as marriage, divorce, abortion, but we can say that Noor seems particularly effective in changing attitudes because it offers new content in a familiar setting: Turkey is a Muslim country, inviting stronger viewer identification than Western TV imports.

Question 5 Who is your favourite male or female character? Or, who is the best character for you?

Answer: My favourite female character is Noor because she is very faithful towards her family and respects their elder family members; she must go through many hardships to win her husband's heart, because I think family responsibility is everything for women and it is the main role for her.

Question 6 Would you like your young children to behave like the characters in this show?

Answer: My daughter does not have to think about only herself, but should also think about her family and take care for her family. Also, my son has to be a faithful and good husband to his wife.

Question 7 Do you think that you can follow the characters' behaviour or adapt this to your everyday life? If yes, in what ways?

Answer: Not really, just maybe in some aspects like family life.

Question 8 Do you think the characters' behaviours resemble your life and your family relationships? If yes, how?

Answer: Sometimes I think I find resemblances with my life; for example, living with a big family and respect to elder members. Also, I got married by an arranged marriage like Muhannad and Noor.

Question 9 How many soap operas do you watch in a week?

Answer: two, three or sometimes four.

Interviewee 16: Narmin

Demographics

Age: 30

Marital status: M

Occupation: teacher

No. of children: three

Codes

Question 1 Could you tell me about your favourite soaps?

***Answer:** I have watched American and Western soaps, but now I realise (Noor) this is my favourite and much more close to us.*

Question 2 Why were you drawn to these particular programmes? Or, what else do you like from international satellite programmes?

***Answer:** I like other programmes like this which present women's lives. Also, we see the advertisements on television and we can try to search out what is high-quality from the advertisements.*

Question 3 What aspects or things do you like about the shows?

***Answer:** I live in a patriarchal society in which we have a big gap between wife and husband and love-less marriages, so I would like love, romance stories and independence, and equal partnerships. I also like love and romance stories.*

Question 4 What is the difference between the other soaps you are watching and the Noor series?

***Answer:** The qualities of this show include family issues and air only during the Muslim fasting period. Noor will have to compete with dozens of Arab-language soap operas which are easy to understand.*

Question 5 Who is your favourite male or female character? Or, who is the best character for you?

Answer: The woman has to be given priority to her family, she is someone who is independent and successful, and the man treats his wife with romance and love.

Question 6 Would you like your young children to behave like the characters in this show?

Answer: I would like them to, but they cannot because we live in a traditional and patriarchal society; they do not agree, for example, in this show and that the girl or female characters can talk about the guy in front of their family. But, if a girl in society talks about her boyfriend, you know her family kills her.

Question 7 Do you think that you can follow the characters' behaviour or adapt this to your everyday life? If yes, in what ways?

Answer: Watching this show helps us find a modern way for our married life and it solves some problems, however it is difficult. For example, every time I would like to treat my husband as the characters in the show treat each other, I fail because society does not allow this.

Question 8 Do you think the characters' behaviours resemble your life and your family relationships? If yes, how?

Answer: Not really, because you know this is TV, the TV always exaggerates and portrays imaginary life, not the same as real life.

Question 9 How many soap operas do you watch in a week?

Answer: Depends to my time, normally about two to three.

Interviewee 17: Bahar

Demographics

Age: 24

Marital status: M

Occupation: housewife

No. of children: one

Codes

Question 1 Could you tell me about your favourite soaps?

Answer: I watch the soaps to pass the time, but the Noor soaps I enjoy very much.

Question 2 Why were you drawn to these particular programmes? Or, what else do you like from international satellite programmes?

Answer: I just watch TV to past the time. This type of programme helps me to waste my time at home. Particularly the programmes which advertise Western clothes, as you see there is a dramatic change in old fashion wearing clothes, the old fashions and special Kurdish clothes are considered only for special occasions.

Question 3 What aspects or things do you like about the shows?

Answer: I always watch soaps to pass the time and gossip, and I enjoy stories with romance and love.

Question 4 What is the difference between the other soaps you are watching and the Noor series?

Answer: This is the first Middle-Eastern soap which gives us something that we are missing in our life, such as romance, love and equal partnerships. I watch too many soaps especially Iranian ones, but prefer the Turkish rather than the Iranian ones.

Question 5 Who is your favourite male or female character? Or, who is the best character for you?

Answer: *I like Noor who is respectful and faithful to her big family and tries to attract all her family hearts, I do not like the person who wants to live alone not involved with a big family. I am not interested in any of the male characters.*

Question 6 Would you like your young children to behave like the characters in this show?

Answer: *I do not know now, because I just have a small baby, not thinking about future at the moment.*

Question 7 Do you think that you can follow the characters' behaviour or adapt this to your everyday life? If yes, in what ways?

Answer: *Some qualities of the show can apply to our life, especially the qualities which deal with family life and problems, but not all things. I can say some similar things are found between our social cultures and soap cultures, in this way I can apply some of them to my life.*

Question 8 Do you think the characters' behaviours resemble your life and your family relationships? If yes, how?

Answer: *Not really cannot find any resemble just may be living in a big family.*

Question 9 How many soap operas do you watch in a week?

Answer: *Normally about two to three.*

Interviewee 18: Eman

Demographics

Age: 20

Marital status: S

Occupation: unemployed

No. of children: 0

Codes

Question 1 Could you tell me about your favourite soaps?

Answer: Turkish soaps, particularly Noor.

Question 2 Why were you drawn to these particular programmes? Or, what else do you like from international satellite programmes?

Answer: I like the programmes that are different from our television programmes. And also I like those programmes which are broadcasted by international satellite or national satellite in the Western style. Especially where the woman's behaviour in our society is variant to the accepted norms. The commercial depicts an inversion of norms as the woman had control over the fielder.

Question 3 What aspects or things do you like about the shows?

Answer: I like love stories, romance and equal partnerships, and handsome and good-looking men.

Question 4 What is the difference between the other soaps you are watching and the Noor series?

Answer: This soap is close to our culture and talks about the romance and love relationships inside the Muslim family, including fasting during Ramadan.

Question 5 Who is your favourite male or female character? Or, who is the best character for you?

Answer: I like beautiful and Western characters, wearing new fashionable clothes, like Noor, and modern handsome men, like Muhannad.

Question 6 Would you like your young children to behave like the characters in this show?

Answer: I do not know, because I am not married yet.

Question 7 Do you think that you can follow the characters' behaviour or adapt this to your everyday life? If yes, in what ways?

Answer: I think it is difficult.

Question 8 Do you think the characters' behaviours resemble your life and your family relationships? If yes, how?

Answer: I like the young girl's role whose father and mother plan on marrying her off to someone she doesn't want to marry. I cried because it seems like me.

Question 9 How many soap operas do you watch in a week?

Answer: Nearly three or four.

Interviewee 19: Gashaw

Demographics

Age: 40

Marital status: M

Occupation: engineer

No. of children: three

Codes

Question 1 Could you tell me about your favourite soaps?

Answer: Noor among other soaps which I watch.

Question 2 Why were you drawn to these particular programmes? Or, what else do you like from international satellite programmes?

Answer: I like the films that change our traditional life; her man has the final word in everything. As we see in the singing and dancing on commercial television, it uses Kurdish dancing which people associate with traditional Kurdish values and mixes this with non-traditional behaviours, such as wearing a short dress and singing in a Western style.

Question 3 What aspects or things do you like about the shows?

Answer: This show teaches men how to treat women in a modern way with romance and love.

Question 4 What is the difference between the other soaps you are watching and the *Noor* series?

Answer: I watch some different soaps like American, Mexican and Iranian soaps, but I have never enjoyed them like this soap, because it gives us things that are lacking in our lives: romance, love, tenderness and a faithful, supportive partner to his independent wife.

Question 5 Who is your favourite male or female character? Or, who is the best character for you?

Answer: In my opinion, the best female character is an ideal woman who has great care and respect to her family and has faith to her family. The best male character is someone who treats his wife as an equal partner.

Question 6 Would you like your young children to behave like the characters in this show?

Answer: Not exactly because now they face a problem with society if my children want to follow the characters' behaviour completely, but in some way I encourage them, such as respect, good relationship etc.

Question 7 Do you think that you can follow the characters' behaviour or adapt this to your everyday life? If yes, in what ways?

Answer: I think some things that this show portrays are unrealistic because we live in the real life; you know the real life includes both pleasure and un-pleasure, not like this show where everything goes around comfortable, love, romance and without any problems.

Question 8 Do you think the characters' behaviours resemble your life and your family relationships? If yes, how?

Answer: In some ways yes; for example, I have a career and a little independence, and I live in a big family with respect, and also I got married by arranged marriage.

Question 9 How many soap operas do you watch in a week?

Answer: Depends of my spare time, some weeks I watch nearly four.

Interviewee 20: Sarah

Demographics

Age: 36

Marital status: M

Occupation: housewife

No. of children: three

Codes

Question 1 Could you tell me about your favourite soaps?

Answer: I would like to watch different types of drama, but I prefer Noor.

Question 2 Why were you drawn to these particular programmes? Or, what else do you like from international satellite programmes?

Answer: I like any films or dramas about family life. I do not watch or like international programmes which change out traditional life and behaviours. I like to keep my traditional life.

Question 3 What aspects or things do you like about the shows?

Answer: I like this show because it teaches us how we should treat each other inside family life.

Question 4 What is the difference between the other soaps you are watching and the *Noor* series?

Answer: I have found some qualities of this show which are close to our life, such as family issues, religion, respect elders and big families.

Question 5 Who is your favourite male or female character? Or, who is the best character for you?

Answer: *My favourite male in this show is Muhannad's grandfather who loves his grandson and granddaughter, and everyone respects him. Also, I prefer Noor's behaviour and attitudes.*

Question 6 Would you like your young children to behave like the characters in this show?

Answer: *No, because the society does not allow them.*

Question 7 Do you think that you can follow the characters' behaviour or adapt this to your everyday life? If yes, in what ways?

Answer: *In some way, for example, a good relationship between me and my husband.*

Question 8 Do you think the characters' behaviours resemble your life and your family relationships? If yes, how?

Answer: *No, I think we have a big difference.*

Question 9 How many soap operas do you watch in a week?

Answer: *However it is not very much some weeks about two or three.*

Interviewee 21: Asma

Demographics

Age: 38

Marital status: M

Occupation: housewife

No. of children: five

Codes

Question 1 Could you tell me about your favourite soaps?

Answer: My best and favourite soap is Noor, I hope I can watch it many times.

Question 2 Why were you drawn to these particular programmes? Or, what else do you like from international satellite programmes?

Answer: I like this show because it is about family life, also I do not like international or national satellite, because the advertisements break our traditional life, like commercial programmes and Western products and some Western aspects of lifestyle which are attacking some of our values and norms.

Question 3 What aspects or things do you like about the shows?

Answer: I like this show because it is about family issues, and help me pass the time.

Question 4 What is the difference between the other soaps you are watching and the *Noor* series?

Answer: I can find some resemble in the qualities of this show with my real life, for example this show tackles family's issue that are close to everyone's heart and mind: love, marriage, divorce, extra-marital problems, pregnancy, women at work, you name it. It resembles with my daughter, for example, there is a rich young man who wants to marry the

young girl but, naturally (just like in real life), she is in love with the poor man. In my society people are talking about the “hot” girl, but now women are talking about a hot guy... it has become acceptable for a female to comment on a guy romantically in front of her husband, father, or brother.

Question 5 Who is your favourite male or female character? Or, who is the best character for you?

***Answer:** I prefer Muhannad’s grandmother, an old woman who is a mother and a wife and stays at home most of the time trying to marry off one of her daughters or sons. She spends her life for the life of her family. Also my favourite man is Muhannad’s grandfather who loves his grandson and granddaughter and everyone respects him.*

Question 6 Would you like your young children to behave like the characters in this show?

***Answer:** No, because this is a film, not real life.*

Question 7 Do you think that you can follow the characters’ behaviour or adapt this to your everyday life? If yes, in what ways?

***Answer:** In some qualities, for example, living inside a big family with respect, peace and good relationships between all members of the family.*

Question 8 Do you think the characters’ behaviours resemble your life and your family relationships? If yes, how?

***Answer:** No, I think we are too far.*

Question 9 How many soap operas do you watch in a week?

***Answer:** It is not regular some weeks about three or four.*

Appendix 3: Questions that have been analysed

1. Could you tell me about your favourite soaps?
2. Why were you drawn to these particular programmes? Or, what else do you like from international satellite programmes?
3. What aspects or things do you like about the shows?
4. What is the difference between the other soaps you are watching and the *Noor* series?
5. Who is your favourite male or female character? Or, who is the best character for you?
6. Would you like your young children to behave like the characters in this show?
7. Do you think that you can adopt the characters' behaviour to your everyday life? If yes, in what ways?
8. Do you think the characters' behaviours resemble your life and your family relationships? If yes, how?
9. How many soap operas do you watch in a week?

TABLES AND FIGURES

Table 1: Interviewee demographic

Table 2: Sequence of steps of the qualitative study

Table 3: Statistics of qualities

Table 4: Questions asked to women in Kurdistan Region

Figure 1: Statistics of qualities