

# The “Clash of Civilizations” in the Post Nine-Eleven Discourse of Turkey

*Christoph Herzog*

In the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 the discourse on the “clash of civilizations” as the dominant paradigm of political perception has been considerably reinforced, especially regarding relations between the imagined blocs commonly identified with the West and the Islamic World. In this imagined bifurcation, Turkey’s position has often been considered ambiguous. As a result, the metaphor of a “bridge” between the two worlds has become a commonplace way of rhetorically harmonizing Turkey’s situation, both in Turkey and elsewhere. Given the rather antagonistic conceptual background of the dichotomization, the “bridge” image has been one strategy to minimize the fundamental and persistent crisis of identity that the model propounds. In the wake of the war on terror after 2001 and especially since the American occupation of Iraq in 2003, the rhetorical-conceptual figure of the “clash of civilizations” has been endowed with a new explanatory power in Turkey. As elsewhere it has been generally reduced from an approach to political world history to a dichotomistic notion of a confrontation between East and West or Islam and Christianity, making only cursory reference to Huntington. This dichotomization long preceded the reception of Huntington’s theory and was connected with a deep resentment towards Europe and the West (Seufert 1997: 66-71).

For its resolution a classical set of basic cultural strategies have been developed since the times of the late Ottoman Empire.<sup>1</sup>

This chapter aims (1) to demonstrate that in Turkey this cultural dichotomization or bipolarity does not necessarily rely on a religious discourse drawing on Islam but is based rather on nationalism or a fusion of nationalist and religious ideologemes, and (2) to show that while the discourses revolving around this bipolarity are dependent on ideological and political orientation, the bipolarity itself is not but rather seems to form a kind of cultural consensus among large parts of the Turkish population, and (3) to shed some light on the discursive strategies that have led to the reversal of the weaker and the stronger positions within this bipolarity.

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<sup>1</sup> The taxonomy in Niyazi Berkes, *The Development of Secularism in Turkey*, Montreal: McGill, 1964 offers the classical paradigm. The recent monumental enterprise *Modern Türkiye Siyasi Düşünce* (Istanbul: İletişim), which comprises seven volumes so far offers an encyclopedic analysis of individual thinkers, intellectual currents and schools according to the familiar categorization of political thought into conservative, nationalist, liberal, etc.

A comment on two central terms I use in my analysis seems in order here. When I employ the term discourse, I am thinking of course of the term as developed by Michel Foucault but not in a strict way. My intention is to point to a commonality between my selected texts that inheres in something that could also be called *Zeitgeist* or a paradigm<sup>2</sup> as much as an archeology of knowledge. But I am also interested in the individual particularities of the texts, and I have not tried to dissolve their authors' voices in textual or intertextual structures. I am aware that reading a handful of texts cannot be a discourse analysis in the sense of reconstructing a general mode of speaking or writing. Still I believe that the heterogeneity of the texts I have chosen (one of them being a movie) and the way I am reading them gives rise to some conclusions that go beyond both their individual characters and their belonging to a particular genre. The term ideologeme is taken from Frederic Jameson, who defined it in loose association with linguistic terms such as phoneme or morpheme as "the smallest intelligible unit of essentially antagonistic collective discourses of social classes" (Jameson 1981: 76). For my present purposes I propose to strip the term of its embeddedness in class relations that was assigned to it by Jameson and rather speak of "antagonistic collective discourses of *cultures*." It will be left open as to whether these cultures are in fact antagonistic or whether they are merely described as such by the discourses using ideologemes as delimiting markers. I also intend not to be too strict about the atomistic character of the concept, in other words, not to be too insistent on the definition of an ideologeme as the smallest intelligible unit but rather to pragmatically apply it to interconnected, mutually cross-referencing and sometimes contradictory building blocks or modules of discourses.<sup>3</sup>

### *The Clash of Civilizations as a Global Confrontation Between Two Camps*

The multiplicity of civilizations discussed by the political scientist Samuel P. Huntington has been commonly reduced to a conflicting bipolarity. Huntington himself had paved the way for such an interpretation by coining the catchy phrase "The west versus the rest" (Huntington 1993: 16). However, it seems clear that the widespread perception of a global confrontation between Islam and "the

<sup>2</sup> While Manfred Frank remarked that Foucault's notion of archive was not dissimilar to the concept of the *Zeitgeist* (Frank 1994: 424), Hans Herbert Kögler found that Foucault's episteme had amazingly many parallels to Thomas S. Kuhn's idea of paradigms (Kögler 1994: 41).

<sup>3</sup> When relating the term to Şerif Mardin's use of Victor Turner's term "root paradigm" in his study about Bediüzzaman Said Nursi for basic cultural-cognitive clusters expressed in terms like *gazi*, *namus* (honor), *hürmet* (respect), *adalet* (justice) or *insan* (man) (Mardin 1989: 3-7), one would have to think of ideologemes as "derivative paradigms" to express the fact that they have a secondary, "derivative" position in regard to the root paradigms.

West” expressed by the phrase the “clash of civilizations”<sup>4</sup> cannot be ascribed merely to Huntington’s certainly extremely influential article (1993) and book (1996) but is linked to older perceptions and stereotypes such as the dichotomy between east and west. We thus may differentiate between a more specific and a wider use of the phrase “clash of civilizations.” While the narrower sense of the expression explicitly refers and is tied to Huntington’s theses, the wider use simply takes up the phrase and reconfigures it into some kind of historic and global antagonistic bipolarity mostly involving the West and Islam. In the following I will deal with the second meaning of the phrase.

In Turkey the use of Huntington’s expression to denote an antagonist bipolarity has not always been uncritically applauded. The poet and essayist İsmet Özel, who started out as a leftist intellectual, turned to Islamism in the 1980s and later added a more dedicated Turkish nationalist flavor to his versatile essays (Aktay and Özensel 2004), gave a talk in 1993 on Huntington’s theses shortly after the latter’s article appeared in *Foreign Affairs*. The talk was, with some additional notes, published in 2006 (Özel 2006). In his talk Özel raises several objections to Huntington’s taxonomy of civilizations.<sup>5</sup> More generally, referring to a distinction made in Oswald Spengler’s *The Decline of the West* between the notions of culture and civilization, he argued that Huntington had failed to properly clarify his concept of civilization (Özel 2006: 22). Finally, he claimed that the Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc were a spurious setup created and concluded by the West for tactical reasons (Özel 2006: 20-21). In the same vein, he argued that Huntington’s thesis of an imminent clash of civilizations was a deliberate delusion arranged to camouflage the fact that, since the 19<sup>th</sup> century all cultures had been more or less erased by Western civilization, “because in the whole world the things that people are trying to do are things that comply with Western norms” (Özel 2006: 30-31). The real and fundamental division, then, is not between cultures or civilizations but between the controlling and controlled world (*denetleyen ve denetlenen dünya*) (Özel 2006: 21). The basic division of the world into Western imperialists and their (potential) victims proposed here by İsmet Özel is a basic ideologeme of the Turkish discourse. Notwithstanding the fact that Turkey as a NATO member is formally integrated into the Western military alliance, the country is generally assumed to be threatened by Western imperialist designs.

My second example for the ideologeme asserting the bipolarity of the world is taken from one of the more politically activist periodicals, *İleri* (Forward), pub-

<sup>4</sup> For a survey done by the Institut für Demoskopie Allensbach in Germany on this topic see Elisabeth Noelle and Thomas Petersen. “Eine fremde, bedrohliche Welt,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* 114 (17 May 2006), 5.

<sup>5</sup> For example, he criticizes the singling out of Confucianism as the determining factor for the identity of China, and questions the validity of the category of the Hindu civilization in light of the presence of Muslims on the Indian subcontinent (Özel 2006: 29, 32).

lished by the nationalist left wing group *Türk Solu* (Turkish Left)<sup>6</sup> and proclaiming itself in its subtitle as Kemalist. Issue no. 26 was dedicated to the topic of the Third World War. The temporal coincidence of this issue with Burak Turna's long awaited bestseller bearing the same title (see below) was probably intended, but this question does not need to occupy us here. The editorial for the issue was written by Gökçe Fırat, one of the editors of the periodical. I will not discuss its contents in any detail here but content myself with reproducing a table listing the “camps” of alliances of the three world wars, the third of which is claimed to be imminent (Gökçe 2005: 11).<sup>7</sup>

<i>First World War</i>	<i>Second World War</i>	<i>Global War</i>
USA England France Italy	USA England France Soviet Union	The West The North The Christians ( <i>Haçlı</i> ) Individualism ( <i>bireycilik</i> ) Capitalism Imperialism
Versus	Versus	Versus
Germany Ottoman Empire Austria	Germany Italy Japan	The East The South Islam Collectivism ( <i>Toplumculuk</i> ) The national state ( <i>Ulus devlet</i> )

According to Gökçe the Third World War will be a global war not between states but between blocs and principles, including religion. It is worth noting that the table puts the national state on the same side as Islam. In this design the position of Turkey – having a Muslim population, belonging to “the East” and “the South,” as well as being a national state threatened by partition at the hands of imperialist machinations – is clearly anticipated. While the Turkish Left may be defined as a group on the fringes of the political spectrum that shares some commonality with right wing positions, several of the ideologemes occurring in *İleri* and other publications from this group are by no means limited to the political fringes in Turkey.

<sup>6</sup> This group split from the Maoist Workers Party (İşçi Partisi) led by Doğu Perinçek.

<sup>7</sup> The table does not list Tsarist Russia among the actors of World War One.

### *A Sociology of Cultural Antagonism*

The 12<sup>th</sup> yearbook of the Institute for Sociology at the University of Istanbul is entitled *Tarihde Doğu-Batı Çatışması* (The clash between East and West in history), which also indicates the general topic of the volume (Eğribel and Özcan 2005). The title refers to the conflict between Orient and Occident that has allegedly persisted since antiquity. It presupposes this conflict to be a basic ordering principle of history. The theoretical basis for this concept has been elaborated by the Turkish sociologist at the University of Istanbul Baykan Sezer (1939-2002), who has developed it since the 1960s. The two editors of said volume, Ertan Eğribel and Ufuk Özcan, are his former students and are now lecturers at the same department. While the volume contains a tribute to the noted scholar of Byzantine studies Semavi Eyice, it is mainly dedicated to the work of a symposium, the *Baykan Sezer Working Days*, held every year in honor of Prof. Sezer.

Baykan Sezer was born on 7 August 1939 in Malatya, but his family moved to Istanbul when he was still in his infancy.<sup>8</sup> His father was a medical doctor, his mother a primary school teacher who had given up her job to be a mother and housewife. Baykan Sezer graduated in 1959 from the famous Galatasaray school and in 1960 went to Paris, where he began to study sociology. He completed his studies in Turkey and graduated in sociology from the University of Istanbul in 1968. He embarked on an academic career. In 1976 he became *doçent* (lecturer) and in 1988, chair of sociology at the University of Istanbul, which had been held before by such illustrious personalities as Ziya Gökalp and Hilmi Ziya Ülken. He retired in 1998 and claims that he chose the earliest possible date for retirement because he was unhappy with the *Yüksek Öğretim Kurulu* (Commission for Higher Education) and its control of the universities.

Sezer's time as a student in Paris fell into the last phase of the Algerian war for independence. He read the Marxist literature of the day, followed the controversies about the Asian mode of production and occupied himself with the writings of Sultan Galiev. One of his influences derived from the works of the Australian philologist, archaeologist and historian Vere Gordon Childe (1892-1957). Edward Said, on the other hand, made little impression on him, he wrote, because his thought at that time had already been shaped (Sezer 2004b: 33). The most important intellectual influence for Baykan Sezer resulted from his friendship with the writer and essayist Kemal Tahir (1910-1973) starting from the 1960s. He wrote about this influence retrospectively: “My discussions with Kemal Tahir became a watershed for me. I don't think that since then until today my thoughts have changed again” (Sezer 2004a: 27). As is known, Kemal Tahir's ideas were

<sup>8</sup> The following data is taken from Sezer's self-portrayal in Sezer 2004a, the letter printed in Sezer 2004b and Göney 2004.

deeply influenced by Marxist theory, and he was an outspoken critic of westernization (Akyıldız 2002: 467-468).

Although Baykan Sezer throughout his life continued to make use of Marxist concepts and terminology, it would be misleading to regard him as a Marxist sociologist. Politically speaking, he was acceptable to such conservative-nationalist circles as the *Kubbealtı Akademisi*<sup>9</sup>, where he was invited to read a lecture (Sezer 1995: 123) and to the editors of the MHP-sponsored monumental encyclopedia about Turkish history *Türkler*, where his article “Turkish History and our Sociology” formed part of the programmatic introductory section (Sezer 2002).<sup>10</sup>

Sezer’s sociology was closely connected to the interpretation of history rather than to the methodology of synchronous social analysis. Although Sezer located the origin of the bipolarity between East and West in human geography (Akpolat 2004: 258), it would appear that for him the difference between East and West assumed ontological qualities and therefore the epistemological consequence of a specifically Eastern sociology. The step from calling for an Eastern sociology to demanding a Turkish one is justified by the historical qualities of Turkish history itself. “Turkish history,” he writes, “has an important superiority when it comes to gaining a comprehensive and holistic view of the world and of history. The reason for that is that the Turks have contributed to relations at the highest levels in history. The superiority and importance of the Turkish society and history (*Türk toplumu ve tarihinin üstünlüğü*) also results from that fact” (Sezer 2002: 192). Western concepts of history were not fit to understand or explain Turkish history. One important difference was the absence of social classes and class conflict in Turkish society (Sezer 2002: 189), another the meaninglessness of the usual periodization of Western history into antiquity, middle ages and modern times (or into their Marxist equivalents of slaveholder society, feudalism and capitalism respectively) for the Turkish case (Sezer 2002: 190).

Sezer also interpreted Huntington’s concept of a clash of civilization in terms of a bipolarity between East and West and claimed to have preceded Huntington in this respect. He also referred to the historians Arnold Toynbee, Gordon Childe and René Grousset as precursors (Sezer 1997: 45).

After his death in 2002 Sezer’s students and successors have continued both Sezer’s dichotomization of East and West and his plea for a genuinely Turkish sociology as the fundamental issue for sociology in Turkey.

There is yet another continuity between Sezer and his successors: the belief in the guiding mission politically and culturally of Turkish sociology. “Sociology

<sup>9</sup> This institution and its co-founder Samiha Ayverdi cooperated with the *Aydınlar Ocağı*, where the original form of the Turkish-Islamic synthesis was formulated (Kaner 1998: 50-51).

<sup>10</sup> The other articles in this section were written by the president of the official Turkish Historical Society, Yusuf Halaçoğlu, by the historians Halil İnalcık and Şevket Koçsoy and by the late Nihal Atsız.

has just one obligation in Turkish society: This is to serve the Turkish people and to advise Turkish society.” If Turkish sociologists do not consider the interests (*çıkarlar*) of Turkish society, they will resemble Turkish musicians who play Western classical music in Turkey (Sezer 2004a: 28). This view is echoed by Eğribel and Özcan in their introduction to the volume about the conflict between East and West:

It is our duty to analyse and to solve our social problems. That will be possible when we approach social phenomena from the perspective of our own interests and, confronted with various events, choose the way that corresponds to our own interests (*çıkarlar*). To do that it is necessary that we possess a certain method (perspective).<sup>11</sup> We advocate a perspective that corresponds to the space and the interests of Turkish society in this world and history and a corresponding approach to research. The place and the interests of the Turkish people are defined by their roles in the clash between East and West (Eğribel and Özcan 2004: 6).

A closer look at this text is in order here, because it contains in aggregation two important assumptions that are hidden in its terminology: (1) Interests (*çıkarlar*) does not mean intellectual affinities of any sort here but “collective benefit.” That implies that sociology here is put under the tutelage of real (or putative) interests of a specific group described as “Turkish society.” (2) What is meant by “method” and “perspective”? In the passage quoted above the word “method” is explained in parentheses as “perspective.” Some lines above, however, the word “worldview” (*dünya görüşü*) is explained as “method” (*yöntem*) when the authors explain that “the relation and the cooperation between the social sciences should indeed be based on a specific worldview (method).”<sup>12</sup> In the same context, the phrase “methods of modern science” (*modern bilim yöntemleri*) is explained as “a specific attitude vis à vis social events” (*toplum olayları karşısındaki belli bir tutum*). These semantic cross references as well as the textual context direct us to the meaning of worldview in the sense of *Weltanschauung* rather than to the question of scientific method in the narrower sense of the term.

This points us to a particularistic concept of social sciences and of history according to which social sciences and history (their close connection being advocated by the very conception of Sezer’s sociology) are put into service for the representation of interests. This is not done, however, by applying François Lyotard’s notion of incommensurable discourses or using similar relativist epistemic approaches as a post-modern reading of Sezer has suggested (Akpolat 2004: 255). This becomes clear when Eğribel and Özcan examine the possible importance of Sezer’s sociology for overcoming the clash of the East and the West. Quoting Sezer they write:

<sup>11</sup> “Bunun için belli bir yönetime (bakış açısına) sahip olmamız gerekir.”

<sup>12</sup> “Toplum bilimleri arasında ilişki ve işbirliği elbette belli bir dünya görüşü (yöntem) temelinde olmalıdır” (Eğribel and Özcan 2004: 6).



What does the East have to do? The West had its chance but it could not use it. The West was not capable of realizing a new balance or a new world with new relations. The West did not use this chance but preferred to conserve the dichotomization of East and West for the sake of its own superiority. The East with its productive character, with its human and other resources in its hand is winning a privileged position by overcoming these problems. The East, by relying on these resources, can put forward a new order of relations that overcomes the clash between East and West. We are at one of the places where the relations between East and West are being shaped. The proposal can come from us; it does not need to come from China (Eğribel and Özcan 2004: 16-17).

The claim that the sociological discourse put forward by the East will be able to overcome the clash by pursuing its very own interests relies on the idea that meeting the demands of the deprived will overcome social cleavage. Given Sezer's roots in Marxist thought, this idea probably should be interpreted in the Hegelian tradition of the dialectical three step process of thesis, antithesis and synthesis. However, from the point of view critical of the meta-historical prerequisites that conceive of world history as a dichotomy of two cleanly and clearly discriminable blocs representing East and West or colonized and colonizers, the quotation enforces a rhetoric of dominance by blurring the distinction between particularist justification and its universal application.

### *Political Fiction*

In December 2004 Orkun Uçar (b. 1969) and Burak Turna (b. 1975) published their bestselling novel *Metal Fırtına* (Metal Storm). While nothing indicates that the resemblance of the book's title to Ernst Jünger's famous metaphor in the title of his book *The Storm of Steel* was intended, the resemblance is not incidental because *Metal Fırtına* in fact contains a militarist celebration of war albeit in a completely different vein and context. *Metal Fırtına* is a straight-forward political thriller about a war between the USA and Turkey in 2007, featuring the Turkish secret agent Gökhan Birdağ as the story's hero. The book struck a responsive chord in the Turkish public mainly among younger generations (Seufert 2005). Within a short time it reached record sales. The figures presented by the publishing house on the verso of its title page indicate that the book started with a circulation of 50,000 in the first edition reaching eight reprints and a circulation amounting to 400,000 by April 2005, i.e. in less than half a year after its first publication. Another 100,000 had been printed by March 2006 (Uçar and Turna 2006: 2).<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> There was also a considerable amount of unlicensed printing; about 150,000 unauthorized copies of the book were confiscated. Uçar further claimed that, as many copies were lent and read dozens of times, the total number of readers may have reached the figure of five million (Uçar 2005a: 197).



Given the limited size of the Turkish book market, these are enormous figures. Until he won the Nobel Prize for literature in 2006, the Turkish novelist Orhan Pamuk's book sales, including translations into foreign languages, came to no more than 800,000.<sup>14</sup> Smaller publishing houses in Turkey print no more than 1,000 to 2,000 issues of a book at one time. If the book proves a success on the market, such small scale reprints may occur with high frequency so that large numbers of reprints can be reached. A case in point is one of the other best-sellers of 2005, Turgut Özakman's *Şu Çılgın Türkler* (Those Mad Turks), a historical narration of the Turkish War of Independence. Published first in April 2005, by mid-June 2006 it had reached a total circulation of 622,000 in 311 reprints of 2,000 issues each.<sup>15</sup>

After their success the authors of *Metal Fırtına*, Orkun Uçar and Burak Turna split up to continue their shared success with separate sequels. Thus there now exist two sequels bearing the title *Metal Fırtına 2*, one by Orkun Uçar published by *Altın Kitaplar Yayınevi* (Uçar 2005b) and one by Burak Turna, whose books continued to be published by Timaş (Turna 2005b). In the meantime Burak Turna achieved yet another commercial success with a book of political fiction on the third world war that was printed with an initial circulation of 100,000 (Turna 2005c). For both authors *Metal Fırtına* enabled them to realize long-cherished dreams of embarking on careers as free-lance writers. Orkun Uçar had been working in the Turkish media sector but since having been laid off in 2001 had been financially supported by his elder sister (Uçar 2005a: 169). At the same time he had been administering his own website and, together with Sibel Atasoy, had been running a small publishing house, *Xasiork Ölümsüz Öyküler Yayınevi*, printing science fiction and fantasy literature, which he claimed were his passion (Uçar 2005a: 34-62).<sup>16</sup> Burak Turna had been working in the banking and textile sectors but in his spare time occupied himself with writing and the study of military technology and philosophy. As becomes clear from their interviews, neither was lacking in self-confidence. Turna has also published an essay entitled *SistemA*, mixing quantum physics, philosophy and systems theory into a synthesis that “when applied to world politics and history brought about the idea of the Turkish political fiction that started with the novels *Metal Fırtına* and *The Third World War*” (Turna 2005c: 11).

*Metal Fırtına* is structured in a sequence of cinema-like scenes that are localised and dated. The book starts on May 23, 2007 at 00:10 a.m. southwest of

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Korap, E. 2004. “İslami Besteseller,” *Milliyet*, April 18, 2004. I owe this reference to Dr. Barbara Pusch.

<sup>15</sup> I owe this figure to the courtesy of the publishing house Bilgi Yayınevi.

<sup>16</sup> This book contains autobiographical information (pp. 11-62), several literary and political essays by Uçar, reprints of several interviews Uçar and Turna gave to newspapers or TV stations as well as some commentaries (not written by Uçar) in the Turkish media about *Metal Fırtına*.

Kerkuk, Iraq, where Turkish soldiers are attacked by American units. When the Turks, after some tough fighting, have nearly all been killed, Lieutenant Alper has a vision:

Alper closed his eyes. The roaring in his ears he was listening to made his head ache. His face smiled. (...) Before Alper's eyes came a vision. Shadows approached slowly, increasing in size. Explosions were heard, but the shadows became larger without changing of shape and advanced directly to his position. He began to distinguish the sounds they made. The sound of horses reached his ears; now he was listening to a symphony produced by thousands of horseshoes. His feeling of loneliness disappeared. Instead, streams of enthusiasm were raining from the sky and like rain relieved his mind. He could perceive the horses now; they were overriding all obstacles as if they had wings. A choked sound of "my God" came from his throat. He saw them; tears were flowing from his eyes. "It's them," he cried out. Flying by on their horses they were Turkish soldiers wearing the kalpak<sup>17</sup> their eyes fixed forward. Lieutenant Alper became paralyzed and unable to move. He couldn't describe the happiness he was feeling (Uçar and Turna 2006: 17-18).

The Turkish riders appear on two other occasions upon the heroic death of a Turkish protagonist (Uçar and Turna 2006: 72, 252). The vision occupies an extraordinary place in the book because it is the only one that connects to any mystic or quasi-religious dimension in an otherwise emphatically realistic narration. It is also remarkable that religion or religious feelings play little significant role in the story – at least on the Turkish side. It has been claimed, not least by the authors themselves, that the book is a complex and multilayered structure of codes and quotations. Thus it is claimed that the description of popular resistance in Istanbul took its inspiration from Stalingrad, or that at the end of the novel the plain of Malazgirt is evoked where the Seljuks defeated the Byzantine emperor in 1071 (Uçar 2005a: 92-93), an event that is commonly remembered as an epochal date marking the beginning of the Turkification of Anatolia. The color grey, appearing in the "Grey Team" (*Gri Takım*) of secret Turkish elite fighters to which the hero of the book belongs, apparently draws its inspiration from the fact that Uçar preferred a grey foreground color on the black background of his web page because white made too strong a contrast and hurt his eyes (Uçar 2005a: 92). However, all these codes and allusions do not raise the simplicity and straightforwardness of the story and its characters to any notable complexity required for a novel of some literary ambition. The best part of the book is probably the detailed information given on the different systems of weapons in current use by the Turkish and American armies, which was contributed by Burak Turna (Uçar 2005a: 117, 163-164). But books do not need to be complex in order to be successful.

<sup>17</sup> Fur caps associated with the Turkmens. A similar kind was used by the Ottoman army in the First World War.

A partial explanation for why the book received so much attention might be that by making armed conflict with the USA its central topic, it broke a political taboo. Interestingly, although the book received much attention in the Turkish media, its authors claimed that they were first ignored and indeed deserved better coverage (Uçar 2005a: 65, 81, 138). They also positioned themselves as potential martyrs, claiming that when writing the book they were aware that publishing it would put their lives in danger (Uçar 2005a: 138). Modestly, Uçar claimed that the book marked a watershed in Turkish political discourse (Uçar 2005a: 66). In an interview printed in the newspaper *Vatan* in September 26, 2004 – i. e. before the book was out – Orkun Uçar claimed: "The idea that America may occupy Turkey is shocking. The publishing houses we approached to publish our book were shocked too. Some of them were afraid of publishing it. What we are saying in the book is that such a possibility exists in the near future" (Uçar 2005a: 87). Asked whether their intention was to earn money by publishing a book containing conspiracy theories, Uçar replied:

Making money is only a secondary result of this project. Our principal aim is not money but to feel the excitement of the effect this book will have. Think of Orwell's 1984! Like this book, we want to 'warn' and, in a certain way, to change the course of history! Therefore we want to send this book to Prime Minister Tayyip Erdoğan, because the prime minister in our book is also Tayyip Erdoğan (Uçar 2005a: 89).

In fact, one of the striking literary devices of the book is to make the real politicians of 2004 play the same roles in its scenario of 2007 – George W. Bush and Condoleezza Rice as well as Tayyip Erdoğan and Abdullah Gül.<sup>18</sup> Asked why they preferred writing a novel instead of a political study, Turna answered that they believed a novel would be much more effective (Uçar 2005a: 118). Both professed that they had no interest in politics (Uçar 2005a: 168).

Most of the discussion concerning the book in Turkey revolved around the question whether the scenario of a US attack on Turkey was plausible. Another heatedly debated topic was the question concerning who had commissioned the book to be written (Uçar 2005a: 91, 167). Although the authors repeatedly claimed that it was their own original idea, even an expert on Turkish politics like Günther Seufert in an article for the daily *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* speculated about that question, given the publication of Turna's book on the Third World War in a critical phase of negotiations between the EU and Turkey (Seufert 2005). Yet when put together, the authors' explanations about their book give few clues.

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<sup>18</sup> But not the Turkish military personnel of the book, who all have fictitious names. Asked about the reason for this different treatment of politicians and military officers, Turna explained that politicians were elected, which made it legitimate to use their names, while military officers were "embedded in hierarchies." Uçar on the other hand pointed out that military officers lacked coverage in the mass media, which made it difficult to transfer their personalities into the novel (Uçar 2005a: 93-94).

Their statements made in various interviews boil down to the claims that the USA would probably attack Turkey because of Turkey's rich sources of boron and because of America's Evangelical beliefs; that they (i.e. Uçar and Burak) were the first in Turkey to have recognized this; and that Turkey should be prepared for the scenario they were describing, and that being prepared could contribute to the prevention of the war they were describing (Uçar 2005a). It is completely plausible that two young authors should write such a book to satisfy their personal ambitions. While it is certainly valid to attribute the success of *Metal Fırtına* in part to the fact that it broke the political taboo of public anti-Americanism in an innovative way at a time favorable for such a venture, another aspect of the success the book has experienced is the fact that it embedded this innovation in a highly conventional structural setting, using a mix of familiar ideologemes that possess a broad consensus in Turkish society.

As has been suggested (Uçar 2005a: 107), *Metal Fırtına* is essentially a "parable" of the Turkish War of Independence that has been shifted into a different scenario in the future. The title of the book is derived from the American code name for the military operation in which American troops from Northern Iraq first conquer Ankara before the American military engages in a battle for Istanbul (Uçar and Turna 2006: 21-22). But operation *Metal Storm* is only part of an American-led international conspiracy that bears the code name "Operation Sèvres" (Uçar and Turna 2006: 151, 215). Sèvres, of course, is a highly important keyword in the political discourse of Turkey pointing to the treaty of the same name after the First World War in which the partition of the Ottoman Empire was stipulated and which was revised after the Turkish War of Independence in the treaty of Lausanne in 1923. As mentioned above, at the very same time as *Metal Fırtına* was dominating sales, a monumental historical description of the Turkish War of Independence stormed the bestseller lists. In the conclusion of this book, Turgut Özakman described this war as "one of the most legitimate, most ethical, justest and holiest wars" against imperialism (Akyaman 2005: 688). In loose analogy to the historical original, the American conspiracy in *Metal Storm* is about the expulsion of the Turks from Anatolia and about the distribution of the country among the Armenians, Kurds and Greeks. The rich sources of boron and uranium are destined to be given in a concession to the American company of a certain Adrian III Lynam. This consolidates US American world hegemony. The reckless bombing and murdering of the civilian population in Ankara and Istanbul is countered by the hero, Gökhan Birdağ who places an atomic bomb in Washington at the cost of several hundred thousand lives. However, the war is not terminated by this successful revenge but by international pressure on the USA, especially by Russia and China. In the end Turkey is saved and Adrian III Lynam is tortured to death by Gökhan Birdağ.

In several interviews Burak Turna has stressed that the book should be considered a study in probability theory (*olasılık teorisi*) not as a case of conspiracy the-

ory (*komplo teorisi*) (Uçar 2005a: 98, 105, 117).<sup>19</sup> Both authors in their interviews seemed thoroughly serious about the “historical facts” underlying the book’s story. After the end of the cold war, the authors explained, the USA and Turkey were not on the same side any more (Uçar 2005a: 67). As Uçar emphasized, the USA was already leading an economically as well as religiously motivated crusade against the Middle East and against Turkey (Uçar 2005a: 96, 97, 106, 128–129, 192). Turna identifies American Evangelicalism as a leading faction in this crusade, defined as follows: “The structure of Evangelicalism is a distorted Christian belief that is formed by private churches that were subjected to the manipulatory influence of Jewish financial groups and accepted the latter’s support” (Uçar 2005a: 129).

The ideologeme of Sèvres as a symbol of imperialist aspirations occurs in different political contexts in Turkey. In *Metal Fırtına* the Turkish prime minister Tayyip Erdoğan plays a thoroughly positive role and by employing his diplomatic skills is instrumental in forging the international concord that pressures the USA to end its war against Turkey. By contrast, in a booklet entitled *III. Abdülhamid*, published by the publishing house *İleri* that belongs to the group of the so-called *Turkish Left*, Ali Özsoy polemicizes against Tayyip Erdoğan by comparing him with Sultan Abdülhamid II. (1876–1909), who in most leftist and Kemalist circles serves as a political symbol for retrograde Islamic despotism and cooperation with Western imperialists. At the end of the booklet two maps show a partitioned Turkey, one printing “Sultan Vahdeddin’s Sèvres<sup>20</sup>,” the other showing “Tayyip’s (i. e. the prime minister’s) Sèvres.” On this map Erdoğan is accused of having given away Cyprus, having allowed an independent state of the Greek-Orthodox patriarchy in the Marmara, an American-controlled vassal state in Kurdistan, an independent Armenia on Turkish territory as well as the separation of the Pontus region around Trabzon (Özsoy 2005: 111). Thus Sèvres serves as a key metaphor that demonstrates many of the structures and workings of political discourse in Turkey. While the keyword “Sèvres” is connected to the ideologeme of the ultimate imperialist design for the partition of Turkey, the political figures identified either as collaborators of imperialism or as patriotic defenders of the fatherland vary according to political position. The notable exception, of course, is the ethnic and religious minorities that practically always are depicted either as politically unreliable or as directly siding with the external enemy that is identified with imperialism and therefore has close affinities (if it is not perceived as simply identical) with the West.

Finally, the ethical utilitarianism of the book is striking. It is more appropriate to distinguish between likeable and unlikeable characters than between good and bad ones, unless one defines good and bad exclusively in terms of national bene-

<sup>19</sup> As mentioned above, for Turna *Metal Fırtına* is a practical application of his own eclectic systems theory he calls SistemA.

<sup>20</sup> Alluding to the Sultan under whom the treaty of Sèvres was signed on August 10, 1920.

fit. This is echoed by Uçar in an interview where he says: “As the writer of the character of Gökhan, I do not think of him as a hero very much. He does not relate much to concepts of good and bad. He is like a member of the state (*devletin bir uzvu gibi*)” (Uçar 2005b: 164). What this means becomes most visible in the scene when the future members of the Grey Team are forced to shoot the puppies that at the beginning of their training had been entrusted to their personal care, in order to prove their unconditional obedience to their commanders (Uçar and Turna 2006: 97).

### *Turkish Rambo*

The film *Kurtlar Vadisi Irak* (Valley of the Wolves Iraq)<sup>21</sup> was produced by Serdar Akar, who also directed the very popular TV action series bearing the same name and starring some of the same actors. According to Akar, the film had to be produced in a hurry because the TV series had ended, and the cinematographic version had to come out quickly before the excitement and the impression created by the series faded away. Costing 10 million dollars to produce, it was one of the most expensive Turkish films (Taşçıyan 2006). After a release of only five weeks, the film had been seen by more than four million people, making it the most popular Turkish film ever (Altuntaş 2006). In *Kurtlar Vadisi Irak*, Necati Şaşmaz plays a smart secret agent named Polat Alemdar. Alemdar, who in the TV series fights the mafia, this time takes revenge for his brother Süleyman, who as a military officer committed suicide because he could not bear the dishonor of having belonged to a special unit of Turkish soldiers who had been arrested and had sacks placed over their heads by American soldiers in Sulaymaniyya in northern Iraq. The film begins with the scene of Süleyman writing a letter to his brother Polat in which he asks the latter to avenge his honor. It is not his personal honor however, as is made unmistakably clear, when after finishing the letter Süleyman puts it into the envelope together with a small Turkish flag he has rescued from desecration by American soldiers before shooting himself in the head. His last words, before pulling the trigger are “Long live the fatherland” (*vatan sağolsun*). The letter, read aloud to the film’s audience, contains a historical explanation in two sentences: “Whoever ruled this region oppressed the people of this land. Except our ancestors.”<sup>22</sup> This digression is highly significant. It claims the heritage of the Ottoman Empire for the Republic of Turkey.<sup>23</sup> It is also significant that

<sup>21</sup> This is the official translation of the film’s title. However, in my own quotations from the film I have not always rendered the (sometimes faulty) English subtitles but orientated myself towards the spoken text.

<sup>22</sup> “(...) bu topraklara her hükmeden bu toprakların insanlarına zulmediyor. Bunu bir tek atalarımız yapmadı.”

<sup>23</sup> In an interview the film’s director Akar made clear that the historical perspective was intended and quoted the well-known Turkish historian İlber Ortaylı saying: “When we ana-

Iraq is not mentioned by name but is referred to as “this region” (*bu topraklar*). Thus it is not referred to as a subject of sovereignty in the international system of nation states but as an object, an agglomeration of land, a region whose inhabitants are naturally subject to rule. In accordance with the official Turkish vision of history, it was only the Ottomans who were just rulers. Thus Turkish rule over “the region” is legitimized while at the same time the American occupation is signified as illegitimate. If we remember the historical Turkish claims to Mosul and northern Iraq, this interpretation is all but innocent. Although the film itself doesn’t claim to be factual, it tries hard to ground this basic political value judgment in facts that are well known to the politically interested Turkish public. The scene that refers to the factual incident of the Americans placing sacks over the heads of the Turkish special unit is shown *in extenso*, and even its exact date (July 4, 2001) is given in the letter of Süleyman, who also declares that the purpose of the special unit was to “serve the security of the region” (*bölgenin güvenliği için hizmet*). The event was called the *çuval olayı* (hood event) in Turkish, and it triggered a diplomatic near-crisis between Washington and Ankara as well as a major mass media campaign in Turkey that can be said to have attained the status of a *lieu de memoire* in the Turkish collective memory.<sup>24</sup> There are also other allusions to real incidents in the film such as the attack of US troops on a wedding party or the Abu Ghurayb prison scandal that are depicted in the film as American business as usual in Iraq but without any reference to the legal consequences the real incidents had after having been revealed to the public. By referencing these “real events” that gained a status of factuality from the political news coverage of the Turkish and international mass media, the film implicitly makes a claim to transcend the fictional action genre and to represent a sort of political parable, whose distinction of good and bad is grounded in factuality even if the characters in the film are fictitious.

The confrontation between Turkey and the United States over Iraq described so far is presented in terms of a purely secular nationalist symbolism. The moral bifurcation on the level of the film’s main actors is between the hero Polat Alemdar and the villain Sam Marshall (played by Billy Zane), who is in command of the American occupation forces. But religion also plays a significant role in the film. The bifurcation here is essentially between Islam and Christianity. But while in the political perspective Polat Alemdar can be said to represent Turkey while Sam Marshall embodies the US, in the religious perspective the film makes a shift. While Sam Marshall, who is depicted not only as the embodiment of ruth-

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lyze events in the Balkans, the Mediterranean, North Africa, South Europe and the Near East, we absolutely have to take into account the order of the Ottoman period. Our analysis has to be made through looking at the political order of the period of the Ottoman Empire” (Taşçıyan 2006).

<sup>24</sup> Still in December 18, 2006 and January 5, 2007 articles in the Turkish daily *Hürriyet* were concerned with the issue, the one in December even being the lead article on the front page of the paper.



lessness, hypocrisy, corruption and cynicism but also as a religious fanatic, represents Christianity, the film's hero of Islam very obviously is not Polat Alemdar but the local Sufi shaykh and highly respected religious leader Abdurrahman Khalis al-Kirkuki (played by the Syrian actor Ghassan Massoud). This shift in representation on the level of the leading parts requires that we differentiate between a political and a religious dimension in the film. They clearly overlap, but they are not identical. Interestingly the film turns the tables here. The disjuncture on the level of the leading parts representing politics and religion on the side of Turkey and Islam implies a considerable degree of secularism, whereas through the personal union of politics and religion in the person of Sam Marshall the stigma of religious fanaticism is ascribed to the other side, forming an example of Orientalism reversed. That this is by no means an accidental but on the contrary an essential message of the film is suggested by explicit and lengthy elaboration of this issue on several occasions. Thus when the bride Leyla, whose husband Ali had been killed in the film by American soldiers during Leyla's and Ali's wedding party, asks her stepfather Shaykh al-Kirkuki whether she can avenge Ali by becoming a suicide bomber, she is harshly reprimanded. The severe lecture she receives from the shaykh is worth quoting because it delivers a condensed moral theological message of the shaykh to the audience:

Leyla, choosing to be a suicide bomber means revolting against Allah's will in two ways by a single action. It means first giving up your hope and committing suicide and then accepting the risk of sacrificing innocent people together with your enemy. Can you know how many will die, when you're a suicide bomber? You can't! And since it is not possible to know that, killing innocent people is like killing the whole of mankind. People who instilled this idea into the minds of Muslims, and recruited them as suicide bombers are the ones who recreate Hasan Sabah's wickedness again. This is a sign of doomsday, my daughter, and it is certainly a work of the devil. I see your grief. However, I feel sorry to see your desire to be one of the suicide bombers who make the world think that Muslims are dreadful people. Never forget that Allah isn't helpless, my daughter; our current helplessness and weakness is due to our deviation from the Quran and our Prophet's way and also due to our failure to be united. Each suicidal act increases this weakness and helplessness. That's why our enemies desire the number of such acts to increase and possibly even organize these actions themselves. Our only hope for survival is to commit ourselves to Allah's way. Let us pray, let us engage ourselves, let us be united and let us be free.

This non-militant and politically quietist Salafi interpretation of Islam given by the shaykh sharply contrasts with the religiously justified political activism of Sam Marshall, who is shown praying in front of a crucifix asking God for "the ability to resolve the conflict in Babylon" as well as with his desire to acquire this promised land "for us" and to die there. While he prays, the scene is cross-faded into an underlayered view of a town in northern Iraq where American soldiers patrol while members of Kurdish militias paint red crosses on the doors of the Turkmen minority who will be obliged to leave. Health care measures and the distribution of care packages and cheap footballs to the population are

documented by American journalists as is a speech delivered by the leader of the Kurdish collaborators in which he personally thanks Sam Marshall for what he has done for Iraq by offering him as a present a piano from one of Saddam's palaces. The speech of the Kurdish leader follows the prayer of Sam Marshall. While Sam Marshall and the Kurdish leader are exchanging the kiss of brotherhood, Sam Marshall informs his Kurdish ally that "the Turkmens are done, the Arabs are next." The scenic arrangement blends hypocrisy and neo-colonialism and ethnic cleansing into the religious devotion of Sam Marshall. The lonesome prayer of Marshall in front of a crucifix is contrasted in the following scene by the extensive filming of a Sufi *dhikr* led by Shaykh Abdurrahman Khalis al-Kirkuki. Again the visual is crossfaded while the prayer expressing the belief that the Muslims must endure and that Allah will eventually emerge victorious goes on. The scene shows Turkmens leaving their homes. For a while the camera shows a son carrying his old mother on his shoulders while the sound track remains with the prayer. Then the view changes again back to the *dhikr* reaching its ecstatic climax, exhibiting a forceful demonstration of Muslim piety, resolve and unity.

The film as a text clearly gains complexity by the secularist split in the division of competence between Khalis al-Kirkuki and Polat Alemdar. The strategic advantage for the narrative becomes clear when we situate the film in its cinematic genre, the category of hard core action. Regardless of morals, this genre is about bloodshed and killing. On the other hand, the normative concept of religion and Islam the film suggests to its audience is that religion is not about violence, at least not against innocent people. Thus, when Polat Alemdar and his friends at the Turkish-Iraqi border slaughter a Kurdish border guard for harassing them, religion is not involved. But when Sam Marshall shoots dead the leader of the Turkmen community because the latter pretends not to know about Alemdar, he does so as a representative both of US politics and of the Christian religion, while Kirkuki is shown saving a kidnapped Western journalist from being decapitated by masked Muslim terrorists and declaring such actions as un-Islamic.

But the secularist division comes at a price regarding both the cinematic texture and the textual coherence of the film. Although the shaykh's religious values and the national values of the hero are on the same side, in the end they remain separate. The meeting between Khalis al-Kirkuki and Polat Alemdar does not happen because of the showdown between Alemdar and Marshall. The innocent romance between Alemdar and the shaykh's foster daughter Leyla, who saves Alemdar's life, ends with the murder of Leyla at the hands of Marshall. Alemdar, unable to save her, can only fulfill her burning desire for avenging her husband by stabbing Sam Marshall with the dagger which her husband has left her as a cherished gift. Thus, on this level, the film is about revenge, both political and personal. However care was taken not to make this an official political af-

front: In a dialog between Alemdar and Marshall at the hotel of Mr. Fender, the representative of American capitalism,<sup>25</sup> a first verbal showdown between the two protagonists takes place. Alemdar demands from Marshall that he and the American soldiers put hoods on their heads like they had forced the Turkish special unit to do, threatening to blow up the hotel if Marshall refuses to comply. Sam Marshall expresses his amazement at the Turkish mentality that would be offended because of the treatment of eleven soldiers. He then carries on:

I tell you why you are offended. Because the US have been paying for you for the last fifty years. We send even the elastic for your god-damn panties. Why can't you produce anything? (...) How can you forget how you begged us to save you from the communists?

The answer of Alemdar to that outspoken American view of history is remarkable: "I'm not the leader of a political party. I'm not a diplomat nor a soldier. I'm a Turk, as you pointed out very well. I wreak havoc upon those who put hoods over a Turk's head!" On the one hand this blunt avowal of ethnic nationalism avoids the confession that Alemdar is on a private mission to avenge his brother. On the other, it also avoids attributing any official character to his punitive mission. The ideologeme of the inseparable connection between honor and Turkishness covers the existence of the deep state (*derin devlet*). But it also tends to blur any demarcation between public and private, between state and society and between legal and illegal. In a way the deep state gives birth to its own negation by dissolving solid state institutions into hidden networks.<sup>26</sup> Thus, the threads of religion and politics on the Turkish side remain unconnected. But the reason for that is not a concept of secularism demanding separation of state and religion but the sheer absence or invisibility of state institutions which are replaced by a vague notion of ethnic nationalism whose compatibility with Islamic universalism the film refrains from putting to the test. That it might not pass this test is indicated, among other things, by the depiction of the politics of clothing imposed by the film on the leaders of the three ethnic groups that it recognizes: Kurds, Arabs and Turkmens. In the scene where they meet with Sam Marshall, only the Turkmen leader wears Western style clothing while the other two are clad in their traditional dress. Thus, at the end of the day the driving motor of the film's narrative is not religion or religious values but honor and revenge clad in secular nationalism. The question about what kind of connection between na-

<sup>25</sup> "Isn't he on your payroll? Isn't the boss of the American soldiers American capitalism?" asks Alemdar of Mr. Fender when the latter claims that he has no connection to Sam Marshall.

<sup>26</sup> As a symbol of the deep state the keyword 'Susurluk' has attained some prominence in the Turkish collective memory. In 1996 after a fatal car accident near this little town a notorious death squad leader, a member of the Turkish parliament, a senior police officer and a former beauty queen were found in the wreckage of a car together with diplomatic passports, weapons, forged documents and some cocaine.

tionalistic and religious values might exist is not only left unanswered it is not even asked. Obviously the film does not feel the need for explanation here but assumes it to be self evident that these values are complementary or in mutual alignment with each other. In other words, a popular form of the Turkish-Islamic synthesis is not discussed in the film, it is presupposed.

### *Chiliastic Fiction*

In 2006 Turgay Güler, employed at the Turkish Islamist TV-station Kanal 7, published his novel *Mehdix*. The book's subtitle was *Olasılık Teorisi* (Probability Theory). The title clearly hinted its synthesis of the two words *Matrix*, referring to the popular movie, and *Mehdi*, the Muslim messiah. The book's cover design, showing among other things vertically arranged and cascading green script characters clearly was a visual evocation of their famous use in *The Matrix*. The story itself read like an Islamist answer to *Metal Fırtına*. However, the author in an interview explained the title simply as a concatenation of *Mehdi* (for messiah) and X (for the unknown), i.e. an *unknown messiah* (*bilinmeyen bir kurtarıcı*). Nevertheless he accepted that the book be compared with *The Matrix* (that in his view was a parable on Jesus) and was enthusiastic about a proposed idea to make his book into a movie. In the same interview Güler also denied that his book was a religious novel (Güler 2006b). However when compared to *Metal Fırtına*, which, although co-authored by a devoted fan of the literary fantasy genre, restricted itself in the main to physical realism, *Mehdix* can be said to have made the transition from physics to metaphysics or to have brought literary fantasy into political fiction. The mythological elements of his book were taken deliberately not from Western but from Islamic sources, as Güler expressed his contempt for Western fantasy:

The West has no narrative. America none at all. As it lacks a narrative, the Harry Potters and the Da Vinci Code appear. But we do have important narratives. Why does nobody write them? It was left to me to write them. This is the first time that local fantasy has been written. And this book has experienced a sudden acceleration. Its first print of 100,000 has been sold. That is a really serious figure. And I hope and wish that it will be the bestselling novel for years (Güler 2006b).

Thus the question of how to write back against the West is thematized. For Güler it is not enough that the plot of a story slaps America and the West in the face. It needs also to re-localize the setting in which the plot unfolds. Re-localizing the story for Güler means Islamization. As he pointed out in the mentioned interview, he did not hesitate to refer to the *Quran* and to hadiths.

The book tells the story of the chief of the Turkish general staff who in the year 2019 through a series of dreams and mysterious messages on his computer is appointed the Mahdi. In the process of receiving his mission, he also loses his wife and family in a plane crash (a God-sent ordeal), turns from being a secular

believer to being a more zealous Muslim observing the Islamic ritual regulations, receives the staff of Moses, which had been hidden for several thousand years, and is commanded to kill the eschatological Dajjal. Not knowing who or what the Dajjal is, the general looks on the internet, where he finds hadiths and their interpretations and finally realizes that the Dajjal is a symbol of the West. For example, a hadith holding that one eye of the Dajjal is blind is interpreted in the following way:

The philosophy and ideology of the Dajjal is materialism. According to this way of thinking, divine revelation or realities which cannot be perceived by the senses are without any importance. For that reason the religious teachings based on revelation may not be allowed to guide man and his life but must be eliminated. This expresses the understanding of materialism that originated in the West. The phrase of the hadith saying that one eye of the Dajjal was blind shows that the Dajjal perceives only the material aspect of life but is uninformed about its spiritual side (Güler 2006a: 44).

In the following year, 2020, the final decision about the acceptance of Turkey into the European Union is to be announced. Because of the activity of Christian pressure groups, Turkey is rejected. The EU makes further negotiations on this matter dependent on the condition that the Hagia Sophia be given back to the Greek patriarchy and turned into a church. However, this outcome is also the result of a decade-long conspiracy of the US and Israel, who have been secretly working against membership of Turkey in the EU. As a consequence, Turkey experiences an unprecedented economic crisis resulting in famine and declining internal and external security. The USA transfer control over Iraq to Israel, Armenian terrorists enter Turkey, Greece starts to violate the Turkish borders, and the Greek Cypriots start attacking the Turks while the Turkish government is helpless. In this situation the Mahdi-general has a dream suggesting that he turn the Hagia Sophia – converted from a mosque into a museum by Atatürk in 1934 – back into a mosque. This is realized on August 19, 2020, when the Mahdi together with the Turkish general staff and the Turkish cabinet arrive there for Friday prayer. The Islamic world applauds whereas the USA regard this act of prayer as a *casus belli*. The reason for their reaction is Evangelicalism:

In America the politics were done according to the prophecies of the Bible. This was openly pronounced. In America alone there were close to 100 million Evangelicals and the American president himself was an Evangelical.

The Evangelicals had a single dream: the Last Judgment should come as early as possible. The Evangelicals, who had brought the president to power worked with all their might to accelerate the advent of Judgment Day. (...) But according to the Bible, all peoples of the world would have to gather in one church. According to them this church could well be the Hagia Sophia. (...) The Messiah would come to the Middle East. But first an early end of the world was needed. According to the Evangelicals, the Jews were chosen people and were to be supported. It was a condition of the end of the world that they be supported (Güler 2006a: 112-113).

The third world war seems imminent. But the planned invasion of Turkey by US forces accompanied by Armenians and Greeks does not take place because the Mahdi-general is instructed to hit the ground with the staff of Moses, thereby causing a terrible earthquake in California leading to chaos and civil war in the United States. The final showdown is between the secret commander of the Zionists and Israel, called "Sion" (Zion) and the Mahdi-general. The Zionists had demanded from the Mahdi-general the staff of Moses because it belonged to the Jewish people and threatened to destroy the Muslim sanctuary in Mecca if it was not given to them. The official answer of the Mahdi-general is broadcast by international television stations:

(...) The staff I'm holding in my hand belongs to the prophet Moses. Moses is the prophet of all mankind. This staff symbolizes a power. It symbolizes truth, beauty and justice. The country that wants to be in possession of the staff must defend these values. Turkey possesses these values. Therefore the staff is with us (...) (Güler 2006a: 169).

The book paints this dichotomy between good and evil in a rather crude way, e.g. when the treatment of the Palestinians at the hands of Israel is described:

(...) the Palestinian population had been suffering a serious decline during the last ten years. More exactly it had been reduced. Hundreds had been killed by Israeli soldiers. The Palestinians were dying of cancer at a young age. The new-born children were almost all disabled. Israel experimented with radio waves in the Palestinian areas. The children born disabled were the result of these cruel experiments. The leaders of the new Intifada movement were the Palestinian women. They had nothing to lose. They knew that they were not strong enough to achieve anything against Israel. But as they were expecting help from God, their hopes were high (Güler 2006a: 169).

Although the Zionists tear down the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem as a part of their prophecies about the preconditions for doomsday, all their activities to stop the Mahdi-general fail although they control even the governments of the Islamic countries. In a conversation between the commander Zion and the Israeli general chief of staff the latter is upset because of the loss of control:

- But the Muslim peoples do not listen any more to their leaders. They don't read newspapers, they don't watch television. Our social engineers cannot reach them.
- It doesn't matter. Their countries are not controlled by them but by us. They only vote. In some places not even that (Güler 2006a: 210).

Although the freemasons in Turkey are set in motion by Zion,<sup>27</sup> even they fail to kill the Mahdi-general. An attempt, instrumented by Zion, to conquer Turkey from Europe by means of a crusade army also fails while in preparation because the Mahdi-general manages to infect the electronic weapon systems of the enemy with a computer virus. In the end the Mahdi-general at the head of the Turkish army marches to Israel, gives the land back to the Palestinians, has Zion hanged and the Jews deported to the USA.

<sup>27</sup> The idea that freemasons act as a part of the Zionist conspiracy is a noted ideologeme in Turkish discourse.

## Conclusion

While it is true that the bipolarity of East and West is a theme that long predates the terrorist attacks on the WTC, there are indications that it has gained a new dynamic and perspective after that date. For Turkey the American invasion of Iraq and the resulting tensions between the two countries have become another milestone. When the authors of *Metal Fırtına* were asked in an interview when precisely they had decided to write the book, Burak Turna answered that it was after 9/11 that he started trying to guess when the third world war would break out. Orkun Uçar, on the other hand, referred to the “hood event” in Sulaymaniyya as the moment when he began to foster similar thoughts (Uçar 2005a: 161). This seems to coincide with the results of public opinion polls by the Pew Research Center about the decline of favorable views of America among the Turkish population that indicated a drop from 52 percent in 2000 to 15 percent in 2003 and only a slight recovery to 23 percent in 2005 (Holland 2006).

Beyond their “anti-western” convictions, the texts discussed above are examples of postcolonial literature.<sup>28</sup> But the ironic words of Salman Rushdie “the Empire writes back” gain an additional twist when we take into consideration the social and political continuities connecting Turkey with the Ottoman Empire.<sup>29</sup> The criticism of the present world order that can be found in these texts converges in some kind of political or cognitive utopianism. While the commercial aspects connected with the production of *Metal Fırtına*, *Kurtlar Vadisi Irak* and *Mehdix* should not be underrated, the seriousness of their messages should not either. “The oppressed await you” is one of the messages mysteriously written on the screen of the Mahdi-general’s computer while he receives his instructions (Güler 2006a: 47).

However, as the paradigm of the nation and its state precedes and penetrates all these visions, they may be claimed to form part of the overarching discourse of Turkish nationalism. Benedict Anderson in his now classical work *Imagined Communities* has pointed out the affinity of nationalism and religion (Anderson 1999: 10-12). Obviously this affinity is more prone to mutual reinforcement than Anderson had assumed (cf. Özkırmılı 2000: 153). The authors of the influential work *The Empire Writes Back*, alluded to above, have somewhat uneasily observed the inherent tendency of some postcolonial literature to “a gradual blurring of the distinction between the national and the nationalist” (Ashcroft et

<sup>28</sup> That is, of course, only in vague analogy with the book of this name by B. Ashcroft, G. Griffith and H. Tiffin who concentrate on English (or in their terminology: “english”) postcolonial literature.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Meeker, M. E. 2002. *A Nation of Empire. The Ottoman Legacy of Turkish Modernity*. Berkeley etc.: Univ. of California Press. Rushdie’s phrase originally was “the Empire writes back at the centre.”



al. 2002: 17). This observation certainly would deserve profound theorizing, which our space here does not permit.

Taner Akçam, one very critical observer of Turkish political discourse, has recently argued that "Today, Turkey vacillates between the poles of being a great power and deep fear for its own existence. Its natural reaction has been to pull in its horns, to go into a defensive posture, and to treat every situation as a problem of vital security" (Akçam: 2004: 5). The ambivalence between anti-imperialism and the desire for empire nourished by the glorification of the Turkish imperial past (Copeaux 1997) may exacerbate the hegemonialist tendencies of nationalism in the Turkish case. A certain degree of narcissism at least seems the unavoidable price, e.g. when Uçar and Turna speak of Istanbul as the center of the world (Uçar and Turna: 266). The sociologist Baykan Sezer in a similar vein believed in "the superiority and importance of the Turkish society and history." İsmet Özel, who in a conference coined the expression *God* "created the Turks superior to other nations" (*Allah Türkleri diğer milletlerden üstün yarattı*), explained this expression in an interview with the idea that "the Turks have to carry a heavier load than all other nations. The way the Turks have to go is riskier, more noteworthy and more worthy of adoration than that of other nations" (Özel 2005: 5). Özel thus willingly or unwillingly parallels Rudyard Kipling's rhetoric of the "white man's burden." In his book Güler brings this meta-historical claim of Turkish chosenness to its final logical conclusion in the chiliastic conflict between the Turkish Mahdi-general and the personification of the Dajjal in the Jewish-Zionist commander Zion.

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