

# Imaginations and Realities: Encoding Turkish Geopolitics in the Valley of the Wolves-Palestine

## Abstract

This paper aims to analyze the links between the film *Valley of the Wolves-Palestine* and current geopolitical events, Turkey's geopolitical visions, and the geopolitical imaginations of the filmmakers, and real events and imaginations by recognizing the site of production. To do this, I included two interviews; one with a Mavi Marmara activist and another with one of the scriptwriters of the movie. Conversations with the interviewees highlighted those geopolitical imaginations and geographical codes that influenced the movie, *Valley of the Wolves-Palestine*, to some extent, which has corresponded with the geographical imagination that is internalized by the practical geopolitics experts in Turkey.

**Keywords:** Geopolitical Imaginations, Popular Geopolitics, Valley of the Wolves, Palestine, Geopolitics of Turkish Cinema

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## Tahayyüller ve Gerçekler: Türkiye Jeopolitiğinin Kurtlar Vadisi-Filistin'de Kodlanması

### Öz

Bu makale, Kurtlar Vadisi-Filistin filmi ile mevcut jeopolitik olayları, Türkiye'nin jeopolitik vizyonları, film yapımcılarının jeopolitik tasavvurları ile yapım alanını tanıyarak gerçek olaylar ve tasavvurlar arasındaki bağlantıları incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bunu yapmak amacıyla iki röportaj gerçekleştirdim; bunlardan biri Mavi Marmara aktivisti, diğeri ise filmin senaryo yazarlarından birisi. Görüşülen kişilerle yapılan röportajlar, Kurtlar Vadisi-Filistin filmi etkileyen jeopolitik tahayyüller ve coğrafi kodların bir dereceye kadar Türkiye'deki pratik jeopolitikçiler tarafından içselleştirilen coğrafi tasavvur gücü ile uyuştuğunu göstermiştir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Jeopolitik Tasavvurlar, Popüler Jeopolitik, Kurtlar Vadisi, Filistin, Türk Sinemasının Jeopolitiği

### لتصورات والحقائق: ترميز الجيوسياسية لتركيا في «وادي الذئاب- فلسطين»

#### ملخص

تهدف هذه المقالة الى دراسة الروابط بين التصورات و الحقائق الواقعية عن طريق معرفة المجال الانتاجي و التصورات الجيوسياسية لصانعي الفلم و الرؤى الجيوسياسية لتركيا و الوقائع الجيوسياسية الموجودة عن طريق فلم وادي الذئاب - فلسطين. و قد قمت بإجراء لقاءين صحفيتين للقيام بذلك؛ اللقاء الأول كان مع ناشط سفينة مرمرة الزرقاء و الثاني أحد كتاب السيناريو في الفلم. و لقد تبين من خلال هذين اللقاءين أن التخيلات الجيوسياسية و الرموز الجغرافية التي أثرت في فلم وادي الذئاب فلسطين متناغمة نوعا ما مع قوة التصور الجغرافي الذي تم استيعابه من قبل الجيوسياسيين الفاعلين في تركيا.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** التصورات الجيوسياسية, الجيوسياسية الشعبية, وادي الذئاب, فلسطين, الجيوسياسية للسينما التركية

## Introduction

In the presidential proclamation in March 2019, the President of the United States, Donald Trump, announced on his Twitter account that the Golan Heights is a sovereign territory of Israel. The Golan Heights are recognized by the world, with the exception of the U.S. and Israel, as part of the Syrian territory that has been occupied by the Israeli military for years. This self-declaration of territorial recognition in favor of Israel is repudiated worldwide which violates the territorial integrity of states as one of the most fundamental principles of international law. Turkey's criticism of the U.S.' unilateral action and Israel's pachydermatous behavior in the region produced heated quarrel in Israel. This was not the first confrontation between Turkey and Israel. The Turkey-Israel conflict dates back to Recep Tayyip Erdogan's acrid conversation with Israeli President, Shimon Peres, at the World Economic Forum in Davos, 2009. Public resentment against Israel in Turkey reached its peak after "the height of humiliation", which occurred during a diplomatic meeting between the Turkish ambassador, Ahmet Oguz Celikkol, and Israel's Deputy Foreign Minister, Danny Ayalon, in Jerusalem, in January 2010. The subsequent attack on the Mavi Marmara Gaza Flotilla in May 2010 (which resulted in nine deaths and the wounding of fifty Turkish citizens in international waters) by Israeli Special Forces gave the needed momentum for the political-action film *Valley of the Wolves-Palestine* (2011). The Pana Film project's well-timed release accumulated public anger for Israel and was visible in the production. Film used the ongoing political tension as a propaganda tool to expose Turkish public resentment and show the political climate in Turkey following the Flotilla incident. The filmmakers wanted to produce a virtual platform to voice Turkish peoples' opinions on the matter. In this respect, this paper<sup>1</sup> aims to analyze the not so hidden links between the film *Valley of the Wolves-Palestine* and current geopolitical events, Turkey's geopolitical visions, and the geopolitical imaginations of the filmmakers, and real events and imaginations by recognizing the site of production. To do this, I included two interviews; one with a Mavi Marmara activist and another with one of the scriptwriters of the film.

<sup>1</sup> This paper is revised and expanded version of the author's thesis chapter.

## Valley of the Wolves-Palestine

The plot of the *Valley of the Wolves-Palestine*, as with the previous Pana film *Valley of the Wolves-Iraq* (2006)<sup>2</sup>, follows well-trained Turkish agents led by Polat Alemdar (central character) on a quest for revenge against the Israeli general Moshe Ben Eliezer who was the prime planner and the executor of the Mavi Marmara raid. The film begins with Israel Defense Forces' (IDF) operation on the Turkish ship, Mavi Marmara, which sails to break the Israeli blockade of Gaza and transport its load to Palestinians. From the beginning and throughout the movie, whenever and wherever Polat and his men engage with Israeli soldiers there are many shootings and killings during the Israeli soldiers' attack on Palestinian neighborhoods. Top of this, the film does not refrain from depicting IDF soldiers as ultimate killing machines of innocent Palestinian civilians.

The movie was banned in Germany (Spiegel, 2011) for being an anti-Israeli and was heavily criticized for premiering on January 27, International Holocaust Remembrances Day. After Pana Film appealed to the German court, the ban on the movie was removed, but it was restricted to audiences 18 years old and older. Other European countries such as the Netherlands, France, and United Kingdom posed similar restrictions on the movie by ruling that only 16 and older could view the movie.

As in previous Pana Film productions, this movie also aroused international tension and criticism as it stimulated national and international praise in various corners of the world. For example, Europe-based Jewish organizations appealed to German Chancellor Angela Merkel and Austrian Chancellor Werner Faymann to condemn the movie and its glorifying violence and inciting anti-Israeli sentiments (Tribune, 2011). On the other hand, according to Ozdener (one of the scriptwriters), this new movie was poised to be the biggest movie in the Middle East. He says that the Pana Film would continue to bring the voices of the oppressed to the white screen and continue to criticize Israel. He said: "*Valley of the Wolves-Palestine* will only storyline what really goes on in Palestine. Israel will be demonstrated as bloody hands, cruel,

<sup>2</sup> Pana Film productions can be situated within the Milli Cinema which is believed that the term in general entered the cinema literature with the works of director Yucel Cakmakli. This paper omits the discussion of the movie's place in the Turkish cinema history for the sake of focus and the broadness of the subject. However, the paper argues that the Milli Cinema especially through the recent trend in the historical TV series contributes greatly to the development of literature about Turkey's geopolitical narratives domestically and internationally. Therefore, the movie *Valley of the Wolves-Palestine* should be situated particularly within the literature on popular geopolitics.

human slaughter, and disrespectful to human dignity” (Özdener, 2010). On other occasions, the producers emphasized that the movie was an effort to bring attention to the human drama in Palestine for the audiences of Turkey and other nations.

Whether one movie can dramatically harm Turkey-Israel relations is already a historically debated matter. It had significant potential as a medium to project social, political, moral, and cultural views to audiences in Turkey and around the world. This movie is action-packed and entertaining and employed novel forms of geopolitical representations and geographical imaginations for audiences worldwide. As the movie entertained millions in the dark rooms of cinema halls and in their living rooms, it spread epic tales of victorious Turkishness and confirmed Turkey’s geographical and historical responsibilities as well as challenged orthodox geopolitical understandings of Palestine-Israel conflict and territoriality. Hence, the following part of the study attempts to analyze the geopolitical implications of the movie by including the site of production of meaning-making and asked these questions: What discourses are embedded in the movie’s storyline and what goals and intentions do the producers possess? Through the interview I explore how an entertainment production is interpreted by informed audiences such as a humanitarian worker who witnessed Israel’s Mavi Marmara raid.

### **Background: Movie and geopolitical narratives**

Earlier studies on popular geopolitics argued that movies as geopolitical texts form an everyday image-based language that can provide better ways of understanding the radically changing geopolitical world (Power & Crampton, 2007). Even the most complicated and problematic issues of social and political life can be expressed smoothly through cinematic narrations and artistic forms. Under the circumstances, cinema’s propagandist and undisputable ability to present places, events, and peoples appeals to politicians and world states (Dodds, 2008). Cinema, for that reason, has been and continues to be the concern of states and policymakers (Löffmann, 2013). Strada and Troper argue that “American foreign policy and movie...track each other through time as compulsively as symmetrical sundials” (Strada & Troper, 1997). Thus, it was not surprising that following the terrorist attack of September 11, executives of Hollywood and White House advisors came together to establish a theatrical exit strategy to the US’s internationally dec-

lining image. Published in 2007, Power and Crampton in their edited book entitled *Cinema and Popular Geo-Politics* draw attention to the unwavering connection between cinema and (international) politics (Power & Crampton, 2007). The contributors from various disciplines for that reason interrogate how movies work to crystallize or firm up states' international identities and location on the world map. For example, Power and Crampton argue that Hollywood movies provide handy maps through which Americans imagine/ position themselves in the uncertainty of the geopolitical world. They note that "important questions can be raised about the ways in which geopolitical imaginations are expressed through a movie and about how different 'threats' and 'dangers' are constructed through various Hollywood narratives" (p.3). Besides statecrafts' discursive proclamations as in the case of President Trump, through movies and cinematic narratives, the importance of borders, boundaries, and sovereignty can be (re)explored, (re)mapped, and recognized. Therefore, it is no surprise that Turkish cinema products such as *Valley of the Wolves-Palestine* takes geopolitical matters into the reel site to challenge established geopolitical narratives while it attempts to formalize one of its own. Thus, this paper investigates the movie within popular geopolitical writings and theories that much of the literature is situated (Toal & Agnew, 1992) (Sharp, 1998) (Dittmer & Bos, 2019).

### **The site of production**

In order to understand geopolitical imaginations encoded within the movie *Valley of the Wolves-Palestine*, we are obliged to pay attention to its production site (Rose, 2007). For this very reason, Gillian Rose asks us to delve into the image's author(s) be it a producer, a sculpture, or a painter. What is known as "auteur theory" examines the production site of an image to understand what its maker(s) intends to show. Although Rose and others argue that in a so-called postmodern era, how an image is understood (audience interpretation) is more important than what is intended to show (author), I argue that in order to grasp the full picture in the meaning-making circle, we don't have the luxury to omit an important element of image studies. Because the viewer is an active reader of an image does not mean that she/he is completely independent of other modalities that give meaning to the image (cinematic text). These kinds of social particularities to a sufficient degree influence the text-reader, as well as the author and construction of the text.

Even though the site of production includes computerized technologies, production materials, location, finance, and authorship, in this paper I will include the authorship of *Valley of the Wolves-Palestine*. This is important because the way the movie is narrated, formed and/or edited has an enormous impact on its viewers. For example, the movie's formation is vital to a movie production which indicates that its material (people, place, and the story) is representative and corresponds to the viewers' experiences and expectations of how that certain object looks. In addition to this argument, a great movie, generally, means that two factors are present: "a good script and a director's inspiration, vision, intelligence, and supervision of all aspects of the movie's production" (Barsam, 2004). Based on particular expectations from the scriptwriter or the director, we make decisions to go to a movie or choose not to go. In the case of *Valley of the Wolves-Palestine*, I wanted to know what intentions were put forwarded by the production side to attract viewers, and what messages were meant to be infused in the movie. One interview with one scriptwriter may not tell the whole story behind the production line but it still gives important clues for what sort of geopolitical messages were imbedded in a movie. For this reason, I completed an hour-long semi-structured face-to-face interview<sup>3</sup> with Cuneyt Aysan, one of the scriptwriters of the *Valley of the Wolves-Palestine*, about various aspects of the movie and reasons behind making such a political-action movie. This face-to-face conversation with the scriptwriter helped me better understand the cinematic codes of the *Valley of the Wolves-Palestine* and motivations behind making such movie. This open-ended dialogue with the scriptwriter also helped to open new doors of understanding of the site of production and the fictionalized messages of the movie.

I also included an interview with an aid worker from the Foundation for Human Rights and Freedoms and Humanitarian Relief (IHH) who was one of the activists in Mavi Marmara. He was also invited to see the premiere of *Valley of the Wolves-Palestine*. I talked to him about the movie because of the extent the movie succeeded to be the voice for the Mavi Marmara and its ability to cinematize Palestinian drama<sup>4</sup>. The movie begins the scene with the IDF's raid of the ship in the Mediterranean. The idea to include an activist's opinion was to understand how reality is coded into the imaginary and how the imaginary created the truth-effect in reality.

<sup>3</sup> The interviews are conducted in Istanbul by the author in 2011.

<sup>4</sup> IHH was the organization responsible for galvanizing the international movement to break the Gaza blockade in 2010.

## Imaginations are rehearsals of realities

My interview with the activist initially aimed to highlight how entertainment production helps us to understand Turkey's geopolitical vision in the world. As the interviewee notes, *Valley of the Wolves-Palestine* production is just one side of the series of events that give important clues about Turkish geopolitics and the Turkish people's understandings of regional affairs. For that reason, our conversation touched on various topics especially the movie's authenticity. In this sense, I asked if *Valley of the Wolves-Palestine* producers had contacted IHH personnel to get inside information about the Mavi Marmara attack. Following are the answers and my interpretations of those answers and what they mean for a student of geopolitics. However, here you will only read the responses about insight the IHH provided for the production of the movie and how the Mavi Marmara activist sees non-government organizations' role on disseminating Turkey's new story to the kin geographies. In this paper, I excluded responses that related to what happened in Mavi Marmara for confidentiality.

The activist:

Yes, some of our friends, including myself, from the IHH are interviewed with the movie team. During this meeting, one of the scenarists, Raci Sasmaz, highlighted that one of their intentions was to contribute to the Palestinian cause and Turkey's firm stand on the issue. Sasmaz mentioned that the Pana Film also wanted to do something about the lawlessness of the raid as to honor Mavi Marmara activists' effort which only few could have attempted to do.

Then I wanted to know what the activist thought about the relationship between the current AK Party government's emphasis on extrovert Turkish foreign affairs and the recent productions of the conservative cinema that bombards the market with national and Turkish narratives.

The activist:

Of course, these are not so separate from each other. But, Turkish cinema's openings to the outside of the borders of Turkey should not be automatically associated with the current government's foreign policies only. Non-profit organizations' years-long works should be included as well. Owing to these organizations, Turkish society became aware of the outside world especially the geography that we were familiar with once. For example, our people went to Afghanistan, Bosnia, Africa, and so on. Our people have always been interested in Asia, the Middle East, Europe and Africa. Being the inheritor of the Ottoman Empire necessitated this interest. And Palestine is just one of these places. If movies such as *Valley of the*

*Wolves-Palestine* and *Iraq* are interested in these areas, it is because our people are interested in these areas. Jerusalem is no different than Istanbul in the eyes of the Turkish people. That is also why people support organizations such as the IHH and movies such as *Valley of the Wolves-Palestine*.

The statement above draws attention to Turkey's abysmal relations with the former Ottoman territories from multiple dimensions. Thus, it would be too narrow thinking if we attribute Turkey's opening to former Ottoman territories solely on the basis of practical geopoliticians activities and Turkey's diplomatic missions. Different non-state actors in Turkey are also responsible for establishing and strengthening historical and geographical ties with the region. These actors' connections with people outside Turkey's formal boundaries should be taken in to account and considered part of civil diplomacy (Ozkan, 2010). Movies like *Valley of the Wolves-Palestine* only enhance these connections and help diffuse cultural symbols that are familiar to people in the former Ottoman territories. In this sense, the activist also highlights the functionality of popular products abroad and their geopolitical visions that serve to Turkish soft power around the world.

The activist:

In the past, at borders, we would be questioned longer than any other nationals. But today, many countries around the world welcome the Turkish passport. And Turkish people surely enjoy this when they are treated welcomed. Let me share with you a story of mine. When I was in Nigeria, I stayed in a hotel that was owned by a Lebanese. When he saw my passport, he asked me if I watch *Valley of the Wolves* television series. First, I did not understand what he was talking about then he showed me the entire CD collection of the episodes. And he was a Christian man. Since then, I began thinking that besides non-profit organizations, Turkish popular cultural products are also active and useful in representing Turkey. In other words, what Hollywood has accomplished abroad that is what Turkish popular culture is achieving today.

The activist speaks cautiously not to generalize the changing perception of the Turkish passport simply with dissemination of popular culture. He also indicates other parameters such as a growing economy, political stability in the country, and Turkish people's international mobility that helps change Turkey's image in the world. But, the activist continuously emphasizes the importance of Turkish entertainment products abroad. Nevertheless, our conversation interestingly came back to Ottoman factors.

The activist:

Turkey and Turkish non-profit organizations are active in many countries. For example, they restore historical buildings such as mosques and bridges, send humanitarian aid to those in need, and organize cultural events in Bosnia, Kazakhstan, Albania, and in many other kin-states. These things were associated with developed countries like the US, England or France, but now with Turkey also. Turkey's international inactivity for almost a century is disconcerting, but now people are getting excited about moving beyond their borders.

As a follow-up question, I asked him this: Can we say that *Valley of the Wolves-Palestine* is a cinematic way of saying sorry to former Ottoman subjects. We are sorry because we have ignored this geography for so long but we have not forgotten about you. From now on, the Palestinian cause is our cause.

The activist:

Imaginations are rehearsals of realities. In Turkey, there is this hope to embrace and unite the people of all these familiar geographies. This is my expectation too. Because, I went to these regions and I saw people oppressed, exploited and live in hardship while others enjoy their high living standards. And this upsets me. For example, I went to many parts of Africa. In those countries, I saw 400 years-old roads that arrive at ports. These are the only roads people still use today. But it still feels like slaves are being exported on these roads. Perhaps not slaves are moving on these roads today but this time their natural resources are exported while modern products are ushering in. Here, our people also see these people are still being slaved through this new importation and modern imperial policies. In this atmosphere, empathy emerges. This empathy feeds our imaginations. And ultimately our imaginations are reflected within our collective culture such as art, cinema, music, and education. Then these imaginations turn into realities. Therefore, *Valley of the Wolves-Palestine* is the reflection of our imagination put into the cinema.

## Encoding Valley of the Wolves-Palestine

In this part of the interview, I wanted to go beyond the decoding process and to see what kinds of geopolitical imaginations fed the site of the production of the movie. It was my intention to gain clues about what kinds of geopolitical priorities are adorned in the movie. Through this interview, I also wanted to see how the opinions of an activist parallel with the scriptwriter in a movie with a storyline of the incident in which the activist was part

of. I began asking the scriptwriter Cuneyt Aysan about the motivations for making this movie.

Cuneyt Aysan:

This movie's priority is this geography, Middle Eastern geography and then the whole world. With this movie, we wanted to take people's attention to the region's trouble spots [Palestine]. We believe that without establishing permanent peace in this part of the geography, there won't be peace in the world. In addition to that, we believe that there is this human tragedy, genocide, on this soil and if this genocide continues, world peace won't be possible or the negative perception for the west among Muslims will not change radically. More or less, this is what we wanted to say.

The movie, *Valley of the Wolves-Palestine*, serves to recall a century-long collective memory and forgotten knowledge about Palestinian drama via cinematizing Palestinians and their tattered and torn geography through the lenses of Turkish geopolitical imaginations and cinematic formations fed with Turkish narratives.

In this respect, Aysan emphasizes the power of cinema and its ability to influence hearts and minds to change the perceptions of millions. He is very aware of this particularity of movies and acknowledges the fact that through *Valley of the Wolves-Palestine* the Western-oriented Palestinian perceptions can be changed or at least challenged. Aysan believes that the public opinion about the Israel-Palestine issue is very much a result of the manufactured news of the Western media. That is why he thinks that their ultimate assignment is at least to unveil different statements on the matter if they cannot reverse the common perception completely.

Aysan continues and adds:

Media perception is really important. Media always have the power of presenting oppressed as cruel and the just as unjust. If you pay close attention to the information about Israel-Palestine, you will notice that this information is slanted and manufactured. The west thinks that the struggle in Palestine is between the terror and the legitimate state. We want to change this perception.

Aysan does not attempt to hide the political agenda embedded in the movie. He charges the movie with a mission and that mission is to change the conditions not only in minds but also on the ground. In other words, if his movie cannot succeed in changing things in reality, it leastways aims to do it in the minds of millions in cinema halls and living rooms. I then asked him if the movie is successful in this respect.

Cuneyt Aysan:

Even if one person sees the movie, it means success. The quantitative majority is not an important matter here; what is important is that how successful we are able to present an alternative version of the story objectively if we cannot change the perceptions completely. As I said, we made this movie to explain the problems of the region because the western media are approaching this issue in an orientalist way.

I asked again if his approach is also sided with errors and how his opinion would be different from that of Fox news', for example.

Cuneyt Aysan:

In the end, we, too, are the children of this land but our approach is not a Turkish approach. We believe that the problem of this geography is the lack of justice. But for centuries we did bring justice to this geography. We had established justice on this land in the past that had begun with Saladin. We are saying that why not we provide justice in Palestine again and end the oppression of the powerful.

I certainly believe in this. A powerful Turkey means powerful Muslims. A rich Turkey means rich Muslims. Turk here should not be associated with a certain ethnicity automatically. It should be read as to how Europeans understood the concept: a combination of Turk and Muslim. The two cannot be separated. Now, there is this successful Turkish experience in this geography which we cannot ignore. For this reason, of course, our starting point will be our people because we live here, and then the Arab countries and ultimately the entire world. Because the borders are so artificial, we say that our natural borders stretch as far as the borders of Libya and Kazakhstan. In other words, there is no project that foresees only the area of 787 thousand kilometers. This project addresses the entire geography from Bosnia to China. But why I say the priority should be given to the people of this geography is because Turkey is the driving force. Arab brothers are newly recovering. More or less, Turkey has the experience of 80 years of recovery. This makes us one step ahead of them.

Aysan understands that Turkey's leadership in the region is undeniable. To him, Turkey is not a transient lodger of the Middle East, Balkans or the other familiar geographies. Turkey is the natural locomotive of these geographies if not the protectorate. For that, in the eyes of the scriptwriter it is natural and perhaps necessary to prioritize Turkey in the re-making of Middle Eastern geopolitics. In the absence of Turkey, neither Palestinian nor the Middle East problems can be solved. Aysan is not alone with the idea of that Turkey is necessary for Turkey to remake of Middle Eastern geopolitics. The online

survey conducted by the author also states that 55 percent of respondents believe that in the absence of Turkey, a fair solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict cannot be accomplished. And more, 35.7 percent of the same respondents indicate that Turkey is the only international actor that can be a fair mediator between Israel and Palestine (Anaz, 2014).

However, at the very root of the argument on Turkey's leadership in the Middle East and how the movie *Valley of the Wolves-Palestine* enforces this agenda meld in different aspects of the movie. For instance, what the movie portrays and narrates seems to promote Turkish heroism and undefeatability. Therefore, I furthered the conversation by provoking the idea that what the movie really employs is the idea that Turkish heroism and patriotism are more important than caring about the Palestinian cause. To delve into this issue, I asked this question: I am forming this question from the comments that the viewers made. Some of them think that the movie *Valley of the Wolves-Palestine* is not really about Palestine or the people in the occupied territories. On the contrary, it is more about Turkey and Turkishness especially when considering the story of the movie and the scenes in which we see repeatedly the actions of three immortal Turkish heroes<sup>5</sup> (referring to main characters Polat Alemdar, Memati and Abduley).

Cuneyt Aysan:

There is nothing about Turkey's leadership there. But there is oppression and shedding light on this oppression. Illumination occurs wherever Polat goes. Before Polat's arrival, those places were in dark and unknown. When they were lightened then the oppression became visible. Why Polat? Polat is a hero here and in Arab countries. To me he is a virtual Caliph. People also accepted him as a Caliph and wherever he goes people think that there is oppression and the hero is going there to eliminate that oppression even he does this virtually. He is honoring the people of those lands so to speak.

I continue to delve into this notion further and asked: As you know there are James Bond series too and in every series Bond has a mission. During the Cold War, he fought against Communism, after September 11<sup>th</sup> he began fighting against the dark organizations of the east and international terrorism. We see these geopolitical shifts in James Bond scenarios according to the changing world geopolitics. Similar to this, we saw *Valley of the Wolves-I*

<sup>5</sup> Before the scriptwriter answers my question, the third person in the room (he is one of the actors in the television series, *Valley of the Wolves-Ambush*) defies my question by asking another: "Pardon me! Isn't it the same in American films", implying if I am underrating the film.

raq (Anaz & Purcell, 2010) then *Valley of the Wolves-Gladio* and then *Valley of the Wolves-Palestine*. Are the *Valley of the Wolves* series corresponding conjectural changes regarding Turkey's changing geopolitics in the last decade?

Cuneyt Aysan:

If our products are seen at that level, we would be very proud. Turkey's problem has always been this: a big nation with a short horizon. Foreign policy actors have always been an open-sore of this nation. During the Cold War, they all said that 'we are defeated, we are a small country and we have to accept to be a spare tire of a big country and we cannot produce policies independently. They always evaluated everything from military power; they ignored the capacity of soft power. The era has changed. Along with military power, soft power has effects too. They [actors of foreign affairs] thought that boundaries were drawn in 1923 and that set everything for us. No! Borders never end there and won't end in the future. Beyond the 1923 borders, there are collective histories, sorrows, experiences, and victories. These borders were artificial and forced. When these artificial borders collapsed, everything came to its natural boundaries.

Aysan challenges the Cold War psychology that has dominated Turkish foreign policy for a long time. As discussed in many studies, former Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu also emphasizes the invalidity of these borders and puts forward Turkey's willingness to nullify these artificial lines (Aras, 2014). Indeed Davutoglu in one of his speeches about the Syrian crisis signals Turkey's de facto extraterritorial jurisdiction on Syria and notes that Syria cannot be left to its destiny declaring that "Syria is our problem" (Anadolu-Ajansı, 2012). Parallel to what the interviewees underline, Turkey's foreign policies in the last fifteen years have been extravert and inclusive of former Ottoman territories. This evidently tells us that it is not surprising to see the discursive similarity in the language created by popular culture and practical geopolitics. In a sense, popular culture and statecrafts feed and complete with each other in creating and reshaping the grammar of Turkish geopolitics. As I discussed earlier, cinema along with other popular cultural products forms a language that can be utilized to simplify and signify geopolitical events for the viewers. In this sense, it is the language of cinema that also helps practical geopolitics experts to code foreign policies and geopolitical priorities for the public. When we deeply examine the movie *Valley of the Wolves-Palestine*, we see that the producers of the movie continuously refer Turks' military victories in the past and geographies of justice on former Ottoman territories (Anaz, 2014). Therefore, the cinema as in the case of *Valley of the Wolves-Pales-*

*tine* and politics as in the hands of AK Party exaggeratedly use, re-produce and popularize historic and symbolic figures for the greater returns and justifications. Therefore, Polat Alemdar is presented as an imaginary historical figure that was undefeatable. Thus, Polat is not just an ordinary actor to entertain viewers. He also fights for Turkey and naturally for the entire Islamic world. In this sense, Aysan continues to explain how modern cinema language is blended with and internalized symbolic figures.

Cuneyt Aysan:

James Bond is not one man; he is a symbol. He is the symbol of Britain. Polat is the same. He is not a man, he is a symbol. First, he is a Turkish hero and then he becomes the hero of the Islamic world. In other words, he is not going into Iraq or Palestine alone. He is trying to say that when Muslims fight together, no one can resist against that power. So, the important thing here is to unite these geographies. When this unification is formed, then no other entity would intervene in any Islamic geography. Polat has undertaken this mission. What is seen virtually is the reflection of this mission. To put it differently, the attention should be paid to what is behind this metaphor. We provide an idol for people and say that we can do this because Polat did it. This might be virtually correct but our heroes had done it in reality in the past.

Aysan believes that the lack of heroism in this part of the world for years caused total disorder as well as weakness of will to question imposed policies and practices in the region. For him, a solution necessitates collective nurturing and awareness. In today's dynamic way of life, who can provide this education and awareness is the entertainment; movies and television series. Through cinema and heroes, this geography can get rid of outsiders and perhaps establish order and justice. Polat has accomplished this in the imaginary world; in that case, someone will do it in the real one.

Again, Polat is neither a simple man nor an ordinary actor in this case. He is a symbol of resistance and a brand name for success. Unlike Bond, Polat is not only a talented agent working for the state department but he is an immortal Turkish hero sent and protected by God to establish order and eternal peace once again. Thus, his first mission is to defeat fears and self-despair in the minds of millions so that defeating real enemies in real situations becomes possible. This is why Polat continuously travels through any kind of challenged borders and becomes an extraterritorial hero, a hero of hope and success. Aysan adds this question: why do you think a child in Libya, Bosnia or Kazakhstan wears Polat's T-shirt because he also thinks that Polat is his hero.

Cuneyt Aysan:

There is a need to find new ways of regaining the lost taste in the last eighty years and *Valley of the Wolves* series and movies are one of the vehicles to achieve it. Here, *Valley of the Wolves-Palestine* fixes this disconnection. It functions as a kind of cable to reconnect the historical, identity, and cultural disunity between the generations [Turkey and Ottoman]. It reconnects the past with the present. In this sense, the *Valley of the Wolves* movies and series succeeded. People said that they knew this taste from somewhere. That is what we wanted to give our viewers every week and to our audiences in our cinema productions.

It is my understanding that, *Valley of the Wolves-Palestine* and many other products of Pana Film are not just television or cinema entertainment programs that concern economic returns. These entertainment sets are formed to be the bridge between the modern and the traditional, the present and the past, today and tomorrow, and here and there. These products are not a random choice of art productions; they are made out of necessity, responsibility, and imagination. Throughout the conversation, it became clearer that the *Valley of the Wolves* series is more than a phenomenon. In the eyes of the producers, *Valley of the Wolves-Palestine* is an attempt to sew eighty years of ripped relationships between Turkey and Ottoman geographies.

## Conclusion

This paper introduced two interviews. Although the first interview cannot be situated within the production site of the movie *Valley of the Wolves-Palestine* per se, it reveals important insights about how a cinematic text can employ geopolitical imaginations side by side with non-profit organizations. An interview with an activist of the IHH indicated that movie producers greatly benefited from different social actors' globally resonating political and social activities. In the end, both served to form and disseminate geopolitical discourses expressed by practical geopolitics experts. According to the interviewee, the real scene in the middle of the Mediterranean and the reel scene in the movie *Valley of the Wolves-Palestine* served the same purpose.

In the second interview with one of the scriptwriters of the movie, I aimed to better understand what sort of geopolitical conditions played a role in formulating such movie that gathered the attention of people from all over the world. Conversations with the scriptwriter highlighted that geopolitical imaginations and geographical codes that influenced the movie *Valley of the*

*Wolves-Palestine*, to some extent, corresponded with the geographical imagination that is internalized by the practical geopolitics experts in Turkey. The scriptwriter of the movie clearly emphasized that the movie had a mission to accomplish and that was to contribute to the Palestinian cause, and bridge familiar geographies and people. The scriptwriter also emphasized that Turkey's new story needed to be told beyond its official borders in all directions because he believes that the story of the movie, in the end, is the story of this geography.

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