



AKADEMİK İLETİŞİM ARAŞTIRMALARI DERGİSİ

Academic Journal of Communication Studies

Sayı (Issue): 4 Yıl (Year): 2026



Conspiratorial Narratives in the Ottoman Empire: The Study of Turkish Series 'Payitaht: Abdülhamid' and Its Parallel with Contemporary Pakistan

Anum Naz¹, Musa Khan², Emine Nilüfer Pembecioğlu³

Geliş Tarihi (Received): 13.07.2025

Kabul Tarihi (Accepted): 18.03.2026

Abstract: Drama is an artistic form that mirrors and interprets sociocultural interactions, such as life events, and often blends reality and fiction. The world of historical dramas is equally important as the culture's values and worldview are transmitted through history and preserved within it. The Turkish series *Payitaht: Abdülhamid*, produced by TRT, dramatizes the political period of Sultan Abdülhamid II and has gained significant popularity, even being broadcast by the Pakistan Television Corporation. This study analyzes the depiction of conspiracies that Sultan Abdülhamid faced in the *Payitaht: Abdülhamid* drama and contrasts it with the contemporary socio-political context in Pakistan. This research evaluates the thematic and narrative aspects of the series using the content analysis method. The significance of the study lies in its highlighting the political context within which the ruling government in the series operates and in drawing parallels between Ottoman history and contemporary political realities in Pakistan. The results demonstrate significant alignment between the conspiratorial frame presented in *Payitaht* and that observed in Pakistan's political dynamics, thereby emphasizing that history tends to repeat itself. The study aids in understanding how to protect a nation from both internal and external danger with the continuous evolution of political strategy.

Keywords: *Payitaht: Abdülhamid*, Ottoman Empire, Contemporary Politics, Historical Drama, Pakistan.

Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Komplo Anlatıları: Türk Dizisi 'Payitaht: Abdülhamid' ve Çağdaş Pakistan ile Paralelliklerinin İncelenmesi

Öz: Bir sanat dalı olarak drama, toplumsal deneyimleri yansıtır ve yorumlar, genellikle gerçekliği kurguyla harmanlar. Tarihi dramalar, bir kültürün değerlerini ve dünya görüşünü zaman içinde aktarmada önemli bir rol oynar. TRT tarafından üretilen Türk dizisi *Payitaht: Abdülhamid*, Sultan II. Abdülhamid'in siyasi dönemini dramatize etmekte ve büyük bir popülerlik kazanarak Pakistan Televizyon Kurumu'nda (PTV) yayınlanmaktadır. Bu çalışma, *Payitaht: Abdülhamid* dizisinde Sultan Abdülhamid'in karşılaştığı komploların nasıl betimlendiğini incelemeyi ve bu temsillerin Pakistan'ın çağdaş sosyo-politik senaryosu ile koşutluklarını araştırmayı amaçlamaktadır. Bu çalışma, içerik çözümlemesi yöntemini kullanarak, dizinin tematik ve anlatsal unsurlarını çözümlemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Çalışma, Osmanlı yönetiminin dizide betimlenen siyasi stratejilerini serimleyerek, Osmanlı tarihi ile Pakistan'ın güncel siyasi dinamikleri arasındaki bağlantıların ortaya çıkarılması açısından önemlidir. Bulgular, *Payitaht: Abdülhamid* dizisinde gösterilen komplocu taktikler ile Pakistan'ın modern siyasi manzarasında gözlemlenenler arasında dikkat çekici benzerlikler olduğunu ortaya koyarak, tarihsel kalıpların tekrarlayıcı doğasını gözler önüne sermektedir. Çalışma, bir ulusun iç ve dış tehditlerden korunması ve yönetilmesi konusunda değerli içgörüler sunmakta ve siyasi stratejilerin zamana yenilmeyen, sonsuz önemini vurgulamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Payitaht: Abdülhamid*, Osmanlı İmparatorluğu, Çağdaş Siyaset, Tarihi Drama, Pakistan.

Atıf/Cite as: Naz, A., Khan, M., & Pembecioğlu, E. N. (2026). Conspiratorial narratives in the Ottoman Empire: The study of Turkish series *Payitaht: Abdülhamid* and its parallel with contemporary Pakistan. *Akademik İletişim Araştırmaları Dergisi*, (4), 15-30

İntihal-Plagiarism/Etik-Ethic: Bu makale, en az iki hakem tarafından incelenmiş ve intihal içermediği, araştırma ve yayın etiğine uyulduğu teyit edilmiştir. / This article has been reviewed by at least two referees and it has been confirmed that it is plagiarism-free and complies with research and publication ethics. <https://iletisimarastirmalari.com/>

Copyright © Published by AKADEMİK İLETİŞİM ARAŞTIRMALARI DERGİSİ. This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

¹ Riphah International University, Riphah Institute of Media Sciences, 0009-0002-6998-1807, anumzulfiqar2@gmail.com

² Dr, Riphah International University, Riphah Institute of Media Sciences, 0000-0002-9437-7057, musakhan_85@yahoo.com

³ Prof. Dr., University of Istanbul, Department of Radio, TV, and Cinema, 0000-0001-7510-6529, niluferpembecioğlu@gmail.com

1. INTRODUCTION

Drama is an influential art form and a powerful medium that can effectively present historical events and educate audiences, much like books, by bringing the past to life through engaging narratives and visual storytelling. It has the capacity to motivate, educate, and entertain us. It can help us better understand who we are and how the world works. Dramatic storytelling is a powerful tool for examining a wide range of topics, including social and political issues, interpersonal interactions, and human behavior (Adway, 2023). It is one of the most critical media genres, having shaped concepts and patterns among people worldwide. This is due to the drama's intricacy and intellectual depth, which have both positive and negative implications for nations (Yashot, 2022).

Historical drama is often regarded as one of the most popular genres in film and television, as it combines entertainment and education while providing an insightful exploration of various historical periods and figures. These historical dramas assist in the study of historical figures and events, both educationally and entertainingly (Mackerras, 1992). Historical dramas do not merely reproduce the past; they interpret historical events and social values through narrative and audiovisual representation (Rosenstone, 1995). Previous studies have shown that television serials constitute an essential means of representing actual events and serve as a major tool of intercultural interaction. Television series can facilitate intercultural communication and shape international audiences' perceptions of history, culture, and identity (Khan, 2020; Khan & Pembecioğlu, 2019).

The television series *Payitaht: Abdülhamid* centers on Sultan Abdülhamid II, the 34th sultan of the Ottoman Empire, who ruled from 1876 to 1909. Under the Justice and Development Party (AKP) government, the Turkish government has strategically employed this series as a political instrument to forge and disseminate a narrative linking contemporary political dynamics to the historical legacy of the Ottoman Empire (Çevik, 2020). The series centers on Sultan Abdülhamid II's efforts to preserve the Ottoman Empire's power amid numerous internal and external challenges, including socio-economic, diplomatic, and political issues.

The television series *Payitaht: Abdülhamid* premiered in Turkey on 24 February 2017 and ran for five seasons, comprising 154 episodes. Turkish dramas have already achieved substantial popularity in Pakistan, especially following the success of the series *Diriliş: Ertuğrul* (Siakas et al., 2023). The critically acclaimed historical series *Payitaht: Abdülhamid* premiered with Urdu dubbing on Pakistan's national television network, PTV, on February 9, 2022 (Daily Times, 2022). The series achieved considerable popularity on the social networking platform "Tabii Urdu," which has an audience of 19.7 million subscribers (Shah, 2022). The series has gathered over 2 million viewers on this channel alone (Taj, 2020). Research indicates that *Payitaht: Abdülhamid* ranks in the 99.3rd percentile among Turkish dramas, indicating that it is more in demand than 99.3% of Turkish dramas (Parrot Analytics, 2023).

Pakistan, established in 1947 as a homeland for Muslims following the partition of British India, is a South Asian nation with a rich historical and cultural heritage. Since its inception, Pakistan has struggled with numerous challenges, including political instability, terrorism, and economic difficulties (USIP, 2023). A central and persistent issue within the country has been the debate over its political identity, particularly the question of whether Pakistan should adopt an Islamic or secular framework. This debate is exacerbated by the absence of robust, genuinely representative national political parties, further complicating the political landscape (Vasist et al., 2024, pp. 663-688). The civil service, along with the military, has supported the nation's governance over the years. The military has also played an active role in directly and indirectly controlling politics and electoral processes, and in attempting to dismantle democratic systems to capture vital state functions, particularly in the economy and foreign relations (Khan, 2010; Rahman & Shurong, 2021). Such ongoing activities have further stunted the nation's development and political balance, exacerbating institutional fragility and the difficulty of governing the system (Rahman & Shurong, 2021, pp. 942-970). The coexistence of negative peace (Galtung, 2011), rampant corruption, and direct or indirect military meddling in the political system and electoral framework has further eroded institutional legitimacy. Moreover, there

are several internal problems, like the high population coupled with external conflicts such as the long-standing conflict with India, dominated by the Kashmir issue, along with Afghanistan, and dependency on foreign aid (Khan & Pembecioğlu, 2015). These obstacles slow down the development of Pakistan and have intensified the rise of intolerance and extremism fueled by a narrow perception of nationalism (Curtis, 2007). Such issues constitute the most significant risk to social solidarity and social order within the country (Jalal, 2024). The growing geopolitical rivalries among world powers such as the United States, China, and Russia have heightened concerns about Pakistan's potential need to align with one of these blocs (Malik, 2016). In the past, Pakistan has had an extremely hostile relationship with India, which has brought both countries almost to the point of war on numerous occasions. Moreover, the United States has had a highly volatile relationship with Pakistan, characterized at times by partnership, conflict, and estrangement (FES Asia Editorial, 2023).

In these contexts, this study aims to analyze theories surrounding conspiracies against the Ottoman Empire as presented in the Turkish series *Payitaht: Abdülhamid* and to relate them to the socio-politics of Pakistan. Within the scope of this study, a distinguishing framework identifies a conspiracy as a secret plot, whereas conspiracy theory denotes a specific set of unverifiable conjectures. One of the primary focal points of this study is the conspiratorial narrative, a defined term denoting a cohesive discourse that narrativizes particular political events as the consequence of the Other's malevolent grand designs (Moore, 2016). This term is used consistently to study the dramatized elements of *Payitaht: Abdülhamid*, as well as the discourse surrounding allegations of foreign interference in Pakistani politics. This study explores the series' events and history in the context of the current events in Pakistan. The study examines the portrayal of political conspiracies in *Payitaht: Abdülhamid* and their relation to current events, to highlight the blurred boundaries between history and the socio-political relations of contemporary society. The study addresses the following research question:

What are the conspiracies against Sultan Abdülhamid in the *Payitaht: Abdülhamid* drama series and how do those conspiracies relate to Pakistan's socio-political environment. Through a comparative approach, the study attempts to find the contrasts and relationships between the narrative and thematic history of the conspiracies presented in the drama and the current socio-political situation in Pakistan

1.1. Theoretical framework

This study employs the agenda-setting theory to analyze the narrative constructed in the TV series *Payitaht: Abdülhamid*. This theory suggests that the media not only highlight specific issues but also shape how these issues are perceived and prioritized by the public (Benton & Frazier, 1976). Holbrook and Hill (2005) applied the theory to entertainment media, contending that the repeated depiction of political issues in this genre can alter how ideas are prioritized. This is useful for understanding how *Payitaht: Abdülhamid* constructs and depicts historical conspiracies against Sultan Abdülhamid II within the context of contemporary socio-political realities. Extending agenda-setting research to dramatic television, Miller and Quarles (1984) examined whether viewing the made-for-television film *The Day After* increased the perceived prominence of nuclear war and disarmament issues. They showed that, while people's perception of the importance of war relative to other national priorities changed, the media's focus on the issue significantly shifted public interest toward it. This illustrates that greater media attention leads to greater prominence of the issue in public discourse. In this study, agenda-setting theory is applied to examine how *Payitaht: Abdülhamid* constructs historical conspiracies and how these narratives reflect or contrast with current geopolitical realities. The research aims to demonstrate how media coverage influences politics and public perception in Turkish and Pakistani contexts, using the series' portrayal of conspiracy theories as a lens. Turkish and Pakistani politics have been studied relatively less. Previous studies have applied agenda-setting theory across a variety of

domains, including politics and social issues, but have ignored popular historical narratives. The study aims to fill this void by analyzing the depiction of historical conspiracies in *Payitaht: Abdülhamid*, with a focus on their implications for contemporary political discourse. This study seeks to advance understanding of the media's role by evaluating the historical context, media actions, politics, and agendas to dispel perceptions of its influence.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative strategy, using content analysis to examine the depiction of conspiracy in the *Payitaht: Abdülhamid* drama and to compare it with the contemporary politics of Pakistan. The principal unit of analysis was the narrative sequence, and these are defined as 'segments of action, dialogue, or text that make a complete conspiratorial claim' to ensure that the same analytical unit is maintained across the television and the journalistic data. The material was selected using purposive sampling. Seasons 1-3 of *Payitaht: Abdülhamid* were analyzed to elucidate the foundational 'besieged state' blueprint, identified through thematic units. Concomitantly, political data from Pakistan were collected from leading English newspapers: *The Dawn*, *The Express Tribune*, *The News International*, and *Pakistan Today*, for the period 2015-2022. The coding process began with deductive coding based on the literature on globalist tropes, followed by inductive coding to capture patterns that emerged from the data. The open and axial coding enabled the data to be condensed into six key themes: natural resource sovereignty (concerning oil/gas projects and Russian imports), data exploitation, politically motivated assassination attempts as tools of destabilization, the New World Order as an instrument of geopolitical fragmentation, the media's weaponization for disinformation, and moral dualism used to frame political opponents. Such thematic consolidation enables an examination of the intersection of history and the political imagination through the lens of a nation's politically constructed collective psyche.

3. ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS AND DATA

In this paper, qualitative content analysis was conducted to interpret the raw data by identifying themes and patterns. Hsieh and Shannon (2005) describe qualitative content analysis as a method for interpreting textual data through a systematic process of coding and identifying themes or patterns. The study aimed to investigate and contrast the conspiracy portrayal of Sultan Abdülhamid II in the Turkish drama *Payitaht: Abdülhamid* with the socio-political setup of Pakistan. This comparison was guided by thematic analysis focusing on how political conspiracies are presented and their bearing on contemporary politics. The research involved rigorous and extensive thematic analysis, and, in so doing, constructs regarding the portrayal of conspiracies and their associated categories were developed. These categories encompass a broad range of ways in which politicians, in both dramatic and real-life encounters, face opposition and threats. The themes and indicators presented in this study, based on the series *Payitaht: Abdülhamid*, are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Selected themes and indicators for analysis

Themes	Indicators
Development Projects	-Issues encountered with the Hijaz Railway Project, as shown in the <i>Payitaht</i> drama. -Internal and external issues impacting the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).
Natural Resources	-Conspiracies related to oil activities in the <i>Payitaht</i> series.

	-Challenges and conspiracies during the Gas Pipeline project in Pakistan. - Implications of oil imports from Russia on Pakistan's economic and political stability.
Data Exploitation	-Politicians' data is being accessed and exploited by opponents for personal agendas and threats.
Assassination Attempts	-Multiple assassination attempts targeting politicians.
	-Connection between assassination attempts, internal political unrest, and external destabilizing forces.
New World Order	- Impact of the global geopolitical landscape on domestic affairs. - Role of powerful nations in controlling and fragmenting nations for their interests.
Media Manipulation and Control	-Use of media for spreading disinformation. -Political parties are leveraging media platforms to undermine opponents and promote their agendas.

The subsequent sections provide a comprehensive interpretation and analysis of the identified themes, focusing on how the content from *Payitaht: Abdülhamid* parallels the current socio-political issues in Pakistan. Those who watch serials typically find the content enjoyable and are content with how they spend their time. It is not necessary to go through the reproduction stage. This can occur if one needs to provide an example related to a particular circumstance. This is somewhat distinct from acknowledging the message, yet it calls for reorganizing the message. Contextualizing the message would replace the deliberate exemplification of the same structure. Therefore, the message must be removed from its original framework once more to recontextualize it. The way the message is presented, along with the various auditory or visual densities that contribute to the suggested structure and meaning, is its structure. Decontextualizing it, however, necessitates shifting the balance of the message. The message, in its original form, would not succeed if individual objects, visions, or indications were removed from their contexts. It would be impossible to contextualize it in the same way outside its own structure if it does not resonate with other points in real life or correlate with another type of reality. There is considerable resonance between Pakistani and Turkish socio-political issues. This discussion examines how historical and contemporary political narratives intersect and inform one another, shedding light on broader implications for understanding political dynamics and media portrayals.

3.1. Analysis of developmental projects: Hijaz railway and CPEC

Table 2. Hijaz Railway and CPEC: objectives, challenges, and broader geopolitical implications

Aspect	Hijaz Railway Project (Ottoman Empire)	China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)
Objective	To modernize the Ottoman Empire, to facilitate pilgrimages to Makkah and Medina, and assert control over the Hijaz region.	To connect Gwadar Port (Pakistan) to Xinjiang (China) and revitalize Pakistan's economy through infrastructure, trade, and industrial growth.
Financial Constraints	Funding from taxes, donations, and loans was insufficient owing to the	Financial mismanagement, corruption, and reliance on Chinese funding led to delays and the halting of projects.

	Empire's precarious economic condition.	
Logistical Challenges	Europe's specialization in logistics and infrastructure for harsh desert and mountain conditions facilitated the transport of materials and expert assistance into the region.	Infrastructure construction was slow in areas with rugged, unstable terrain, violence, unrest, and strife, particularly in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.
Security Threats	Workers were often attacked, and construction was sabotaged by local tribes with foreign backing, like Britain, supporting and enabling foreign control.	Terrorism and insurgency in Balochistan required special security forces to protect infrastructure vulnerable to attack.
Geopolitical Opposition	Britain's opposition stemmed from concern that Ottoman influence would dominate the area within the project's region.	The US opposed CPEC because it was a "debt trap," while India opposed it strongly due to the routing through disputed Kashmir.
Impact of Opposition	Covert acts of sabotage by Britain and other powers funding the rival tribes undermined the project.	External parties, including the US and India, along with the country's internal instability, corruption, and weakness, exert overt controls, adding strain and pressure.
Outcome	Sultan Abdülhamid II adopted administrative, diplomatic, and security measures to address financial, logistical, and geopolitical constraints.	Setbacks, such as the cessation of funding and political turbulence, have slowed progress, but the project remains a potential milestone for Pakistan.
Comparative Insights	The competitive gaze that mirrors colonial antagonism and imperialist conflict seeks to constrain Ottoman modernization and sovereignty.	The modern geopolitical conflict encompasses the United States and China's competition, India's regional concerns, and Pakistan's domestic challenges.

The Hijaz Railway Project depicted in the series, which commenced during the era of Sultan Abdülhamid II, aimed to industrialize the Ottoman Empire and strengthen its power in the Hijaz region. Moreover, the railway was designed to facilitate pilgrimage to the holy cities of Makkah and Medina, while aiding the empire's control in the region. The project also faced significant challenges. Firstly, there were severe financial problems, especially after the Ottoman Empire's economic collapse strained funding sources (taxes, donations, and foreign loans) for such an ambitious financially demanding project. There were also severe logistical problems, since construction in mountainous terrain and desert regions requires imported materials and a European skill set, which greatly complicated the situation (Kafadar, 1997).

Security never ceased to be a concern for the project as tribes, often supported and armed by outside forces, attacked workers and infrastructure. This opposition was already being sustained by the European powers, particularly Britain, which perceived the railway as a threat to its regional interests. Britain, together with other countries, such as France, deliberately thwarted the project by supporting tribal guerrillas, fearing that the railway would increase Ottoman control over the Hijaz and strengthen Ottoman military logistical dominance in the Middle East (Hammond, 2017).

On the other hand, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) serves as a contemporary example of a transformative infrastructure project. CPEC, which aims to connect Gwadar Port in Pakistan with China's Xinjiang region, is a central component of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and is expected to drive transformative economic development through infrastructure, trade, and industrial expansion. CPEC, however, is also fraught with challenges. The project has been significantly affected by geopolitical rivalries, particularly between the US and China. The U.S. has derided CPEC as a "debt trap," while India has opposed it because its route traverses the disputed territory of Kashmir (Ahmad et al., 2020).

CPEC's security problems within Pakistan stem from Balochistan and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, where terrorism and insurgency violence have targeted infrastructure and workforce assets. To mitigate these concerns, Pakistan deployed specialized security forces; however, unrest remains a significant impediment to development (Bhatti et al., 2023). Furthermore, political and poor governance have equally obstructed CPEC's progress. Allegations of mismanagement led China to withdraw funding for several projects, underscoring Pakistan's governance issues (Tanvir, 2021; Ashraf, 2022).

CPEC and the Hijaz Railway share several traits: both are among the most prominent infrastructure projects, and both face significant internal and external resistance. Both represent attempts to further consolidate economic and geopolitical power at the global and regional stage. The Hijaz Railway faced resistance stemming from colonial aspirations and rivalries among empires, whereas CPEC is better understood through contemporary geopolitical frameworks, including US-China competition and India's ambitions in the region. CPEC is unique among these projects because, in addition to the dynamics of international relations, it is also subjected to severe internal political turmoil, corruption, and governance complexities, illustrating the realities of statehood and international relations. Both projects offer insights into the interplay between infrastructure and expansive geopolitical strategies, demonstrating that economic integration remains vital to achieving national and regional goals.

3.2. Natural Resource Challenges: Ottoman Oil and Pakistan's Gas and Oil Projects

Table 3. The Ottoman Oil and Pakistan's Gas and Oil Projects

	Ottoman Oil Concessions	Pakistan's Gas Pipeline and Oil Imports
Objective	Exploit Ottoman oil reserves to strengthen the empire's economy and sovereignty.	Develop energy infrastructure through the Iran-Pakistan Gas Pipeline and diversify oil imports to reduce energy costs.
Challenges	Foreign interference from European investors who prioritized profit over development. - Manipulation of domestic unrest by figures like Parvus to destabilize the empire.	Delays due to U.S. sanctions on Iran and financial constraints. Internal security challenges in Balochistan are impacting pipeline construction.
External Opposition	- European powers exploited economic dependencies to undermine Ottoman sovereignty.	U.S. geopolitical pressures and IMF restrictions hindered energy diversification, particularly efforts to import oil from Russia.
Internal Vulnerabilities	Weak governance and domestic divisions made the empire susceptible to external manipulation.	Political instability, financial mismanagement, and security threats in regions such as Balochistan exacerbated project delays.

Impact	Foreign-controlled oil profits limited economic benefits for the Ottoman Empire.	Delays in energy infrastructure development and dependence on external funding weakened Pakistan's energy independence.
Comparative Insights	Reflects colonial economic imperialism, where foreign powers leveraged resources to maintain dominance.	Highlights modern geopolitical complexities, with multipolar power struggles shaping resource policies and projects.

The comparative analysis of natural resource challenges between Sultan Abdul Hamid's Ottoman oil concessions and Pakistan's contemporary gas and oil projects highlights striking parallels in external interference and internal vulnerabilities. Late Ottoman efforts to preserve control over strategic economic resources occurred amid increasing European commercial penetration, foreign investment, and external political pressure (Pamuk, 1987). Similarly, Pakistan's Iran-Pakistan Gas Pipeline faced significant delays due to U.S. sanctions on Iran, internal security concerns in Balochistan, and financial constraints. Geopolitical pressures also hindered efforts to import lower-cost oil from Russia despite pressure from the United States and to secure International Monetary Fund (IMF) financing (Saeed, 2019; Jamal, 2022). Both cases underscore the interplay between external manipulation and internal governance challenges. While the Ottoman Empire's struggles reflect the dynamics of colonial economic imperialism, Pakistan's challenges highlight the complexities of navigating modern geopolitical rivalries in a multipolar world.

3.3. Data Exploitation: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives

Table 4. Parallels and differences between historical and modern data exploitation

Aspect	Espionage in Sultan Abdülhamid II's Reign	Modern Data Exploitation in Pakistan
Context	Espionage dramatized in <i>Payitaht</i> depicts the theft of sensitive diaries and the interception of telegrams.	Leaked audio and video recordings of key political figures in 2022 created political turmoil.
Methods	Physical infiltration, bribery, and collaboration with internal dissenters by European powers.	Advanced technologies, including cyber espionage, were employed to obtain and manipulate sensitive data.
Actors	European powers were aiming to destabilize the Ottoman Empire by exploiting internal dissent.	Political opponents, aided by modern technology, exposed sensitive information to weaken leadership and influence narratives.
Impact	Destabilization of the Ottoman Empire through subversion of state projects and exploitation of dissent.	Undermined trust in leadership, raised cybersecurity concerns, and exacerbated political instability.
Comparative Insights	Relied on physical means like theft and bribery to gain information.	Utilized modern cyber tools for large-scale data manipulation and dissemination.
Shared Theme	Both historical and contemporary cases illustrate the critical role of information control in destabilizing regimes and political systems.	Both reflect how external or opposing forces exploit internal vulnerabilities to undermine state sovereignty.

A comparative analysis of data exploitation in Sultan Abdul Hamid's era and modern Pakistan highlights the evolving methods of espionage and underscores their shared objective of destabilizing regimes. During Sultan Abdul Hamid's reign, espionage efforts dramatized in the *Payitaht* series included the theft of sensitive diaries and the interception of telegrams, which were orchestrated by European powers to subvert state projects and exploit internal dissent within the Ottoman Empire (Perkins, 2014). In contrast, modern Pakistan experienced significant political turmoil in 2022 following the leak of audio and video recordings of key political figures. These leaks, potentially facilitated by advanced technologies, exposed personal and strategic discussions, eroding trust in leadership and demonstrating the dangers of cyber espionage (Gul, 2022; Shaukat, 2023). While historical espionage relied on physical infiltration and bribery, contemporary data exploitation leverages technological advancements to manipulate sensitive information on a larger scale. Both cases reveal how control over information is a critical tool for undermining political stability and state sovereignty.

3.4. Assassination Attempts: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives

Table 5. Resemblance between historical and modern political assassinations, between the Ottoman Empire and Pakistan's political landscapes

Aspect	Assassination Attempts on Sultan Abdülhamid	Political Assassinations and Assassination Attempts in Modern Pakistan
Context	The assassination plots depicted in the <i>Payitaht</i> series were intended to destabilize the Ottoman Empire.	Political assassinations in Pakistan started with Liaquat Ali Khan (1951) until recently, including the 2022 assassination attempt against Imran Khan.
Actors	Domestic internal dissenters and foreign schemers with the intention to undermine Sultan Abdülhamid's reign.	Politically motivated extremist groups and rivals driven by power or ideological objectives.
Methods	Use of poison, explosives, and physical violence during public events or ceremonies	Modern forms involve shooting, bombing, or other forms of violence during public appearances or political functions.
Impact	The assassination attempts demonstrated the empire's instability and the threats to its power.	Assassinations have disrupted political processes, diminished governance effectiveness, and exposed security vulnerabilities.
Motivations	Destabilize the empire and attempt to exploit internal fractures for imperialist or ideological purposes.	Remove a political rival, disrupt governance, and advance a politically motivated ideology.
Comparative Insights	Demonstrates the competition for imperial supremacy and control in a turbulent geopolitical period.	Demonstrates a blend of internal political rivalries and ideological battles within a contemporary multi-layered security context.

The study of political assassinations reveals critical similarities in the historical and modern-day techniques employed and their consequences. During Sultan Abdülhamid's rule, as shown in the *Payitaht* series, assassination attempts were made by both local and foreign dissenters with the intention

of destroying the Ottoman Empire. These attempts, which included poisoning and bombardment, revealed the Empire's delicate balance of power, coupled with its increasing vulnerability within the international system, during this troublesome period (Slaughter, 2005). In contemporary Pakistan, political assassinations have included Liaquat Ali Khan in 1951 and Imran Khan in 2022. These politically motivated violent acts, often conducted by extremist elements or political adversaries, provided shocking governance failure, security weakness, and deepened the already fragile condition of Pakistan's political environment (Ahmed, 2022; Malik, 2022). While Ottoman attempts at assassinations were motivated primarily by imperial struggles and ideology, the modern instances in Pakistan have both internal competition and extremist elements. In both settings, there is an undermining of the use of assassination to bring about regime change, as it reveals internal rivalries in a politically fragmented system, exposing them to divisions and demolishing the system.

3.5. New World Order and Media Manipulation

Table 6. Resemblance between the colonial use of media against Sultan Abdülhamid and the modern digital disinformation campaigns targeting Pakistan

Aspect	Sultan Abdülhamid's Challenges	Pakistan's Geopolitical Struggles
Context	Resistance to the new world order imposed by European powers during Sultan Abdülhamid's reign.	Pakistan's portrayal in the global media as a hub of terrorism and instability.
Methods of Manipulation	Propaganda through print media, diplomatic, and military pressures aimed at delegitimizing his rule.	Digital-age disinformation campaigns, including false narratives orchestrated by external actors like India.
Actors	European powers were seeking to reshape global power dynamics and undermine Ottoman sovereignty.	International entities and neighboring nations are using media to influence global perceptions of Pakistan.
Impact	Destabilized Sultan Abdul Hamid's rule, eroded public trust, and contributed to imperial decline.	Damaged Pakistan's global image, influenced policymaking, and undermined national sovereignty.
Comparative Insights	Reflects colonial-era reliance on print media for propaganda.	Highlights the modern shift to digital disinformation campaigns for narrative control.
Shared Theme	Both contexts demonstrate the strategic manipulation of media to weaken opponents and reshape power dynamics.	Media remains a critical tool in undermining sovereignty and influencing public and global opinion.

The investigation of a New World Order and the subservience of the media during the time of Sultan Abdülhamid and the contemporary case of Pakistan, it is here that the NWO is considered not to be of a specific form but rather a 'floating signifier' populist politicians use to unify the citizens of a nation in positive self-identification and negative other-identification (Byford, 2011). Abdülhamid in *Payitaht* was resisting what the World Order of European Dominance was, that is, a world order of proto-globalism, the order of which is to be anti-Islamic sovereignty (Barkun, 2015). Pakistan's contemporary struggle against international media portrayals of instability reflects resistance to a "hegemonic western order" that allegedly employs digital disinformation to effect regime change (Nasir et al., 2025). These two periods illustrate efforts to industrialize media, whether in the form of print media during the colonial

period or in modern information warfare, to manipulate the global order and the sovereignty of nations that resist the New World Order and to reshape control within the New World Order.

4. CONCLUSION

The Turkish historical drama *Payitaht: Abdülhamid* is a powerful cultural and political account that offers a window into the historical and contemporary socio-political systems that subtly shift within societies. Through analogues such as the abdication of Sultan Abdülhamid II, conspiracies, foreign involvement, espionage, meddling, and media narrative drives, the series portrays the politics of Pakistan in the contemporary setting. As a nuclear-armed state and a geopolitically significant nation, Pakistan faces contemporary political challenges with historical precedents that exacerbate challenges in governance, international relations, and civil society. This illustrates how and why *Payitaht: Abdülhamid*, aside from recounting the diachronic modulation of the Ottoman Empire's governance, is grounded in modern predicaments of Pakistan: infrastructure, politics, and conspiracy, along with media-driven public relations and perception, widely known as Public Relations (PR).

These dynamics are exemplified by the Hijaz Railway Project and the CPEC (China-Pakistan Economic Corridor), which illustrate how infrastructure development serves as a strategic geopolitical instrument, exploited within the battlegrounds of internal and external geopolitical rivalries, including poverty and corruption.

Similarly, the Ottoman Empire faced issues; Pakistan must contend with internal weaknesses and external pressures, revealing an intricate web of political and economic self-sabotage (Pamuk, 1987; Ashraf, 2022). Furthermore, the espionage activities depicted in the series parallel contemporary concerns in Pakistan regarding cyber and political espionage, demonstrating how data breaches and targeted violence discredit authority and control structures (Perkins, 2014; Gul, 2022).

The media played a critical role during the period depicted in *Payitaht* and continues to exert substantial influence in contemporary Pakistan. The media's impact remains significant in shaping public perceptions and opinions. For example, the series shows how European powers sought to destabilize and supplant Sultan Abdülhamid's rule through print media. In contemporary Pakistan, this is being done through digital technologies and information manipulation to shape global perceptions of the country and diminish its sovereignty (Saghir et al., 2025). Such manipulation of history falls under agenda-setting theory and demonstrates how media coverage, past and present, shapes public perceptions of political conspiracies, thereby shaping political perceptions and statecraft. *Payitaht: Abdülhamid* is a contemporary example that illustrates the Ottoman Empire's struggles and illuminates Pakistan's current political predicaments. The way the series shows the political strategizing, attempted assassinations, and the blend of forces from within and outside the country is also how Pakistan has been in focus in the world as a country of geopolitical importance, positioned within intensifying great-power competition. There is a striking resemblance between the strategies adopted by the Ottoman Empire and Pakistan's geostrategic position, which underscores the need for historical analysis to address complex state governance issues today.

Moreover, the series stands out as an educational resource that underscores the cultivation of enduring foresight, leadership, and decision-making skills amid political and economic volatility. As a corrective to the predominantly negative representations of Muslims in Western media, *Payitaht* further valorizes the narrative of Islamic civilization and governance, which has attracted considerable attention among audiences in several Muslim-majority countries. It airs on Pakistan's PTV and examines the concerns and cultural significance of Turkish historical drama in the context of modern politics and history. Ultimately, *Payitaht: Abdülhamid* integrates history with contemporary politics by providing a multifaceted account of the state's age-old governance and political maneuvering. It demonstrates the potential influence of historical dramas on public perceptions of political discourse, revealing important insights for policymakers, media, and academics. The series illustrates the need to understand historical precedents when addressing contemporary political issues, especially for countries such as Pakistan,

which is of vital geostrategic significance in the world order. This study shows that conspiratorial narratives operate as forms of Public Relations for the state. *Payitaht* Ottoman administrators and the current leadership of Pakistan, New World Order plots, and other geopolitical pressures are expressions of perception management aimed at garnering and sustaining domestic allegiance and countering external ‘information warfare’ (Saleem, 2021). Consequently, public relations in this context does not function only as promotion; it also operates as a defensive form of strategic communication intended to sustain domestic legitimacy and counter perceived information threats.

Ethics Statement: The authors declare that this study falls within the category of research that does not require approval from an ethics committee. In the event that a contrary situation is identified, the Academic Journal of Communication Studies bears no responsibility, and all responsibility rests with the author(s) of the study.

Author Contribution Statement: The first author contributed 40%, the second author contributed 35% and the third author contributed 25% to the study.

Conflict of Interest Statement: The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding this study.

References

- Adway, A. (2023). The impact of television drama in understanding history. *Journal of Al-Tamaddun*, 18(1), 67-78. <https://doi.org/10.22452/JAT.vol18no1.6>
- Ahmad, R., Mi, H., & Fernald, L. W. (2020). Revisiting the potential security threats linked with the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). *Journal of the International Council for Small Business*, 1(1), 64-80. <https://doi.org/10.1080/26437015.2020.1724735>
- Ahmed, A. (2022, November 3). *Pakistan's history of coups and assassinations*. Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/pakistans-history-coups-assassinations-2022-11-03/>
- Ashraf, S. (2022, June 2). *Why CPEC faces challenges in Pakistan*. China-US Focus. <https://www.chinausfocus.com/finance-economy/why-cpec-faces-challenges-in-pakistan>
- Barkun, M. (2015). Conspiracy theories as stigmatized knowledge. *Diogenes*, 62(3-4), 114-120. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0392192116669288>
- Benton, M. & Frazier, P. J. (1976). The agenda-setting function of the mass media at three levels of "information holding." *Communication Research*, 3(3), 261-274. <https://doi.org/10.1177/009365027600300302>
- Bhatti, I., Sahito, I. H., Soomro, S. A. & Abro, M. R. (2023). Security threats to mega investment project CPEC. *Elementary Education Online*, 20(2), 991-999. <https://ilkogretim-online.org/index.php/pub/article/view/1454>
- Byford, J. (2011). *Conspiracy theories: A critical introduction*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Curtis, L. (2007). *US aid to Pakistan: Countering extremism through education reform*. The Heritage Foundation. <https://www.heritage.org/asia/report/us-aid-pakistan-countering-extremism-through-education-reform>
- Çevik, S. B. (2020). The empire strikes back: Propagating AKP's Ottoman Empire narrative on Turkish television. *Middle East Critique*, 29(2), 177-197. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19436149.2020.1732031>
- Daily Times. (2022, February 11). *PTV to air "Payitaht: Abdülhamid," another Turkish drama*. <https://dailytimes.com.pk/883642/ptv-to-air-payitaht-abdulhamid-another-turkish-drama/>
- FES Asia Editorial. (2023, January 30). *Pakistan in the new geopolitics of Asia*. Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung. <https://asia.fes.de/news/pakistan-in-geopolitics>
- Galtung, J. (2011). Peace, positive, and negative. In D. J. Christie (Ed.), *The encyclopedia of peace psychology* (1st ed.). Wiley. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470672532.wbepp189>
- Gul, A. (2022, October 10). *Mystery around audio leaks from Pakistan PM's office deepens*. VOA News. <https://www.voanews.com/a/mystery-around-audio-leaks-from-pakistan-pm-s-office-deepens-6783855.html>

- Hammond, A. (2017). Balkanism in the political context: From the Ottoman Empire to the EU. *Westminster Papers in Communication and Culture*, 3(3), 6-26. <https://doi.org/10.16997/wpcc.56>
- Holbrook, R. A. & Hill, T. G. (2005). Agenda-setting and priming in prime time television: Crime dramas as political cues. *Political Communication*, 22(3), 277-295. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10584600591006519>
- Hsieh, H.-F. & Shannon, S. E. (2005). Three approaches to qualitative content analysis. *Qualitative Health Research*, 15(9), 1277-1288. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732305276687>
- Jalal, A. (2024). Does democracy have a future in Pakistan? *Journal of Democracy*, 35(1), 30-42. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2024.a915347>
- Jamal, S. (2022, June 1). *Pakistan to consider buying Russian oil if there is no threat of US sanctions*. Gulf News. <https://gulfnews.com/world/asia/pakistan/pakistan-to-consider-buying-russian-oil-if-no-threat-of-us-sanctions-1.88289395>
- Kafadar, C. (1997). The question of Ottoman decline. *Harvard Middle Eastern and Islamic Review*, 4(1-2), 30-75.
- Khan, M. (2020). *Televizyon dizilerinin uluslararasılaşması ve kültürlerarası iletişimde rolü ve etkisi: Türk ve Kore televizyon dizilerinin karşılaştırmalı bir çözümlemesi* (Yayımlanmış doktora tezi). İstanbul Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, İstanbul.
- Khan, M. & Pembecioğlu, N. (2015). Destructive role of radio in society: Case study of Pakistan (Malakand region). *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, 6, 678.
- Khan, M. & Pembecioğlu, N. (2019). International audience's perception about the Turkish TV serial "The Magnificent Century" in the context of the portrayal of history and women. *Global Media Journal TR Edition*, 10(19), 216-246.
- Khan, N. (2010). *Civil-military relations: A case study of Pakistan* (Doctoral dissertation). UNLV Theses, Dissertations, Professional Papers, and Capstones, 880. <http://dx.doi.org/10.34917/2228992>
- Mackerras, C. (1992). The contemporary Chinese historical drama: Four studies, *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs*, 27, 206-208. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2950042>
- Malik, H. (2016). *The roles of the United States, Russia, and China in the new world order*. Springer.
- Malik, M. (2022, November 4). *The attempted assassination of Imran Khan shocks the nation*. Dawn. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1718769>
- Miller, M. M. & Quarles, J. P. (1984, August 5-8). *Dramatic television and agenda setting: The case of "The Day After"* [Paper presentation]. 67th Annual Meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, Gainesville, FL, United States. ERIC Document ED245257. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED245257.pdf>
- Moore, A. (2016). Conspiracy and conspiracy theories in democratic politics. *Critical Review*, 28(1), 1-23. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08913811.2016.1178894>

- Nasir, T., Bhadur, A., Javed, S. & Sabir, S. (2025). Digital battlegrounds: The role of social media in the Indo Pakistani media war analysing narratives, propaganda, and public perception. *Journal of Media Horizons*, 6(3), 1434-1446. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.16760157>
- Pamuk, Ş. (1987). *The Ottoman Empire and European capitalism, 1820-1913: Trade, investment and production*. Cambridge University Press.
- Parrot Analytics. (2023, September 20). *Payitaht: Abdülhamid*. <https://tv.parrotanalytics.com/TR/payitaht-abdulhamid-trt-1>
- Perkins, J. A. (2014). *British liberalism and the Balkans, c. 1875-1925* (Doctoral dissertation, Birkbeck, University of London). <https://eprints.bbk.ac.uk/id/eprint/40082/1/PhD%20thesis%20J.A.%20Perkins.pdf>
- Rahman, S. U. & Shurong, Z. (2021). Governing through informal mechanisms: Military control over state institutions in Pakistan. *Asian Survey*, 61(6), 942-970. <https://doi.org/10.1525/as.2021.1433283>
- Rosenstone, R. A. (1995). *Visions of the past: The challenge of film to our idea of history*. Harvard University Press.
- Saeed, A. (2019, May 10). *Gas pipeline project "impossible" under US sanctions, Pakistan tells Iran*. Arab News. <https://www.arabnews.pk/node/1495251/pakistan>
- Saghir, A., Saleem, M. S. & Karim, A. (2025). Assessment of the effectiveness of social media in shaping the perception of the public on national security matters in Pakistan: A securitization theory perspective. *ASSAJ*, 4(02), 208-221. <https://assajournal.com/index.php/36/article/view/944>
- Saleem, M. (2021, December 29). *Indian disinformation operations against Pakistan and its implications*. Centre for Strategic and Contemporary Research. <https://cscr.pk/explore/themes/defense-security/indian-disinformation-operations-against-pakistan-and-its-implications/>
- Shah, S. A. (2022). *After Ertugrul, PTV is now airing Payitaht: Abdülhamid*. Dunya News. <https://blogs.dunyanews.tv/28784/>
- Shaukat, S. (2023, January). *Audio-video leaks expose politician's contradictory approach*. Pakistan Observer. <https://pakobserver.net/audio-video-leaks-expose-politicians-contradictory-approach-by-sajjad-shaukat/>
- Siakas, E., Rahanu, H., Loveday, J., Georgiadou, E., Siakas, K. & Ross, M. (2023). Managing ethical requirements elicitation. In M. Yilmaz, P. Clarke, A. Riel, & R. Messnarz (Eds.), *Systems, software and services process improvement: EuroSPI 2023* (Communications in Computer and Information Science, Vol. 1890). Cham: Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-42307-9_19
- Slaughter, A.-M. (2005). *A new world order*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Taj, H. (2020, June 24). *TRT launches special YouTube channel for Pakistani viewers*. Independent News Coverage Pakistan.

- Tanvir, A. (2021). *CPEC and the PTI: A complicated relationship*. Stimson Research. <https://southasianvoices.org/cpec-and-the-pti-a-complicated-relationship/>
- USIP. (2023, January 23). *The current situation in Pakistan*. United States Institute of Peace. <https://www.usip.org/publications/2023/01/current-situation-pakistan>
- Vasist, P. N., Chatterjee, D. & Krishnan, S. (2024). The polarizing impact of political disinformation and hate speech: A cross-country configural narrative. *Information Systems Frontiers*, 26(2), 663-688. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10796-023-10390-w>
- Yashot, M. (2022). Sosyal medyanın ve Yemen'deki siyasi olayların Türkiye'de yaşayan Yemenlilerin üzerindeki etkisi. *Journal of Social and Humanities Sciences Research*, 9(82), 645-651. <http://dx.doi.org/10.26450/jshsr.2976>