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Deep State. Visual Socio-Political Communication in the Television Series and Serials of the Turkish Television Channel *Samanyolu*

Petra de Bruijn

- 1 The 11th episode of the Turkish serial¹ *Ötesiz İnsanlar* ([*The People Beyond*], 2013-2015)², directed by Başak Soysal shows an officer in the Turkish army, around 1997, on his way to the classy engagement party of the daughter of a general and the son of a colonel. The officer is religious and his wife covers her hair. The army dress code in this era requires his wife to appear unveiled at the engagement party. The wife leaves home unveiled, however, on the road to the party the officer regrets that he made his wife unveil. He stops the car in Balat, a conservative quarter of Istanbul, in order to buy a scarf in one of the shops. However, the shops are closed and in despair he rings the bell at all the houses in the neighbourhood. He asks Allah to help him and suddenly scarfs fall from the windows like manna from heaven (Plate 1 below).

Plate 1: Screenshot *Ötesiz İnsanlar*, episode 11, 44,05 min.

- 2 He returns to the car and promises his wife that he will never ask her again to unveil. The seculars have to respect them for what they are. The headscarf issue was important in Turkish politics for several decades, from the 1990s to the mid-2000s. Through images and content as mentioned above, the Turkish television channel *Samanyolu* (Milky Way) communicated a socio-political message. *Samanyolu* was an international religiously orientated television channel with its headquarters in Turkey; owned by the Gülen Movement³, related to the Islamic scholar and preacher Fethullah Gülen. The channel started broadcasting on 13 January 1993 and was closed directly after the failed military coup of 15 July 2016.
- 3 *Samanyolu* television drama involved social issues from the perspective of Islamic religiosity, such as being honest, law abiding, peace loving, pious and caring for your family and neighbours. In addition, the channel included political issues in their shows, such as the Kurdish question, the headscarf issue, the 1997 military intervention and the controversy, starting in 2013, between the *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* (Justice and Development Party, AKP) and the Gülen Movement. By touching upon sensitive Turkish social and political issues, *Samanyolu* was one of the few television channels to defy the self-censorship many Turkish media have inflicted upon themselves, especially since 2007⁴. This article aims to elaborate on how *Samanyolu* disseminated socio-political content through its television series and serials, asking questions especially about Turkish political reality and religiosity. The discussion will touch upon the politicization of Turkish television drama in general and the position of *Samanyolu* in Turkish television. The focus will then be narrowed down to *Samanyolu* television dramas, particularly those series and serials of this channel in which socio-political themes appear: *şubat Soğuğu* ([*February Cold*], 2004-2006), *Tek Türkiye* ([*One Turkey*], 2007-2010), *şefkat Tepe* ([*Compassion Peak*], 2010-2014) and *Ötesiz İnsanlar* ([*The People Beyond*], 2013-2015). Only a selection of the *Samanyolu* shows with socio-political content will be discussed here, although in many others, references to political and historical events in Turkey were made. The serials included in this analysis form a representative case study of the manner in which socio-political content was disseminated.

Politicization of Turkish television

- 4 Television drama has been used as a vehicle for the dissemination of political content in Turkey since the early 2000s, as Kumru Berfin Emre Çetin argues. The use of television drama as a vehicle for social and political content is not a new phenomenon; it has occurred amongst others in Brazil, Egypt and China⁵. In this respect, television drama is nothing else but a recent cultural product with the potential of influencing public opinion; as theatre, literature and film did before.
- 5 According to Çetin, this politicization was provoked by a number of circumstances. On the one hand, the late 1990s saw a large privatization of Turkish television channels; this was followed by a period of about 15 years, until 2006 in which relative freedom existed for these channels to determine the content of their programmes⁶. Turkish private television grew rapidly and at the same time Turkish society became more politicized, with a strong polarization between the secular and the religious. The combination of the relative freedom to determine the content of television and the increasing gap between societal factions in Turkish society brought about a politicization of Turkish television series and serials. After 2006, the relative freedom for private broadcasters changed. New regulations were implemented and, especially after 2010 with the consolidation of the AKP government, restrictions on the freedom of expression imposed on the media by the increasingly authoritarian mode of government, multiplied drastically⁷. The Turkish mediascape became more and more politicized and polarized. Media supporting the government did propaganda for the ruling party; those who wanted to tell a different tale were submitted to censorship and applied self-censorship. Çetin discerns two trends in the politicization of Turkish television drama: the dissemination of political messages through television serials and the use of television drama as “a battleground for groups expressing a variety of political concerns⁸”.

Position of Samanyolu

- 6 Samanyolu, on which this research will concentrate, started broadcasting in 1993. It was one of the smaller national channels, with in 2010 a market share of 2%⁹. According to a study conducted in 2009 by the *Radyo ve Televizyon Üst Kurulu* (Radio and Television Supreme Council, RTÜK) Samanyolu ranged fifth in the list of most popular television channels with around 10% of the votes¹⁰. Samanyolu was owned by *Feza Gazetecilik A.Ş.*¹¹; a media conglomerate combining newspapers in several countries, a news agency, a publishing house and a television channel. Feza Publications was closely associated with the Gülen Movement. After the failed military intervention in July 2016 all media outlets of the Gülen Movement in Turkey were closed, including Samanyolu¹². Samanyolu could be described as a generic channel aiming at an Islamic orientated audience.
- 7 Drama forms an important component of the television offer in Turkey; economically¹³ and in terms of their presence on the Turkish mainstream channels¹⁴. Turkish television series and serials have qualitatively and quantitatively improved during the last decades to a point that they became an important export product¹⁵; in 2014 Turkey reached the level of the second world wide exporter of television drama¹⁶. Samanyolu was comparable to the other mainstream channels: 61% of its broadcasting was dedicated to television

series and serials¹⁷. In November 2015 Samanyolu was removed from the Turkish television broadcasting satellite Türksat¹⁸. By this removal the advertising revenues were cut off, and the channel could no longer afford the production and broadcasting of television series and serials. After the failed military coup in July 2016 Samanyolu was closed altogether.

- 8 In the 1990s and 2000s Samanyolu caused a hype with the concept of fantasy series and serials. Ahu Yiğit describes these shows as:
- These fantasy serials adopt magical plots such as time travel, angels disguised as ordinary people, and appearing or disappearing objects and people. Several serials are set in the afterlife, from which the main character looks back on his or her life on earth¹⁹.
- 9 The first serial with fantasy content was *Sırlar Dünyası* ([*World of Mysteries*], 1996-2007, [first called *Sırlar Kapısı*, *The Gate of Mysteries*]). Other channels copied the concept, which was very popular for some time, but after a few years these productions were cancelled²⁰. Samanyolu continued to produce fantasy serials and to broadcast reruns. However, in 2015, other concepts, not based on fantasy, dominated the spectre.
- 10 Yiğit's claim that Samanyolu broadcasted only fantasy serials was not correct²¹. From 2004 onwards Samanyolu broadened its repertoire with other concepts. Since that time, Samanyolu produced, besides fantasy, serials of different genres, for instance police serials such as: *Kollama* ([*Being Watched*], 2008-2011) and *Ekip 1-Nizama Adanmış Ruhlar* ([*Squadron 1 - Souls Dedicated to Order*], 2012-2015); serials about family life and moral dilemmas such as, *İki Dünya Arasında* ([*Between Two Worlds*], 2012-2015) and *Küçük Gelin* ([*Young Bride*], 2013); and action serials, such as *Tek Türkiye* (2007-2010), *Şefkat Tepe* (2010-2014) and its successor *Sungurlar* ([*Falcon's*], 2014-2015).
- 11 Recurring themes in Samanyolu's dramas are anti-Islam politics such as the 28 February 1997 military intervention and the head scarf issue, the importance of education, the advocacy of a modern, preferably pious, life style, international conspiracy theories related to Free Masonry and the corruption and terror conducted by state related underground organizations, the PKK and Syrian or Iraqi Kurdish organizations. Socio-political messages may be found in all of Samanyolu's shows. However, the emphasis of these themes in the most prominent examples shifts and the degree to which and the manner in which socio-political content was included changed over time.

Şubat Soğuğu ([*February Cold*], 2004-2006)

- 12 The first serial with an openly political content that Samanyolu broadcasted was *şubat Soğuğu*. It dealt with a corrupt criminal group that carried out operations for a “deep state” organization. Mehtap Söyler and Ryan Gingers, amongst others, prove that Turkey has a history of various kinds of underground forces, called *derin devlet* (deep state). These organizations, have existed since the time of the Ottoman Empire and have served both Ottoman and Republican Turkish regimes to consolidate their power and in Republican Turkey's case to establish authoritarian regimes. After 1945, in cooperation with the CIA, an *Özel Harp Dairesi* (Special Warfare Department) was established, later to be continued under other names, like specially in the Kurdish regions the *Jandarma İstihbarat ve Terörle Mücadele* (Gendarmerie Intelligence and Anti-terror Organization). Since the 70s and 80s these secret organizations have maintained strong ties with organized crime, mainly drug trafficking and the mafia and ultra-nationalist extreme

right political parties with violent youth organisations such as the *Bozkurtlar* (Grey Wolves). These deep state organisations were responsible for most of the numerous unaccounted for killings during the politically tumultuous years between 1960 and 1980²².

- 13 The existence of deep state organisations has inspired many producers of Turkish films and television drama; amongst others *Kurlar Vadisi Pusu* ([*Valley of the Wolves, Ambush*], 2007-2016) the television serial and the movie *Kurtlar Vadisi Gladio* ([*Valley of the Wolves, Gladio*], 2009)²³. All mainstream television channels in Turkey, including Samanyolu, have elaborated on this theme. A producer has numerous opportunities for many action scenes with this theme, which, in addition, appeals to the nationalistic feelings of many Turks. Moreover, as Göçek states, many people still believe that Turkish sovereignty is undermined by foreign powers in combination with deep state related criminal organisations²⁴. *şubat Soğuşu* was the first Samanyolu serial in which a deep state organisation was depicted. As will be shown below, this theme reoccurred in various ways and even more strongly in later serials.
- 14 The name of the serial, *şubat Soğuşu*, refers to what is called the 28 February military intervention. In 1997 and 1998 the Turkish military intervened in politics by overthrowing the coalition government of the Islamic *Refah Partisi* (Welfare Party) of Necmettin Erbakan, by closing down the party and by banning Erbakan from politics. This intervention was accompanied by the dismissal of a great number of military personnel and measures were taken against manifestations of Islam in public life. The military and other secularist politicians were afraid of the increasing power of political Islam in Turkey²⁵. These events had a deep impact on religious movements, not only on the *Milli Görüş* (National Vision) around Necmettin Erbakan and its successor the AKP of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan; they affected the Gülen Movement as well. For the Gülen Movement, which tried to provide Islam with a modernist worldview, this intervention was a trauma, as its depiction in the serials shows.
- 15 One of the main characters in *şubat Soğuşu* is Tahir Mutlu, a writer and history teacher. In the period following the 28 February intervention, he lived in exile out of fear of being persecuted for the Islamic content of his writings and teachings. In 2004, when the action of the show takes place, he returns to Turkey, because of a more liberal climate. At that time the AKP had won the elections (2002), gaining a majority in Parliament. With this new regime, came the end of persecution of Islamic conservatives in the army and the state apparatus, following the 28 February military intervention²⁶.
- 16 The character of Tahir Mutlu in the serial is the proto-type of a righteous follower of Fethullah Gülen. Just as Mutlu, Gülen had been prosecuted many times by the secular regimes and the military for his preaching and his educational activities. He was accused of encouraging his followers to infiltrate the military and the judiciary in order to take over the state. After the 28 February intervention, in 1998, he retreated to the United States²⁷. The way Mutlu is depicted as a peace-loving, humble, religious preacher reminds one very much of Fethullah Gülen. Although Mutlu is not Gülen, by linking him to the spiritual leader of the Gülen Movement, the content of the serial takes on a second - political - meaning showing the struggle of the Gülen Movement against the secular forces in the Turkish regime (mainly the army) and the deep state organisations supporting it.
- 17 *şubat Soğuşu* was inspired by the concept of the immensely popular serial *Kurtlar Vadisi* ([*Valley of the Wolves*], 2003-2005). This serial was one of the longest running and most

popular on Turkish television for more than a decade. It was the first serial in which political content was introduced. It started in 2003 and from 2007 until 2016 it was broadcasted under the name *Kurtlar Vadisi Pusu* [Valley of the Wolves Ambush]. The serial concentrated on a secret police squadron that fights the mafia, a corrupt conglomerate of powerful businessmen and an international free masonic organization aiming at a new world order infiltrating Turkey (*Tapınakçılar*, Knights Templar.) From the start, the serial incorporated elements from reality in its episodes and its films. Scenes referred to political events, sometimes commented upon, sometimes acted out, sometimes real politicians participated in the serial. Themes that were dealt with were amongst others, the admission of Turkey to the European Union, the Cyprus question and the Kurdish question²⁸. Just as in *Kurtlar Vadisi*, *Samanyolu* included politics in its television dramas in various ways: political events were referred to, commented upon and imitated.

Tek Türkiye ([One Turkey], 2007-2011)

- 18 *Tek Türkiye* combined the theme of deep state violence with that of the terror of the PKK and the importance of education. The serial was produced by Salih Akan, the directors were Nacı Çelik Berksoy and Gürsel Ateş and the screenplay was written by Ali Kara and Samim Utku. The serial related the story of Tarık, a medical doctor, who visits an old friend in a small village in Hakkâri, the southeastern Kurdish region of Turkey. His friend is involved in smuggling medicines to the *Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê* (PKK). When Tarık arrives in the village his friend had already left. Tarık decides to stay in the village, which is poverty struck and suffers hard from the terror inflicted upon it by the PKK. It is located in a remote area, where the Turkish army and gendarmerie are absent. It is a Kurdish village of, in principle, peace loving, traditionally living farmers and landowners. The members of the community are heavily divided between pro- and contra- PKK members. The PKK expects that they provide food, money and that their children join the organisation. New partisans are recruited by indoctrination and by force when needed.
- 19 During the first two seasons, emphasis lay on the backward position of the village. There is no school, and when Zeynep, the daughter of the local landowner, trained as a teacher, makes it her life's work to open up a school for the local children, she is met with resistance from, on the one hand, the villagers because they do not understand the importance of education. The PKK, on the other hand, obstructs the establishment of the school out of fear that the villagers will no longer cooperate when they are educated. In reality the PKK had launched a campaign against village schoolteachers; many were killed²⁹. Tarık teaches them hygiene and the necessity of a good working public health system. In addition, Tarık, with help from the imam and Zeynep, fights the conservative customs of the local people, such as blood feuds, child marriages and emphasis on the protection of the honour of women³⁰.
- 20 In the last two seasons the depiction of the struggle against the PKK is foregrounded. There is a time lapse of about ten years. Tarık has married the nurse from the village, their son is born and he has become *kaymakam* (governor of a provincial district). The size of the struggle against the PKK has magnified. Already in the first seasons it was suggested that the PKK is not the only force controlling terror. References to forces within the Turkish government and foreign powers become more and more important during the series. It is implied that there are national and international (English/American and Russian) intelligence forces and organisations with special mandates

involved in the Kurdish issue. It is in their interest that the struggle in the southeastern regions continues; they work for Armenian and Kurdish Communist lobbies who want to create an independent Armenian and Kurdish state.

- 21 These international forces want to restore the map drawn at the end of the First World War at the Treaty of Sèvres (1920). This treaty reduced the Ottoman Empire to a rump state consisting only of the northern half of Anatolia. The rest of Anatolia was divided into Greek, Italian, English and French zones of influence. An independent Armenian state was supposed to arise in the eastern provinces and Kurdistan was to be a part of the Empire with autonomy³¹. As history proves, these plans never materialized, but a distrust against foreign powers with respect to their support of Armenian and Kurdish claims, called the “Sèvres syndrome” by Göçek, has remained vivid in Turkey until today; Turkey’s national security is always at stake, threatened by internal (Armenians/Kurds and other minorities) and external western forces³². In the series Tarık finds the original documents of this partition, signed by all the parties. All enemy parties, the Kurds, the Armenians, the Russians and the US want to use these original documents of the Sèvres Treaty for their own benefit and that is one of the reasons why all the parties are after Tarık.
- 22 In addition this theme refers to the infiltration of *Hizbullah* in the southeast of Turkey in the 1980s. Hüseyin Veliöğlü established this organisation, inspired by the Iranian revolution of 1979 and the Muslim brotherhood in Egypt. Hizbullah acted against the PKK and its Batman branch worked together with state security organisations against the PKK. From 1993 onwards, Turkish politics aimed at the dissolution of Hizbullah, but all efforts were frustrated by the state security organisations. In 2000, when Hizbullah was not needed anymore against the PKK, the organisation was dismantled³³.
- 23 During the last seasons, Tarık had to deal mainly with the PKK and a deep state team of special forces that enact possibly even more violent and cruel crimes towards the population than the PKK. In *Tek Türkiye* the PKK is represented as an organisation with a strategy of remorseless cruelty against the civilian population and their own people who refuse to execute their extreme orders. However, in the end the lower level of PKK commanders all turn out to have their reasons for becoming so cruel. Some of them had been victims of PKK violence as well; or they were told that their families had been shot by the Turkish army, but it was the PKK who did it. Others were persuaded to join the PKK in their youth with false prospects and regret their choice by now. They, however, cannot return to their homes because, either, they fear being killed by the PKK or they face long periods of imprisonment when they surrender. One of the main characters Şivan, was the commander of the PKK unit that terrorised the village in the first two seasons. At the end of the second season he suddenly realises that the PKK is corrupt and that the PKK killed his son. This transforms him into a completely different personality. He regains his lost faith in Allah and after working for the local populace as atonement, he becomes a Robin Hood like character that rescues people from a hiding place in the mountains and in the last season he joins Tarık’s resistance group.
- 24 Tarık is not able to fight the PKK because of his official function as *kaymakam*. Deep state infiltrators obstruct all action taken to appease the region. In the end, they succeed in getting Tarık arrested. Tarık escapes to the mountains and forms his own resistance group, called *Son Karakol* (the Last Guard Post). This is a reference to a secret organisation founded by the unionist leaders at the end of World War I to protect members of the Turkish government against the revenge of the Allied Forces and Christian minorities and

to smuggle people and arms to Anatolia. This organisation is considered to be the start of the resistance movement in Anatolia that led ultimately to the foundation of the Republic of Turkey (1923). It was an underground organisation related to the *İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti* (Committee of Union and Progress, better known as the Young Turks) and Mustafa Kemal Atatürk³⁴ who worked together with this organisation only for a short time. Later Atatürk established his own underground organisation³⁵.

- 25 In *Tek Türkiye*, Tarık, the good guy, stands for the civilized Turkish nation, where justice is implied and where there is space for Turks as well as minorities to live peacefully together. The reference here to *Karakol*, the first resistance movement of the Turkish Republic, implies, on the one hand, that Tarık and his friends are rescuing Turkey from the PKK and foreign intervention, like the heroes of the “Struggle for Independence”. On the other hand, they represent “the other” resistance, distinct from the secular Kemalist state resistance.
- 26 The serial ends with the dismantling of the deep state organisation, and a reconciliation of all local parties. A school will be build and it is suggested that when the people in southeast Anatolia get educated, justice and peace will remain and the area will prosper. The concept of schooling is a very important element in the Gülen Movement. It runs schools, boarding houses, universities and pre-university courses, first only in Turkey, but later as the movement grew, in many countries ranging from Central Asia, Africa, the Balkans, the US, Europe to Australia³⁶.

***Şefkat Tepe* ([*Compassion Peak*], 2010-2014)**

- 27 *Tek Türkiye*'s successor, *şefkat Tepe* was broadcasted for four seasons from 2010-2014. The serial was produced by Salih Akan, directed by Engin Koç and the screenplay was written by Samim Utku. During the first two seasons the serial *şefkat Tepe* focused on a regular army unit near a border village Karapınar in the southeastern region of Turkey. It is not clear whether this is the Syrian or the Iraqi border. In the first episode it is indicated that the serial takes place in 1997. This was a moment in history when the Turkish army more or less broke the resistance of the PKK and with the arrest of Abdullah Öcalan, the leader of the PKK, in 1999 an armistice was established³⁷.
- 28 In the serial a Kurdish PKK cell terrorizes the village. The message of this programme is strongly Turkish nationalistic, depicting the PKK as mean villains and terrorists and the army as the good guys. The villagers are depicted as, mostly innocent, victims. The events dominating the serial are attacks on the village and the kidnapping of people, mostly women and children for extortion or young girls and boys, who are recruited for the PKK. As Zürcher states, in the Turkish press of those days, voluntary recruitments were often presented as kidnappings³⁸. In the serial however very few people voluntarily join the PKK and many characters at one point repent their terrorist actions and become loyal anti-PKK fighters. Ali Samim Noyan, the scenarist of the serial, relates in an interview with *Radikal* journalist Pınar Ögünç that the show does not want to depict enmity between Turks and Kurds. The serial focussed more on moral, righteous and human behaviour and wanted to stress the unity of Turkey³⁹.
- 29 From the third season onwards, a team of special forces, the *Sungurlar* ([*Falcon's*], 2014-2015), is established and the main character Serdar Mert, commander of the army unit in the village during the first two seasons, now becomes the commander of this unit.

This team did not so much fight the PKK anymore, but concentrated on Kurdish and Islamist terrorists in Syria, or sometimes infiltrated the Turkish border region. This change can be explained by the political reality in Turkey; from 2012 onwards the peace process that lasted until the summer of 2015, secretly started by the AKP government in 2009, became visible to the general public⁴⁰.

- 30 Ali Samim Noyan, the scenarist of the serial, relates in the interview with *Radikal* journalist Pınar Ögünç, that the peace process was a central issue in the serial. As Ögünç comments, it is impossible to deny the fact that 60% of the Turkish population supports the peace process. “[D]ışardan bir uyarıyla değil” (without a warning from outside), but independently, the Samanyolu management and the production team decided to change the story line. Noyan explains that, although the serial was supposed to take place in the 1990s, they wanted to make the serial look real. Since there was no armed struggle in 2013 between the PKK and the army anymore, the serial concentrated on foreign agencies; which according to Noyan “are still around⁴¹”.
- 31 One of the organisations the *Sungurlar* fight against is *Selam-Tevhid* (Peace-Unification) or by another name *Kudüs Ordusu* (Jerusalem army)⁴². This is, in reality, an Iranian orientated Islamist terrorist group that fights against Israel and its allies. It has been active in Turkey since the 1980s and some believe they were involved in the killing of the famous left-wing journalist Uğur Mumcu in 1993⁴³. After 2014 *şefkat Tepe* continued under the title *Sungurlar*. At the start of the serial, in a promotion trailer, commander Serdar is wearing an orange overall, about to be executed by the Islamic State. As indicated in the scene, the action takes place in the Rojava area, the independent Kurdish area in Northern Syria⁴⁴.

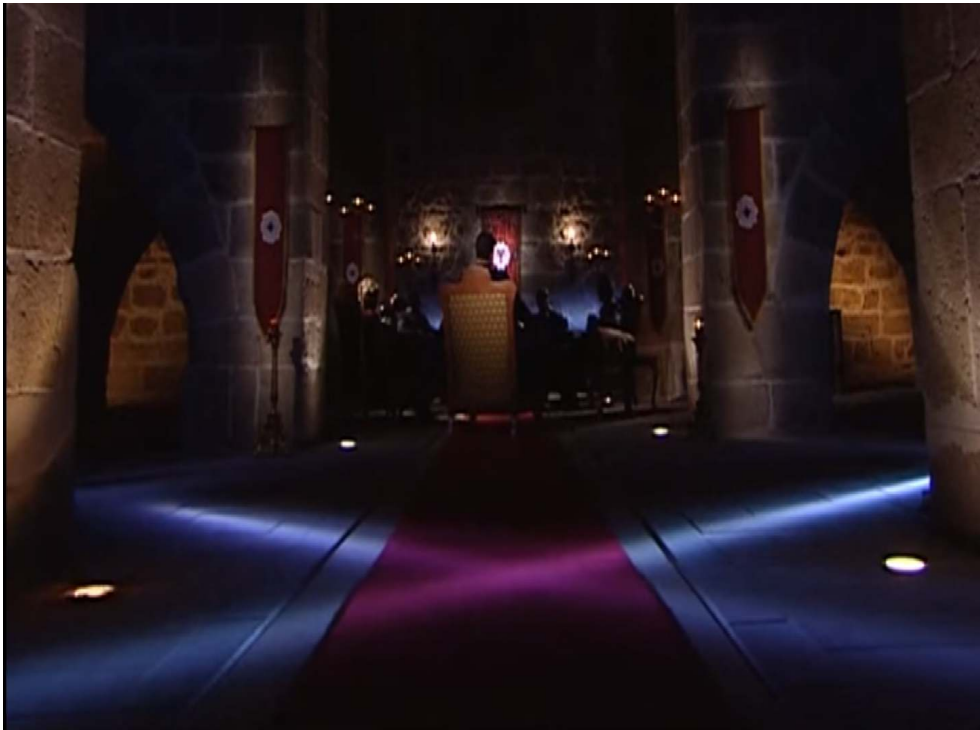
AKP – Gülen Movement controversy

- 32 The Gülen Movement, with their emphasis on the importance of education - educating many managers, lawyers and economists - was associated with the AKP, during its formative years. Many Hizmet sympathisers found jobs in the judiciary, ministries and earned important positions in the private sector⁴⁵. From 2012 onwards the relation between the AKP and the Gülen Movement became troubled. A public prosecutor wanted information from Hakan Fidan, chief of the *Millî İstihbarat Teşkilatı* (National Intelligence Agency) about the secret negotiations between a Turkish delegation and the PKK in Oslo. The AKP accused the Gülen Movement of disturbing the peace process. As a punishment the AKP started an initiative to close down the *Dershane*'s, private, extra-curricular institutions where high school children could prepare, for example, the career determining central entrance exam for university. In December 2013 a large corruption scandal, involving family members of cabinet ministers and even the son of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan was disclosed. Erdoğan immediately blamed the Gülen Movement and foreign powers of being behind what he called an attempt at a coup against his government. Ever since, Erdoğan has taken all possible measures to destroy the Gülen Movement, which he now considers to be his worst foe⁴⁶.

***Karar Kurulu* ([Decision Board], 2013-2014)**

- 33 The Gülen Movement could be best described as a religious community with a loose structure; it is not a political organisation. The movement does not have the power a government or political party has to implement judicial steps or any other form of measures against the AKP. Therefore, in case of controversy with the AKP, they used their television series to explain their side of the story. Between 28 September 2013 and 19 April 2014, a kind of mini serial (28 episodes) by the name of *Karar Kurulu* was broadcasted, included within several episodes of *şefkat Tepe* (E119-E148). The episodes of *Karar Kurulu* were broadcasted as an integral part of the episodes of *şefkat Tepe*; always at the start of the episode. As an independent serial *Karar Kurulu* existed only on the website of Küre TV, the on-demand Internet streaming channel of Samanyolu; currently it is not on display. Its content was not related to the plot of the main show, *şefkat Tepe*. In the episodes of this mini serial, each lasting around 5-10 minutes, we see meetings of a secret board talking about creating chaos in Turkey. (See Plate 2 below) The board is determined to wipe out the power of the Gülen Movement, called *Cami`a* (community) in the series. The board discusses the measures they have taken in order to destroy the power of the *Cami`a*. For instance, they congratulate themselves on the closure, in fall 2013, of the *Dershane`s* (Cram Schools), one of the issues in the controversy between the AKP and the Gülen Movement.

Plate 2: screenshot *Karar Kurulu* [Decision Board], *Şefkat Tepe* 2,52 min.⁴⁷



- 34 The concept of the *Karar Kurulu* originated in *Tek Türkiye*. In this show the Decision Board was called *Karanlık Konsey* (Dark Council). The *Karanlık Konsey*, first appeared in the second season, (E63), broadcasted on 6 April 2009. The last *Karanlık Konsey* scene was broadcasted (E91, as far as I have been able to trace) on 6 February 2010. The *Karanlık Konsey* consists

of representatives from all kinds of deep state organisations and foreign powers. Just as the *Tapınakçılar* in *Kurtlar Vadisi Pusu*, it is suggested that the *Karanlık Konsey* in *Tek Türkiye* and later the *Karar Kurulu* in *Şefkat Tepe* have connections with the masonic Knights Templar. Several Knights Templar symbols are referred to in *Kurtlar Vadisi Pusu* as well as in *Karar Kurulu* and *Karanlık Konsey*. For instance:

- The faces of the actors in both the *Tapınakçılar* and the *Karar Kurulu* are hidden. In *Kurtlar Vadisi Pusu* they wear masks most of the time, in *Karar Kurulu* their faces are blackened.
- The actors in *Karar Kurulu* wear rings that resemble Knight Templar rings. On the rings and on one of the banners hanging on the wall a kind of Baphomet symbol is depicted. This symbol had been used in the serial *Şubat Soğuşu* as well; here (Plate 3 below) it appears on the ring worn by the leader of the deep state organisation.

Plate 3: screenshot ring with Bapomet symbol *Karar Kurulu* [Decision board], *Şefkat Tepe* 5,04 min.⁴⁸



35 In *Kurtlar Vadisi Pusu*, just as in *Tek Türkiye*, the references to a masonic-like global, Christian, western secret organisation, which aims at toppling the world order using Turkey as a target that has to be won over, is connected to the “Sèvres syndrome” discussed above. In *Tek Türkiye*, the scenes of the *Karanlık Konsey* are related to the main storyline. Members of the council meet secretly with characters of the serial in southeast Anatolia. This free masonic organisation is a coalition of all kinds of secret organisations, foreign such as the CIA, Russian or local such as the deep state. In the story, they are involved in the struggle in southeast Anatolia. The message conveyed is that the Kurdish populace is manipulated by these foreign forces, which obstruct a peaceful cohabitation of Turks and Kurds. In *Şefkat Tepe*, the same scenes of the *Karanlık Konsey* in *Tek Türkiye* are used with a different voice-over. The scenes do not have any relation with the plot of the main serial. In contrast with *Tek Türkiye*, the characters in the main serial are not aware of the existence of the *Karar Kurulu*. The scenes of the *Karar Kurulu* in *Şefkat Tepe* are only used to comment on actual political events going on in Turkey at the time; the closure of the *Dershane*'s and later on, the 17 December 2013 corruption scandal.

Mixture of fiction and reality

- 36 Samanyolu went even one step farther in mingling facts and fiction. On 9 February 2014 Samanyolu reported the discussion in the *Karar Kurulu* in their main news bulletin *Ana Haber Bülteni* ([Main News Bulletin], 17.30 -21.30 min.). The anchorman remarked that the episode of *şefkat Tepe*, broadcasted on 8 February 2014, had provided the audience again with scenes full of action. Without referring explicitly to the fact that this was fiction, he announced that the *Karar Kurulu* met again. Then a fragment of the mini serial was shown, provided with Turkish subtitles. Samanyolu produced this mingling of reality and fiction on several occasions. On 12 March 2014 the station was admonished by the RTÜK (Radyo Televizyon Üst Kurulu/Radio Television Supreme Council) for the same action⁴⁹. This time a fragment of the 15 February 2014 *Karar Kurulu* episode was broadcasted the next day as a non-fiction item in the lunchtime weekday news program *Güncel Durum* [Current Situation]. Since spring 2014 scenes of the *Karar Kurulu* have no longer appeared in any of the Samanyolu shows.
- 37 The AKP government continued their destructive actions against the Gülen Movement. On 14th of December 2014, instigated by the AKP government, many employees of media concerns related to the Gülen Movement were arrested, amongst them Hidayet Karaca, general manager of the Samanyolu Broadcasting Group. At his arrest Karaca declared: “Bir dizi filminden terör örgütü çıkıyor. Özgür Türkiye, özgür basın susmaz” (A terrorist organisation originates from a serial. Free Turkey, the free press does not remain silent)⁵⁰, and later he said “Yeni Türkiye dizilerden korkuyor. Bir yaygın grup başkanı eğer terörden suçlanıyorsa daha ne diyeyim” (The new Turkey is afraid of serials. What else can I say when the general manager of a media group is accused of terror)⁵¹. The “New Turkey” refers to the new era in Turkish political history that Erdoğan claims he is building.
- 38 Karaca was accused of “heading a terrorist group” based on references made in a scene of the *Karanlık Konsey* in *Tek Türkiye* in 2009 about an alleged Islamist group the *Tahşiyeciler* (Annotators, E64)⁵². In the serial, the *Karanlık Konsey* indicates that it could use a group such as the *Tahşiyeciler* in order to provoke a reaction from the secularists⁵³. It seems that Fethullah Gülen, had a theological dispute with the *Tahşiyeciler*, originally a branch of the *Nurcu* Movement from which the Gülen Movement originated as well⁵⁴. In a television speech on 6 April 2009, where Fethullah Gülen answered questions of followers, he clarified the meaning of the word *irtica* (fundamentalism) by explaining where the term comes from and how it developed in the context of modern Turkish history. In this speech he referred to the *Tahşiyeciler* as an organisation, which could potentially radicalise⁵⁵. The accusation is based only on a fragment of this speech taken out of context; the pro-government media outlet *Sabah* (Morning) placed this fragment on its website⁵⁶. The leader of the *Tahşiyeciler*, Mehmet Doğan, was arrested and imprisoned for 10 months in 2010. He openly sympathised with Osama Bin Laden and violent struggle; this in opposition to Fethullah Gülen who sought dialogue⁵⁷. In 2013 Karaca had an illegally wiretapped telephone conversation with Gülen about the *Tahşiyeciler* scene in the script of the serial in 2009. The judiciary suggested that Karaca and Gülen sent messages to police officers through the serial to make them take action on the *Tahşiyeciler*⁵⁸. Although no further evidence has been brought in this case, and several courts have asked for the release of Karaca pending his trial⁵⁹, in November 2017 he was convicted to 31 years of imprisonment⁶⁰.

Ötesiz İnsanlar ([The People Beyond], 2013-2015)

- 39 Meanwhile, Samanyolu continued to criticize the AKP government and especially its president Erdoğan. References to a deep state organisation appeared again in the serial *Ötesiz İnsanlar*. This serial was broadcasted for two seasons, 2013-2015. It was produced by Ömer Önder, the scenario was written by the *Kız Kulesi Senaryo Grubu* (Maiden tower scenario group). Until the 43rd episode, broadcasted on 24 November 2014, the serial was directed by Başak Soysal. The 44th episode does not have credits and from the 45th episode, broadcasted on 8 December 2014, onwards the serial was directed by NEB, the initials of Nursan Esenboğa. *Ötesiz İnsanlar* takes place against the background of the political situation of the 28 February 1997 postmodern coup. This show focuses on a religious village girl, Elif, who enters the medical faculty of Istanbul University. With the help of a young lieutenant Deniz, she had been able to escape being married off to the son of a landowner and arrives in Istanbul. The first season concentrates mainly on the love affair between Elif and Deniz, son of a secular colonel in the Turkish army. His parents do not agree with Deniz' choice for a headscarf-wearing religious girl from a peasant family. They want Deniz to marry Sanem, the spoiled, unreligious daughter of general Kudret Karay.
- 40 The serial revolves around the headscarf issue and the strong anti-religious atmosphere in Turkey, especially the Turkish army. Elif and her friends encounter all kinds of difficulties when they want to enter university. In order to enrol, they have to remove their headscarves, later on they are not allowed to attend courses or take exams. Kudret Karay, one of the cruelest secular orientated generals in the army, tries to purify the army of all religious elements; religious officers are severely punished. He was so afraid of religion that he forced his own sister Rana to give up her religious lover İbrahim. When she gives birth to a girl Karay tells her that the baby died. In reality he gave the girl for adoption to a family in east Anatolia; this turns out to be Elif. Since Elif is one of the most prominent, strongminded amongst the headscarved students, she has a lot to do with Rana, who is vice director of Istanbul University. Only near the end of the serial, Rana, İbrahim and Elif are reunited.
- 41 In the second season, Kudret Karay is approached by a deep state organisation, which aims at further destabilising Turkey's political system. Here again, the organisation is depicted as a free masonic like organisation. Kudret Karay becomes the leader of the organisation and the ceremony accompanying this event is full of free masonic symbols, such as, again, the ring with the Baphometh symbol. In order to be inaugurated as the new leader, Kudret Karay has to take a blood oath with the old leader. Kudret Karay's first assignment is to create more chaos and disruption through the establishment of a popular religious political movement. The deep state organisation notices that the anti-religious intervention of 28 February 1997 did not stop the religious sentiments of large segments of the population, especially the conservative migrants from Anatolia. In order to gain control over these people, the deep state organisation bribes a simple religious man, heading a charity organisation, to become the leader of a political Islamic movement. The movement resembles the AKP in its initial phase and its leader is an Erdoğan look-alike (Plate 4 below). This character is depicted as faking religiosity; he is corrupt and only after money and power. In this way, Samanyolu again sought a means to ventilate their political opinion.

Plate 4: Erdoğan look-alike: *Ötesiz İnsanlar* final episode 1.26,04 min.

Conclusion

- 42 This article has aimed at elaborating on how Samanyolu disseminated its socio-political content through its television series and serials; the relation of the themes of these series to Turkish political and religious reality, how these themes can be discerned, how they develop over time and how they comply with the religiosity Samanyolu wants to disseminate?
- 43 Samanyolu started, as part of a trend in Turkish television, to include socio-political content in its series and serials from 2004 onwards. Samanyolu focused on the Kurdish issue in three of the serials analysed in this article: *şubat Soğuğu*, *Tek Türkiye* and *şefkat Tepe*. Their line of approach has a strong nationalistic view of the PKK: the PKK are terrorists and in cooperation with foreign forces, a threat to the unity of Turkey. However, in line with the teachings of the Gülen Movement, with an emphasis on peace, dialogue and education, the Kurdish people living in the area suffer most from the violence. Education would help them to have a better future, to develop their society and the need to join the PKK would disappear.
- 44 Another recurrent theme is the 28 February 1997 military intervention; the subject of *şubat Soğuğu* and *Ötesiz İnsanlar*. These programmes problematize the anti-Islamic measures taken after the military intervention. After 2013, the AKP focused on the destruction of the power of their former ally, the Gülen Movement. The Gülen Movement reacted through its television channel, not only in news programmes but in its series and serials as well. Probably, they realised that through their very popular shows they could reach a much wider audience.
- 45 Religion and piety occur in the serials discussed, but with the exception of *Ötesiz İnsanlar*, the action serials do not display religiosity very openly. Religiosity is referred to by the fact that the good guys are Muslims, the characters sometimes pray to Allah in difficult

situations and sometimes a wise pious man helps the characters make difficult decisions. The main theme of *Ötesiz İnsanlar* is the military intervention and the headscarf issue. It is therefore, logical, that a display of religiosity and piety is more foregrounded. In line with the teachings of the Gülen Movement, emphasis is laid on tolerance of the differences in human beings, peace and the importance of education.

- 46 Samanyolu, as other Turkish television channels, integrated contemporary and historical references to reality. Especially, since the start of the controversy between the AKP and the Gülen Movement, they took advantage of their access to wide audiences to disseminate, in a highly politicized mediascape, their side of the story.

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NOTES

1. In this article the terms television serial and television series are used as defined by Jeremy G. Butler, *Television: Critical Methods and Applications*, 4th ed., New York/London, Routledge 2012, p. 465. “Serial: A narrative form that presents daily/weekly episodes, with a multiple set of recurring characters and simultaneous storylines. Because each episode specifically links to the next, narrative closure is rare. Series: A narrative form that presents weekly episodes, usually self-contained, with a defined set of recurring characters. In addition the term television drama is used referring to both serials, series and other forms such as sit-coms and soap operas.”
2. Unfortunately links to episodes of television series and serial are unstable. This holds true especially for the broadcasts of *Samanyolu TV*. All links to the serials and series on *Küre TV* and other websites distributing Turkish television drama have been removed since mid-2016. Some of them are available on YouTube.
3. The Gülen Movement is called the Hizmet Movement by the followers themselves. *Hizmet* means “service” and refers to the societal relief organisations run by the movement, due to their belief that in order to attain true faith it is necessary to provide “service to humanity” and to fulfil altruistic societal duties to improve life standards. M. Hakan Yavuz, *Toward an Islamic Enlightenment. The Gülen Movement*, Oxford/New York, Oxford University Press, 2013, p.8, 10.
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12. “Feza Publications Inc.”.
13. Sözeri and Güney, p. 45.
14. Uğur Tanrıöver, p. 39-53.
15. Uğur Tanrıöver, p. 49-53.
16. “Turkey World's Second Highest TV Series Exporter after US.” *Hürriyet Turkish Daily News*, 26 October 2014. www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkey-worlds-second-highest-tv-series-exporter-after-us.aspx?pageID=238&nID=73478&NewsCatID=345. Consulted 14 July 2017.

17. Uğur Tanıöver, p. 45. The survey is based on research done between 30 April 2011 and 6 May 2011, Uğur Tanıöver, footnote 27, p. 40.
18. "Samanyolu group." *Media Ownership Monitor: Turkey*. turkey.mom-rsf.org/en/owners/companies/detail/company/company/show/samanyolu-group/. Consulted 18 July 2017.
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20. Yiğit, p. 213.
21. Yiğit, p. 213.
22. For a detailed discussion of these issues see: Mehtap Söyler, *The Turkish Deep State : State Consolidation, Civil-Military Relations and Democracy*, Oxon, New York, Routledge, 2015 and Ryan Gingeras, *Heroin, Organized Crime, and the Making of Modern Turkey*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2014.
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25. Erik J. Zürcher, *Turkey. A Modern History*, London, New York, I.B. Tauris, 2017, p. 323-325.
26. Zürcher, p. 329-330.
27. Göçek, p. 157-158.
28. Çetin, p. 2467-2468.
29. Zürcher, p. 308.
30. Protecting the honour of women means in traditional Turkish/Kurdish circles that women have to behave modestly and that they have do their utmost best to avoid everything that could bring their reputation (and that of their whole family) in discredit. They have to marry as virgins, they don't meet with men from outside the family without a chaperon, they don't flirt or have extramarital relations. The very suspicion of not being "honourable" may cause a woman to be killed. Aysan Se' er and Gökçeçiçek Yurdakul, "Culture of Honor, Culture of Change. A Feminist Analysis of Honor Killings in Rural Turkey," *Violence Against Women* 7, no. 9, Thousand Oaks, California, SAGE Publication, 2001, p. 964-998. <https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/bitstream/1807/17543/1/cultureofhonour.pdf>. Consulted 11-3-2018.
31. Zürcher, p. 147.
32. Göçek, p. 98-184.
33. Zürcher, p. 328.
34. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (1881-1938), founder and first president of the Turkish Republic (1923).
35. Zürcher, p. 135-136; Bilge Criss, *Istanbul under Allied Occupation, 1918-1923*, Leiden/Boston/Köln, Brill, 1999, p. 94-114.
36. Carter Vaughn Findley, *Turkey, Islam, Nationalism, and Modernity: a History, 1789-2007*, New Haven/London, Yale University Press, 2010, p. 388-389; Bekim Agai, "The Gülen Movement's Islamic Ethic of Education." *Turkish Islam and the Secular State. The Gülen Movement*, ed. M. Hakan Yavuz and John L. Esposito, Syracuse/New York, Syracuse University Press, 2003, p. 48-68; Thomas Michel, "Fethullah Gülen as Educator," *ibid.*, p. 69-84; M. Hakan Yavuz, *Toward an Islamic Enlightenment. The Gülen Movement*, Oxford/New York, Oxford University Press, 2013, p. 92-116.
37. Zürcher, p. 333-334.
38. Zürcher, p. 308.
39. Pınar Ögünç, "Senaristi Der Ki: 'şefkat Tepe de Değişiyor' (The Scenarist Says: 'şefkat Tepe Changes As Well'," *Radikal*, 5 April 2013.
40. Zürcher, p. 359-362.

41. Öğünç,
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ABSTRACTS

From the early 2000s onwards Turkish television drama has been a vehicle for the dissemination of political content in Turkey. It occurred in shows of many Turkish television channels. This article focuses on *Samanyolu* (1993-2016) a generic channel aiming at an Islamic orientated audience, related to the Gülen Movement. The channel disseminated its socio-political content through its television series and serials. *Samanyolu* focused on the Kurdish issue in three of the serials analysed in this article: *şubat Soğuğu* [February Cold], *Tek Türkiye* [One Turkey] and *şefkat Tepe* [Compassion Peak]. Their line of approach has a strong nationalistic view of the PKK: the PKK are terrorists and in cooperation with foreign forces, a threat for the unity of Turkey. However, in line with the teachings of the Gülen Movement, with an emphasis on peace, dialogue and education, the Kurdish people living in the area suffer most from the violence. Education would help them to have a better future, to develop their society and the need to join the PKK would disappear. Another recurrent theme is the 28 February 1997 military intervention; the subject of *şubat Soğuğu* and *Ötesiz İnsanlar* [The People Beyond]. These programmes problematize the anti-Islamic measures taken after the military intervention. After 2013, the AKP focused on the destruction of the power of their former ally, the Gülen Movement. The Gülen Movement reacted through its television channel, not only in news programmes but in its series and serials as well.

Depuis le début des années 2000, les fictions télévisuelles ont véhiculé des messages politiques, dans plusieurs chaînes de télévision. Cet article étudie la chaîne *Samanyolu* (1993-2016), une chaîne de télévision générique qui vise un public à sensibilité islamique, liée au mouvement Gülen. La chaîne a diffusé ses contenus socio-politiques à travers ses séries télévisées et ses feuilletons. *Samanyolu* a traité de la question kurde dans trois des feuilletons analysés dans cet article : *şubat Soğuğu* [Le Froid de février], *Tek Türkiye* [Seule la Turquie] et *şefkat Tepe* [La Colline de la compassion]. Leur approche donne une vision très nationaliste du PKK (le groupe armé kurde, ndlt) : ce sont des terroristes, en lien avec des puissances étrangères, qui forment une menace pour l'unité de la Turquie. Cependant, en accord avec les enseignements du mouvement Gülen, qui prône la paix, le dialogue et l'éducation, la population kurde est présentée comme la principale victime de la violence. L'éducation les aiderait à avoir un avenir meilleur, à se développer, ce qui tarirait le recrutement du PKK. Un autre thème récurrent est l'intervention militaire du 28 février 1997, ce qui est le sujet de *şubat Soğuğu*, et de *Ötesiz İnsanlar* [Les Gens de l'au-delà]. Ces programmes traitent des réformes contre l'islam qui ont été prises après l'intervention militaire. Après 2013, l'AKP s'est donné pour objectif de détruire le pouvoir de son

ancien allié, le mouvement Gülen. Le mouvement Gülen a réagi au moyen de ses chaînes de télévision, pas seulement via les nouvelles, mais aussi dans ses séries et feuilletons.

INDEX

Mots-clés: État profond, nationalisme, religion, propagande, Gülen Fethullah, communication visuelle, séries turques, Samanyolu

Keywords: deep state, visual communication, Gülen Fethullah, propaganda, nationalism, religion, Turkish series, Samanyolu

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