

Arabic Script Television Formats between Adaptation and Cultural Identity: A Case Study of The Killing

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Abstract

This paper discusses a comparative qualitative cultural study, using the content analysis approach. It examined the pattern of Script Television Formats (STF) in two versions of the Danish detective series *Forbrydelsen*, i.e. the Arabic version, named *Dangerous Curve*, and the American version, *The Killing*. It aimed to identify the localization of the adapted script versus the source material to accord with the needs of the two contrasting cultural identities, 42.48 hours of programming were viewed, eighty-nine episodes (44 of *The Killing* and 15 of *Dangerous Curve*) in total. The study focused exclusively on the elements that are emphasized or altered in the two versions, demonstrating how STFs of American and Arabic versions differ about their cultural identities. Results identified three significant elements displaying differences and similarities: characters, narrative structure, and length of the broadcast series.

Keywords: *The Killing*, *Dangerous Curve*, Arabic script, hybridity, adaptation

1. Introduction

Online dramas have now become a global phenomenon, with digital platforms proving a novel way of watching televised drama series. At the same time, Arabic audiences in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region have shifted their exposure to media productions from traditional analog Versus conventional generic formats to digital (Buccianti, 2016). Thus, digital globalization now enables Arabic audiences to decide which platforms they prefer, and distribution format – but not a ‘different’ text just on a different platform including the most well-known digital platforms, such as HBO, Showtime (Wayne & Uribe Sandoval, 2023) YouTube, Amazon Prime Video, and Netflix (Mikos, 2016; Bondebjerg & Redvall, 2015). In addition, Edwan (2021) revealed that Arabic audiences typically prefer Netflix. Edwan found that Arabic audiences prefer Netflix simply because it’s an easily available, ad-free experience with high-quality streaming, and exclusive content. Thus, Haddad and Dhoest (2021) noted that, when Netflix transformed the Arab market in 2016, it tested conventional Arabic shows in terms of both their structure and content. In other words, this approach allowed Netflix to understand and adapt to the preferences and expectations of the Arab audience, ensuring that its offerings were culturally relevant and appealing. This strategy was crucial in tailoring its content to be more culturally relevant, engaging, and appealing to viewers in the region, ultimately transforming the landscape of entertainment in the Arab market.

Furthermore, Buccianti indicated that, since 2016, Arabic viewers have watched various forms of media productions online through Netflix, including films, dramas, and series. Additionally, viewers can choose from a variety of languages, and accents, and also for their programmes to be subbed or dubbed. Therefore, not claiming the text is ‘changed’ – only ease of access by localizing for language/accents. As such, Arabic viewers who successfully engage with international (i.e. non-Arabic) digital platforms, such as Netflix, tend to prefer watching foreign dramas, with Buccianti (2016) stating that, “Arab audiences have always shown great interest in foreign productions”. Perhaps, the potential reason Arab audiences watch ‘foreign’ dramas is due to their unavailability on local networks, or the potential to engage with the ‘exotic other’. As Alardawi (2023) observed, Saudi audiences find enjoyment in watching foreign dramas because they derive amusement from critiquing or mocking elements of a different culture. This engagement provides them with a sense of entertainment and satisfaction through the lens of cultural comparison and satire. However, Netflix now faces major competition

from Arabic platforms. Haddad and Dhoest (2021) stated that the Saudi-owned pan-Arab MBC Group has relaunched its streaming service as Shahid VIP to create Netflix-inspired episodes and fresh programming capable of competing with Netflix.

Netflix, with its substantial financial resources and global reach, has invested heavily in expanding its content and services worldwide. Its extensive funding allows for high-quality production, diverse content offerings, and sophisticated technology, positioning it as a leading player in the streaming industry. However, despite these advantages, there are concerns about its performance in certain regions, including the Arab market. The challenges include potential market saturation and intense competition from other streaming services. With numerous platforms vying for viewers' attention and subscription dollars, Netflix faces the risk of diminished returns in some areas. This competitive landscape, combined with regional preferences and market dynamics, can affect its overall success and growth in specific markets. This has led to Shahid VIP rivaling Netflix among many sections of the Arabic audience (Allam & Chan-Olmsted, 2021; Soliman, 2021). However, the most significant issue with Shahid VIP remains its scripts, and in particular the storytelling of its drama series, many of which have been adapted from foreign drama series, while others may be hybrid.

Several academics have confirmed that adaptation or hybridity can be found in scripts of various drama series (e.g., Straubhaar, 2013; Wang & Yeh, 2005; Wardle, 2019; Wells-Lassagne, 2017; Armbrust, 2012; Postill & Epafra, 2018; Edgerly, S., & Vraga, 2019). Haddad and Dhoest (2021) discussed the transitional wave taking place from Netflix to Shahid VIP, to understand how the global co-production setting has transformed the Arabic TV drama market. This current research therefore assesses how the Arabic script of the crime series under study utilized an adaptation of the American version. Little attention has been previously paid to how the pattern of STF is used to portray the adaptations undertaken for the Arabic and American versions. The current study therefore examines one case study example of how the STF pattern is used in the two versions of *The Killing*, through the teasing out of two different culture identities. In particular, content analysis was performed, investigating specific elements found to be emphasized or altered in the adaptation of STF, along with assessing the overall impact of the cultural context for the consuming audiences.

1.1 The Killing

The Killing is an American crime fiction drama based on the Nordic noir drama *Forbrydelsen*, which aired between 2007 and 2012 (Creeber, 2015; Hansen, 2020). Its ability to engage viewers, particularly those in Europe and America, led to the series spreading to numerous countries around the world (Akass, 2018) (Bondebjerg et al. 2017). Thoumelin noted that 'The Killing had been broadcast in over 120 countries' (2019), while Stougaard Nielsen (2020) added that *Forbrydelsen* had been delivered across 159 nations and regions of the globe. Creeber (2013) justified the popularity of this Danish TV drama by indicating that the series played a 'crucial role in creating a new form of contemporary miniseries. According to Stougaard Nielsen (2020), the American version was filmed by Fox for AMC and then Netflix (2011–2014), with its location transferred to Seattle in the Pacific Northwest of the United States (Pinedo, 2021). This version (i.e. *The Killing*) subsequently received many favorable reviews and was viewed on television and/or online around the world.

Because of the ease of bandwidth, digital platforms tend to air a multitude of TV serial dramas and films. *The Killing* is one of the most famous global crime fiction dramas of late due to several reasons. Firstly, the Arabic version of this drama, *Dangerous Curve*, is particularly enjoyed by MENA audiences (Hasan, 2023). According to William, 'With the rise of adaptations of foreign shows, like *Magnouna Beek*, *El Anesa Farah*, and *El Nazwa*, *Munaataf Khatar* shined the brightest' (2022). Additionally, *Dangerous Curve* aired through Shahid.Net, which is the most viewed and highly prevalent Arabic platform (Khalil and Zayani, 2022).

The show streamed for four seasons and developed plots and characters that diverged from the original Danish format. The first season included thirteen episodes, which aired from April 3rd, 2011, to June 19th, 2011. Similarly, the second season aired from May 6th, 2012, to the 17th of June 2012 also having thirteen episodes. The third season included twelve episodes that aired from June 2nd, 2012, to 4th August 2013, and the fourth season streamed with only six episodes, being released on August 1st, 2014 (<https://www.apps.disneyplus.com>). This drama represented the female detective, Sarah Linden, with her partner, police officer Stephen Holder, throughout the investigation of the murder of a young woman named Rosie Larsen (Alberti, 2017). The first and second seasons depicted the detective and her partner attempting to capture the killer, which included the campaign and election of the state senator, which played an integral part in the plot (Mohler, 2020). At the same time, the first and second seasons depicted a specific type of parenting that could be related to the potential reason behind the crime. The cultural uniqueness of Danish culture and family type can be notably observed in this show. The third and fourth seasons portrayed a chain of crimes against other adolescents that take place in

response to the nature of their parental relationships. The cumulative length of the four seasons of the American drama series amounts to 33.19 hours.

1.2 Dangerous Curve

Dangerous Curve (Munaataf Khatar) is currently the most-watched Arabic Drama on the Arabic platform Shahid.Net, with its Arab viewership having expressed a high level of appreciation for this production (see, <https://elcinema.com>). This crime drama was produced by the Shahid production company, executed by Sadeer Massoud and Shadi Youssry, and written by Mohamed El Masry and Ahmed Gouda. The drama aired in one season and included fifteen episodes that ran from July 15, 2022, to August 26, 2022 (see, <https://www.shahid.net>). The drama represented the male detective, Hisham Montaser, with his partner, Mustafa Khalaf, investigating the murder of a young girl, Salma El-Wakil. The cumulative length of the seasons amounts to 9.29 hours.

1.3 Novelty of the Study

The study is novel as it explores the cultural dynamics involved in adapting STF through the case of *The Killing* and its Arabic version *Dangerous Curve*. By examining the specific elements that are emphasized or altered between the American and Arabic adaptations, this research contributes to the literature on media localization and cultural identity, especially within the MENA region, where such analyses are still limited. The study provides insights into how cultural identities influence adaptations of popular Western formats, focusing on character portrayal, narrative structure, and the impact of social norms on content representation. Furthermore, this research extends theories on media globalization, cultural imperialism, and hybridity by illustrating how the process of adaptation integrates global narratives into culturally distinct local contexts, thereby fostering hybridization rather than homogenization. Methodologically, the use of thematic content analysis in comparing STF adaptations offers a replicable approach for future research on media adaptation and cultural identity. Thus, this study helps to understand Arabic adaptations of Western television series, along with getting to know the broader implications of cultural hybridization in media.

1.4 Research Questions

This study explores how the pattern of STF in the detective series *The Killing* portrays the different cultural identities reflected in the American and Arabic versions, with its research questions being as follows:

RQ1: What specific elements are emphasized or altered in the adaptation of STF?

RQ2: What impact does cultural context have on the adaptation choices made in STF of *The Killing*?

The remaining study is organized as; section two discusses literature on globalization, imperialism, and hybridity of mass media and its impact on different cultures, it also discusses the shifting preferences of Arab viewers from Netflix to Shahid VP as well as adaptation theory and cultural identity. Section three highlights the sampling technique and methodology where qualitative research and thematic analysis are conducted. In section four, results are discussed in which the authors attempt to understand the STF of *The Killing Between Two Cultures: Arabic and American Characters*, the narrative structures, and the significance of broadcast length. Lastly, section five provides concluding remarks.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Globalization, Imperialism, and Hybridity

The watching of televised American dramas initially became a phenomenon among Arab viewers during the 1980s with *The Bold and the Beautiful*, *Dallas*, and *Falcon Crest* (Alardawi, 2023). Cultural Imperialism literature would argue that Hollywood/American export TV was set up to 'colonize' other territories. For example, Banjo and Umunna (2022) looked into how the beliefs of Nigerians regarding their outlook on the United States and Nigeria are affected by American media. In their study, a focus group of 54 Nigerian students between the ages of 15 to 17, and no older than 29, revealed that most participants viewed American shows as being more 'realistic' and 'complex' than those from Nigeria.

In a similar vein, Merzougui (2015) studied the effects of American cultural imperialism on Algerian society, as evident in television commercials. Data for the study was collected through surveys administered to 65 MBC channel viewers, supplemented by interviews with a diverse group of viewers to explore their perceptions of American products and advertisements. The study revealed that MBC1 and MBC4 broadcast a significant number of American commercials, including those for Procter & Gamble and Coca-Cola, as well as American-inspired programs like *Arab Idol*, *Arabs Got Talent*, which was sponsored by 7Up, and the *X-Factor*,

primarily supported by Ford, Coca-Cola, and KFC. The study determined that these media formats are instances of American imperialism and have had a significant influence on Algerian culture.

Hirschman (1988) observed that TV dramas from the United States, including *Dallas* and *Dynasty*, functioned as vehicles for spreading the ideology of consumption. Furthermore, Disney and Hollywood outputs could potentially represent the intrusive aspects of American media imperialism. As suggested by Terrebonne (2008), these American media portrayals underscore cultural differences and gain momentum as they are distributed beyond the United States.

This exposure to American media productions may lead Arab audiences to be influenced by imperialism, globalization, and the power of Americanization. Thus, audiences from MENA regions are now familiar with the issue of American imperialism existing in films, dramas, movies, and music. Nonetheless, Arab viewers have continued to watch these dramas in a digital format, through various platforms, i.e. Netflix or Disney. This has resulted in an impact on the cultural identity of Arab audiences, in particular, the invasion/proliferation of Western culture (i.e. American) into local Arab culture; in contrast to homogeneity, globalization produces cultural heterogeneity. However, Gordon (2009) indicated that the concept of Western culture being predominant across Arab media culture is somewhat exaggerated. Using postmodern theory, he indicated that globalization does not destroy native cultures or create a single culture, but rather facilitates cultural hybridity and heterogenization (Gordon, 2009).

Thus, digital platforms such as Netflix can provide Arabic viewers with several options for viewing televised foreign drama series, including Western or Asian content, in both dubbed and subtitled versions, allowing these audiences to watch hybrid content.

Bhabha (1994) described hybridity as a new category of culture arising from multiculturalism. Likewise, Çakırtaş (2017) highlighted, 'the mixture of cultures feeding from different cultures (Eastern-Western)', although Wang (2008) defined hybridity as 'contemporary globalisations, particularly cultural and media globalization'. Interestingly, cultural globalization may lead to hybridization (Pieterse, 2019). Hybridity can be seen across several approaches in media content. For example, the transculturation approach encompasses cultural elements that are derived from one or more cultures, making it difficult to identify a single culture as the source (Rogers, 2006). In addition, Rogers (2006) stated that multiple cultural appropriations generally lead to globalization and transnational capitalism, which work to create hybrid forms that are problematic to replace. For example, Turkish dramas and Korean dramas provide a vastly different cultural identity to Arab audiences, these dramas may become one of the successful hybrid forms of media production that Arab audiences easily engage with. Thus, it is significant to indicate that the popularity of these foreign dramas could make them essentially irreplaceable to Arab audiences.

An alternative approach employed by the local branches of global media conglomerates is that of delocalization, which assists global goods and media texts to break into a local market (Wang, 2008). Furthermore, hybrid delocalization emphasizes the direct mixing of global and local cultural elements to increase the appeal of global goods. This new cultural dimension (often referred to as a "third space"), amalgamates social symbols that cannot be distinctly identified as part of the culture of either the colonizer or the colonized (Tutucu, 2015). In addition, the delocalization approach can also be used in media content, with Iwabuchi (2002) and Lee (2003) suggesting a need to eliminate local qualities to enable products to become more appealing to foreign customers.

This suggests that the hybridity of platforms has the potential to change the direction of the insidious underlying forces of imperialism. Thus, instead of the usual path of Americanization (i.e. from West to East), there is a potential shift to an alternative cultural imperialism, such as Korean or Turkish (i.e. from the East to West). This less uni-directional mode of hybridity could therefore encourage Arab viewers to watch (and even embrace) cultures other than American, i.e. globalization. For instance, Arabic viewers of digital drama series and films have several options thanks to platforms such as Netflix. The hybridity potential embedded within these platforms allows viewers to select Asian content (i.e. Korean dramas) in place of American offerings. This highlights a complex relationship between hybridity, imperialism, globalization, and Americanization, indicating that the notion of cultural imperialism is not limited simply to Western culture.

2.2 *Shifting from Netflix to Shahid VIP*

As noted above, there remains a potential for change within the nexus of cultural imperialism, including platforms starting to shift from Netflix (West) to Shahid VIP (Arab). Thus, (Sakr and Steemers, 2019) noted that, in 2019, 'Goboz was the name chosen for the subscription video-on-demand (SVOD) service MBC Group launched in March 2018 and cancelled unexpectedly a year later, apparently for financial reasons. At the end of February 2019, Goboz ceased to be a standalone application and was merged with MBC's existing VOD

platform, Shahid.net.' MBC created the Shahid VIP on 16 January 2020, which then became the most popular digital platform among Arab viewers (Mustafa, 2020). This platform can be considered hybrid, primarily providing a large number of Arabic dramas and films, as well as foreign content, i.e. Turkish, American, Latin, Pakistani, and Korean.

Shahid VIP has demonstrated hybridity in its script development, with most of its Arabic series not having been originally written by Arabs, but having adapted some of their storylines from foreign series, including American or Turkish productions. For example, Shahid VIP presented the *Stiletto* and *Crystal* Arabic drama series based on original Turkish dramas, which were enjoyed by most of the Arab audience (Appendix B). Interestingly, the changes between the two versions such as Turkish and Arabic are just cosmetic; changing names and geography. This may be due to several reasons. Firstly, the impact of globalization and digitalization has exposed Arab audiences to adaptative versions of other foreign dramas, including Turkish, American, and Korean. Secondly, the lack of innovation in the Arabic Scripted Television Format (STF), which has led Arabic digital platforms, such as Shahid VIP, to encourage the Arabic audience (including Saudi audiences), to watch Arabic drama by producing adaptative serials such as *Dangerous Curve*.

This, therefore, reveals the ability of digital platforms to promote adaptative drama based on the global market. In response, Agger (2011) asserted that adaptation is the most commercially successful form of production, particularly as an alternative to original local dramas. However, while Arab audiences engage in these adaptive dramas, they may also wish to continue to see some of their own cultural identity. Perhaps, Arab audiences would watch 40% of the series which represented their cultural specificity.

2.3 Adaptation Theory and Cultural Identity

Villegas-Simon and Soto-Sanfiel (2021) noted that the primary definitions and theories regarding the adaptation of STF generally concern the concept of determining which elements remain constant and which can be modified. However, Chalaby (2016) outlined several reasons for the delayed growth of scripted formats. In particular, scripted shows are particularly challenging to adapt, largely due to the complexity involved in transferring knowledge. By contrast, buyers of unscripted formats typically receive comprehensive consulting packages capable of equipping them with the necessary skills to successfully replicate a show. On the other hand, the mechanisms and factors contributing to the production of cultural identity can exert a significant influence over the extent and nature of modifications undertaken when adapting STF. These include considerations such as audience preferences, cultural norms, and societal values, all of which shape decisions concerning which elements of the original format tend to be adapted and how they are presented in a new cultural context.

This has led several scholars (e.g., Adriaens and Biltreyst, 2012) to claim that this process is intricately connected to the concept of nations as imagined communities. Thus, Villegas-Simon and Soto-Sanfiel (2021) pointed out that scripted television productions utilize national and cultural identities and discourses, thus rendering them recognizable and authentic, as well as being reflective of perceived truths about what is 'core' to the home culture.

Several previous studies have explored critical factors influencing the adaptation of STFs, including firstly, narrative and dramatic conventions (Mikos and Perrota, 2011); secondly, audience preferences and sensitivities (Canovaca de la Fuente, 2013); and thirdly, local interpretations of television storytelling (Perkins and Verevis, 2015).

This indicates that the use of adaption in scripted format may have a special place in mediating cultural identity, which may impact SFT in areas such as cultural elements; religion, language, and social norms. Thus, each adapted version generally attempts to portray its own cultural identity, to become more acceptable for a local audience. In this context, Liebes and Livingstone (1998) and Chicharro-Merayo (2012) observed that television genres are not simply adopted uniformly across different nations, but each television industry modifies genres, infusing them with local cultural elements and preferences. This process results in a unique version of the genre capable of resonating more strongly with the domestic audience, so illustrating the dynamic and adaptive nature of television production on a global scale. For instance, Latin American telenovelas have been tailored to suit the cultural preferences of non-Latin American audiences globally (Acosta-Alzuru, 2003). Is this why they are so successful abroad? It is argued that Hollywood films are so 'polysemic' that they speak equally well to non-American audiences – and that is why they are so successful. In addition, Turkish drama series have been adapted from Korean originals to dovetail with local cultural identity.

The term "adaptation" in popular culture refers to the process by which global or foreign cultural elements are transformed to fit into a local context. Tutucu (2015) stated that there are two methods of adapting imported cultural products. Firstly, through the purchase of copyright, which preserves the format of the original program,

but with modifications to reflect local culture, i.e. by including local actors, languages, and settings (Moorti, 2004). Acquiring copyright has now become a widespread global practice. Secondly, 'cloned' or 'copied' television programs (Wang, 2010), in which local cultural industries incorporate foreign values into their productions.

Since 2010, Korean dramas have gained increasing popularity on Turkish TV channels, leading to the emergence of adapted Korean dramas, which modify the main story and characters to resonate with Turkish audiences. This process has led to a large number of Korean series being successfully adapted for Turkish viewership, i.e. 'Love story themed dramas began with 'Bir Aşk Hikayesi'. This drama which has thirty-six episodes adapted from the Korean 'I Am Sorry I Love You'. Günahkar's original Korean version is 'Nice Guy', while 'Kiraz Mevsimi', one of the most popular romantic comedies, is adapted from 'A Gentleman's Dignity'. The other FOX TV series 'Kocanın Ailesi' is adapted from the Korean drama 'My Husband Got a Family' (Tutucu, 2015). Adaptions of Turkish dramas tend to change the original SFT to deal with specific cultural issues, i.e. nonverbal communication, or creating dialogue more acceptable to local audiences. Thus, a successful SFT adaption can portray the cultural identity of the country of the original drama, i.e. Turkish identity. Likewise, The Killing has morphed into two other versions, one American, and one British, adapted from the original Danish drama, with the Arabic series based on the American plot of 'The Killing'.

As noted above, the series and films presented through this Arabic digital platform are not exclusively Arabic productions, with some having been created from foreign storylines. Therefore, the current researcher considered it to be of interest to understand how the pattern of STF in the detective series The Killing is used to portray adaptation in the two versions through two different cultural identities, particularly due to the lack of research in this area. This led the current study to answer this research question through the crime drama The Killing, by examining certain elements that are stressed or transformed in the adaptation of STF, alongside the impact of the cultural context on the associated choices within each adaptation.

3. Sampling and Method

The current study was conducted using the comparative qualitative analysis technique as a component of Theme Analysis (TA). Joffe (2012) stated that "TA is useful for understanding textual data, like a focus group and verbal interview data, in addition to mass media materials, like images and videos". In addition, Braun and Clarke (2006) described TA by saying that "It minimally organizes and describes your data set in (rich) detail". The current researcher therefore undertook this procedure to obtain answers to the specific research question concerning how the pattern of STF (The Killing) was adapted in the two versions of the series.

The researchers spent four months watching the two versions of the series, i.e. from January 2024 to April 2024. They completed a total of 42.48 hours of drama viewing consisting of eighty-nine episodes (forty-four episodes of The Killing and fifteen of Dangerous Curve). The duration of each episode ranged from 38 to 57 minutes. The researchers viewed the dramas separately and utilized TA to intensively engage with the data, subsequently employing coding to discover the ideas and principles appearing in the episodes. As trends emerged, those considered prevalent were classified to generate the final analysis. Each of the researchers worked separately, to guarantee the integrity of the results, i.e. interrater reliability. Lombard and his colleagues outlined interrater reliability as 'the extent to which independent coders evaluate a characteristic of a message or artifact and reach the same conclusion' (Lombard, 2002). Consequently, the result of Cohen's kappa test was 0.82, indicating acceptable inter-rater reliability (Altman, 1990). This demonstrates that the coding was generally consistent and agreed upon between the two researchers and was therefore sufficiently secure to continue encoding the variable for the script underpinning both versions.

4. Research Results and Discussion

4.1 Understanding the STF of The Killing Between Two Cultures: Arabic and American Characters

The cultural lens (Appendix A) reveals several differences and similarities between the characters in the Arabic and American versions through four dimensions (i.e. Gender, Status, Role, and Background). Both versions portray the main characters Sarah Linden, and Hisham Montaser as having the same status, and role as in the original, i.e. divorcee and detective, respectively. However, while the main character (or hero) in the Arabic version is a man raised in a family setting, the American version depicts the female as a main character and as having been raised in an orphanage. It can be estimated that these changes are impacted by cultural identity. For example, the Arabic version portrays the detective as male, because is rare to see a woman as a detective or police officer. By contrast, the American version depicts the woman as the detective and one who was raised in an orphanage, a scenario that may be more common and conventional within contemporary American culture. However, Redvall (2013) states that 'the American version of The Killing has been criticized for giving its

female lead too much backstory and thereby losing much of its overall sense of mystery' (Redvall, 2013). This demonstrates how the changes in *Dangerous Curve* are designed to engage an Arab audience by reflecting the specific gendered address of Arabic culture.

Similarly, in the Arabic version, Jack Linden is portrayed as the son of a detective, while Noor is the detective's daughter. This reflects, from the cultural perspective, that in Arabic society, most girls stay with their fathers following a divorce. The detective's mother in the American version is the conventional Western image of a single mother, and embraces the traits of an independent woman, while the Arabic version envisages her as a traditional Arab housewife, widow, and ideal mother. This suggests that the *Dangerous Curve* adaption is designed to be more suited to mainstream Arab audiences.

Additionally, both versions depicted Stephen Holder and Mustafa Khalaf as policemen, but with different backgrounds, i.e. Mustafa Khalaf is seen as a benevolent policeman, while Stephen Holder is portrayed as a drug addict. Interestingly, some characters playing a significant role in the serial *The Killing* are absent in the Arabic versions, i.e. Sarah Holder, Stephen, Terry Marek, and Stan Larsen. It can be surmised that this may be due to the overall differences in the storyline or plot in the Arabic version.

In addition, both versions depicted the victim (Rosie Larsen/ Salma El-Wakil) similarly when it comes to her gender, status, and role. Both characterizations were also interested in creating films, taking photographs, and using social media. However, the two were portrayed as coming from differing backgrounds. Rosie Larsen in the American version is shown as having a troubled past and experiencing depression and loneliness, while Salma El Wakil in the Arabic version has an otherwise good life and wholesome family. This is partially due to Salma's mother (Jehan) being seen as a good mother, while Rosie's mother (Mitch Larsen) is portrayed as domineering.

On the other hand, both versions represent the victim's brother as having a similar status, role, and background. However, while the American version represents David as Rosie's biological father, and Mitch's boyfriend (which could explain the reason behind the character of Stan Larsen), the Arabic version gives Salma only one parent father (i.e. Jamal El Wakil), as homosexual relationships are forbidden in Arabic Muslim culture including fictional representations. In addition, a stepfather is a far more common occurrence in Western than Arabic culture.

Furthermore, both versions portray minor characters, such as Belk and Hassan which retain the same gender, but differ when it comes to other demographic factors. For example, the Arabic version depicts Hassan as a married male, and uncle of Salma, with a harsh unpleasant characterization, while Belk is seen as a single male and a family friend. This is undoubtedly due to the differences between Arabic and American cultures, as Hassan could not be a friend of the father, or the family knew about his daughter, as with Belk in the American version. Hassan is seen as a harsh uncle, and thereby able to make firm decisions about Salma's future, as well as her father; an aspect that is common in Arabic culture, enabling the uncle of a girl to substitute or take the place of her parents.

Notably, both versions of the serial *The Killing* are similar in their portrayal of the characters of Jasper and Karim in terms of their gender, status, and background, but the American version has Jasper as a boyfriend of Rosie Larsen, while the Arabic version depicts Karim as simply a friend of Salma El-Wakil. However, the best friend of the victim remains similar (i.e. Sterling Fitch, and Amina). Furthermore, some characters share the demographic factors across both serial dramas (i.e. Darren Richmond and Khalid Suliman and Janek and Salma).

Interestingly, the American version depicts Mohammed Banet in a positive light as a married Somalian Muslim man, and Rosie's photography teacher, while the Arabic version depicts Jecka as a former boyfriend of Salma, and as a single male photographer, of ill repute, who works in a bar, and takes drugs. This can be seen as both a manifestation of and reflecting Arabic culture, particularly the issue of a female character being seen as having a boyfriend, which again is ostensibly unacceptable in Muslim society. Not to mention the depiction of drink and drug taking. This can be rationalized and explained as an Arabic version portraying Egyptian culture, which tends to be less conservative and more secular compared to Saudi Muslim culture, which does not permit the use of drugs or a female character to be seen as being in a sexual relationship with a boyfriend. Finally, the minor characters Jamie Wright and Eaze Suliman are portrayed in both versions as having the same gender and a similar status but differ when it comes to their backgrounds, as well as the roles played in the drama. This reflects the view of García Avis (2016), who emphasized alterations in the complexity of characters as being one of the elements changed during the adaptation process. Thus, the characters in the adapted form of serial TV drama could change their features such as gender, or behaviours to be aligned with the cultural identity of the audiences. For example, the main hero in the serial drama (*The Killing*) was changeable from a woman (Sarah Linden) to a man (Hisham Montaser) in the Arabic version to be more acceptable to the Arabic culture or Arabic audiences who believe female detectives are rare in Arabic society.

4.2 Narrative Structures

The overarching aim of this study was to explore how the pattern of STF in the detective series *The Killing* is used in the American and Arabic versions through the artifice of two very distinct and different cultural identities. The research therefore evaluated ways the Arabic version differed from the four seasons of the American version.

The American script portrayed the investigation regarding the disappearance of Rosie in ambiguous circumstances, focusing on her parent's relationship as a potential reason if not rationale for the crime. Thus, *The Killing* portrayed a young girl who had a positive relationship with her family disappearing after attending a Halloween party with a school friend, with her body finally found in a submerged car. In the American version, the crime is investigated by a female detective (Sarah Linden) and her colleague (Stephen Holder). Through two seasons of the series, both detectives are seen attempting to capture the killer, investigating all the victim's family members, friends, and teachers, as well as the surrounding neighbourhood. In addition, Rosie's relationships are considered vital to help in identifying the killer. For example, Mohammed Banet, Rosie's photography teacher, a Somalian Muslim married to an American woman, comes under suspicion, spending much of the investigation in the ICU of the hospital after being attacked by Stan Larsen and his friend Belk, under the impression that he was the killer. During this investigation, the storyline indicated a negative view of a Muslim, but he was subsequently revealed as innocent and a good man and husband. It's significant to note that the narrative of the serial drama (*The Killing*) portrayed in depth the socio-cultural values of American society which could indicate that the American society includes different ethnicities, ideologies, and religions via depicting the different and complex storylines. In this scenario, Redvall (2013) calls this type of structure "Double-Storytelling" because it enables the drama to intertwine in several complex narrative threads. Possibly, this style of narration could be more pleasurable to watch. Thus, the diversity and complexity in the narrative structure of *The Killing* could illustrate why audiences like the series so much.

Another character suspected of being the killer of Rosie Larsen in the American version is her boyfriend (Jasper), who was the last person seen with her at the Halloween party. In addition, Terry, Rosie's aunt is also suspected, due to the investigators finding that Rosie frequented the prostitution nightclub "Cat" and received a large amount of money from Terry's bank. However, it is revealed that it was Terry who worked in the nightclub as a prostitute.

The storyline depicts that the Larsen family was aware that Rosie was shocked to find that Stan Larsen was not her real father and that this led to her being depressed and wishing to leave her family and start a new life in California. Mitch (Rosie's mother) is seen as blaming herself for hiding knowledge of Rosie's biological father from her daughter. The storyline showed Stan Larsen (Rosie's stepfather) attempting to find her killer, while simultaneously having to face his dubious past as part of a gang. The American version also introduces another suspect, the corrupt Darren Richmond, campaigning in the Florida state election. This version shows Rosie as having been an accidental witness to police corruption, which then led to her murder.

By contrast, the Arabic version shows the young girl (Salma El Wakil) as a Vlogger, living with her conservative middle-class Egyptian family, and is obsessed with obtaining digital fans through social media, particularly Instagram. The drama portrays Salma as having been raised by both parents with a healthy familial relationship and also with a close relationship with her brothers (Saleem and Adam), but she was more like her mother (Jehan) than her father (Jamal). She is seen as disappearing when the family goes to visit relatives in another village, while she prefers to stay behind and celebrate Halloween with her friends.

In this version, the girl's disappearance is investigated by Hisham Montaser, a male detective, and his colleague (Mustafa Khalaf). Both detectives attempt to capture the killer by investigating all her family members, friends, teachers, and neighbourhoods. They identify her relationships as potentially leading to her murderer, including her former boyfriend, a photographer working in a bar, who is involved with drugs. The Arabic version also shows that, after the investigators spent a considerable amount of time trying to catch the murderer, they discovered that the victim went to her friend's house, to travel outside the country. That led to her uncle (Hassan) and her father (Jamal El Wakil) forcing her to stay, and it was her uncle who was the killer, justifying his crime as an honour killing.

This reveals the differing cultural aspects that influence the two versions of this story. For example, the American version portrays the investigation in depth, with many storylines focusing on the issue surrounding police corruption, while the Arabic plot portrays policemen in a positive light, fighting to find justice for the victim. This may explain the prominence of American drama, with Nelson (1997) highlighting that American network dramas target their audience through the use of a flexible narrative strategy, which contains four to five

stories, one of which is episodic. Suggesting American/western audiences get bored easily and thereby need the complexity of more multi-layered storylines weaved together into the overall plot structure.

It is also notable that the two versions end in very different ways. Thus, while the American version portrays the murder as being an attempt to conceal police corruption, the Arabic version shows an 'honour killing', undertaken by family members. This demonstrates the narrative structure as an important textual component capable of being altered during the adaptation process, as well as being modified in relation to the quantity and intricacy of the storylines, along with the types of dramatic conflicts (Canovaca de la Fuente, 2013). Similarly, García Avis (2016) also emphasized narrative roles as one of the elements that tend to be altered during the adaptation process.

4.3 Length of Broadcast

The broadcast of the two versions also differed in relation to time. The American version, *The Killing*, was broadcast over four seasons, with the first two depicting the actions undertaken to catch the murderer while, the third and fourth seasons shifted to covering other stories of teenagers, and crimes linked to their relationships with their parents. In this context, Creeber (2015) describes the narrative structure, "The Killing, for instance, can be broken down into three major storylines. Firstly, there is 'The Crime Plot', involving the brutal rape and murder of a young girl. Secondly, there is 'The Political Plot', set in motion when a local politician becomes a major suspect. Finally, there is 'The Family Plot', focusing on the girl's friends and family and their reaction to her death". However, the Arabic version (*Dangerous Curve*) has only fifteen episodes, exclusively offered by *Shahid VIP*. The small number of episodes in the Arabic version can be seen to result in the absence of some other ancillary characters or the reduction in the portrayal of some issues explored in the American version. This reveals that the length of the series is one of the most important factors in the adaptation of STF. As noted by Larkey et al. (2016), attention should be directed towards the time dedicated to each one.

5. Conclusion

This study has explored how the pattern of STF in the detective series *The Killing* can demonstrate its adaptation in relation to two contrasting cultural identities. It has underscored the specific elements emphasized or altered in the adaptation of STF in both versions, in particular through identifying the differences and similarities between the American and Arabic versions. These two versions depicted a range of significant factors, including characters, narrative plot, and length of broadcast. These changes have been shown to reflect the significant role played by cultural identity on the adaptation choices made in STF. From the adaptation theory perspective, each version has a specific pattern, mainly in relation to the narrative structure, followed by changes in some of the characters. In addition, the Arabic version reflects Arabic cultural identity in relation to specific social norms (i.e. honour killing), while the American version also reflects American cultural identity as broadcast on Disney and Netflix. These can be seen to influence the changes made between the two versions in accordance with their respective cultures.

The study has several limitations. First, the scope of analysis was restricted to only two versions of the detective series *The Killing*: The American and the Arabic versions. This limited scope prevented the study from capturing a more comprehensive view of the cultural adaptation process by omitting other international adaptations. Furthermore, the focus on a single case study limits the generalizability of the findings, as different genres or formats may exhibit distinct adaptation patterns. Additionally, the study relied heavily on thematic content analysis, which, while suitable for qualitative insights, is inherently subjective and might lead to interpretational biases, especially given the complex cultural nuances involved in such adaptations. The study also did not conduct audience analysis to understand how viewers perceive the cultural changes between the versions, which could have added depth to the findings regarding audience reception of localized content. Lastly, the duration of each broadcast varied significantly between the American and Arabic versions and influenced the narrative depth and character development differently, however, this aspect was not analyzed in sufficient detail to understand the effects of broadcast length on culture.

In line with the limitations of this study, it is suggested that future research should examine in more depth audience perceptions of the original and adaptive series within foreign serial dramas, including Korean and Turkish dramas, and use interview and/or focus group methods. Furthermore, this study considers that it is crucial to scrutinize the pattern of STF in Arabic productions through the cultural context. It, therefore, suggests that it would prove beneficial to conduct a study to enhance understanding of the impact of cultural elements on the adaptation of STF, particularly focusing on narrative structure and characters in Arabic serial dramas.

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Appendix A**Demographic Information of the Characters in The Killing and Dangerous Curve**

Characters	Drama Series	
	The Killing	Dangerous Curve
Name	Sarah Linden	Hisham Montaser
Gender	Female	Male
Status	Divorced	Divorced
Role	Detective	Detective
Background	Raised in an orphanage	Raised by his family
Name	Jack Linden	Noor
Gender	Boy	Girl
Status	Teenager (15 years)	Child (7 years)
Role	Detective's son	Detective's daughter
Background	Lives with his mother	She has autism and lives with her father and grandfather
Name	Bergy	Unknown
Gender	Detective's mother	Detective's mother
Status	Single mother	Widow/mother
Role	Independent woman	Housewife
Background	Selfish mother	Ideal mother
Name	Stephen Holder	Mustafa Khalaf
Gender	Male	Male
Status	Single	Married
Role	Policeman	Policeman
Background	An addict	Policeman specializing in Internet crime
Name	Sarah Holder	
Gender	Female	
Status	Single mother	Absent
Role	Detective's sister	
Background	She is seen as having raised Stephen	
Name	Stephen	
Gender	Male	
Status	Child	Absent
Role	Detective's nephew	
Background	Raised by a single mother	
Name	Rosie Larsen	Salma El Wakil
Gender	Female	Female
Status	High school student	High school student
Role	Photographer, victim	Vlogger, victim
Background	Depressed and lonely	Having a good life and family
Name	Mitch Larsen	Jihan
Gender	Female	Female
Status	Housewife	Teacher
Role	Rosie's Mother	Salma's Mother
Background	Domineering mother	Ideal mother
Name	Stan Larsen	
Gender	Male	
Status	Married	Absent
Role	Stepfather of Rosie Larson	
Background	Gang connections	
Name	Tom and Danney Larsen	Saleem and Adam El Wakil
Gender	Male	Male
Status	Boys (7-8 years)	Boys (7-8 years)

Characters	Drama Series	
	The Killing	Dangerous Curve
Role	Rosie's brothers	Salma's brothers
Background	Strong relationships with Rosie	Strong relationships with Salma
Name	Terry Marek	
Gender	Female	
Status	Single	
Role	Rosie's aunt	Absent
Background	Prostitute	
Name	David	Jamal El Wakil
Gender	Male	Male
Status	Single	Married
Role	Rosie's biological father	Salma's father
Background	Mitch's boyfriend	Seen as having changed his name from Othman after he stopped selling drugs
Name	Belk	Hassan
Gender	Male	Male
Status	Single	Married
Role	Stan's friend	Uncle
Background	Family friend	Having a harsh character
Name	Jasper	Karim
Gender	Male	Male
Status	Classmate	Classmate
Role	Boyfriend	Friend
Background	Rich Family	Rich Family
Name	Sterling Fitch	Amina
Gender	Female	Female
Status	High school student	High school student
Role	Best friend of Rosie Larson	Best friend of Salma
Background	Good girl	Good girl
Name	Mohammed Banet	Jecka
Gender	Male	Male
Status	Married	Single
Role	Rosie's photography teacher	Ex-boyfriend of Salma
Background	Somalian Muslim, a good man	A photographer, of ill repute, who works in a bar and takes drugs
Name	Darren Richmond	Khalid Suliman
Gender	Male	Male
Status	Widow	Widow
Role	State Senator	Senator of the city
Background	Rich and good man	A rich man
Name	Jamie Wright	Eaze Suliman
Gender	Male	Male
Status	Single	Single
Role	Darren's friend	Khalid's brother
Background	Worked hard for the election	He was jealous of his brother
Name	Janek	Slama
Gender	Male	Male
Status	Single	Single
Role	Head of a gang	Head of a gang
Background	Working with drugs, and being in a relationship with Stan	Working in drugs, being in a relationship with Jamal

Appendix B**List of Adaptative Serial Dramas from Turkish Drama**

Original Version	Turkish version	Release Date	Arabic Version	Producer	Release Date
Istanbullu Gelin	Istanbullu Gelin	2017	Bride of Beirut	Shahid	2019-2021
Cinnayetler	Cinnayetler	2017	Stiletto	Shahid	2022
Binbir Gece	Binbir Gece	2006-2009	Althaman	Shahid	2023
Gullerin Savasl	Gullerin Savasl	2014-2016	Crystal	Shahid	2023
Doctor Foster	Sadakatsiz	2020-2022	The Unfaithful	Shahid	2023
Kiralike ask	Kiralike ask	2015	Lo'bat Hob	Shahid	2024

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