# Benevolent conquerors, besieged homelands, threated state: the reproduction of political myths in cold war Turkey

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## *CONCLUSION: "Which one of you is Kara Murat?"*[763]

"Which one of you is Kara Murat? Reveal yourself!" (1:11:22). Thus, Davut asks the Turkish inhabitants of Morea, who rise against his unjust policies in *Kara Murat Devler Savaşıyor (The Giants are Fighting)*. He is a corrupt devshirme pasha that collaborates with the Kingdom of Morea and exploits the Turkish Muslim community by imposing unbearable taxes. Kara Murat is a Janissary commander mistakenly imprisoned by the Sultan because he has told negative things about Davut and his brother, who is the grand vizier Greek Mehmet Pasha. As he runs away with a good pasha's help, he goes to Morea to prove his loyalty to the Sultan. He aims to punish Davut to provide order and protect the state, nation, and the Sultan, who is the embodiment of all. In Morea, he disguises himself as the new Ottoman governor appointed by the center. After he makes sure of Davut's corruption, he starts to help those who need it by covering his face with a black mask, in the style of Zorro. In one of many instances, he saves a woman when her livestock is about to be taken away by the black knights because she has failed to pay her taxes. For the leader of the community, who is also an imam, Kara Murat is a savior and a folk hero. Realizing all these, Davut interrogates the villagers about Kara Murat, asking them the question above. Although he threatens the villagers that he would impale them if they do not tell where Kara Murat is, each villager risks death and says, "I am Kara Murat" (1:12:42-1:13-01),[764] one after the other. This is a momentous scene, even a pinnacle of a long journey in my quest for understanding the reproduction of political myths.

Amongst the seventy-one films analyzed in this dissertation, *Kara Murat Devler Savaşıyor (The Giants are Fighting)* is the latest one shot in 1978. Its protagonist is the crystallized image of the ideal Turkish warrior that has been evolving over the decades. This warrior represents the 'common man' or, essentially, the 'ideal citizen' who is an obedient nationalist male, a proponent of Sunni Islam with a non-elitist rural background contrary to westernizing elites. He follows the ruler's orders as his loyal warrior and can even correct him when the ruler is deceived by the enemy, whether internal or external. The ruler is the embodiment of both the nation and the state, and his warrior is like his extension. Since the warrior does not survive without the nation and the state, his cause is always united with the great cause. Therefore, what is good for him is also considered good for the state and the nation. In this regard, due to his bravery and loyalty, in addition to his ordinariness, the warrior is the ideal citizen. It also makes him the best representative of the national will. Since the warrior is

[763] "İçinizde Kara Murat kimse ortaya çıksın"
[764] "Kara Murat benim!"

always expected to be loyal to both the ruler and the state, his will hence the nation's will, is designed around the wishes and interests of the state and the ruler. In fact, the ruler or the state knows what is best for the nation. Therefore, the Kara Murat character stands for the national warrior whose identity has been built on merging the state, the nation, and the ruler. As the idealized member of the Turkish nation, he conquers lands in the name of Islam, takes the revenge of his nation from all its enemies, protects the oppressed people, defeats the enemies sieging the homeland, and threatening the unity of the state hence, the ruler.

How the myth of national warrior is represented in nationalist action/adventure films through Kara Murat and various other warriors besides the political myths about the past, future, and the current situation of the nation are reflections of a particular ideological universe. In this universe, Turkish cinema developed outside of the realm of the state by adapting its own economic system based solely on consumer demands and the purely commercial interests of the filmmakers'. While creating economic opportunities for many people, this alienated elites from the cinema. The unfriendliness between the elites and the filmmakers was, in fact, the product of the struggle between westernizing military-bureaucratic elites and the conservative peripheral elite about who was more *devletlu* and therefore a more appropriate representative of the national will. In the 1960s and 1970s, while cinema was a popular form of entertainment, the electoral balance of Turkish politics had already shifted in favor of the conservative peripheral elite, which manifested itself as the common man's representative against the 'privileged' founding elite. This happened against a backdrop of increasing social movements, economic crisis, Turkey's questioning of its membership in the Western alliance as the Cyprus crisis mounted up, and further militarization of everyday life through both military and non-military means.

In this context, Turkish cinema became a significant playground for the reproduction of political myths out of the realm of the state. Basically, it became an area of everyday life where different nationalist discourses meet and negotiate. What emerged from this was a fusion of unofficial and official discourses of Turkish nationalism working together to reproduce nationalist political myths pertaining to specific contexts during the period. From this perspective, the 1950s' were a transition period in terms of the reproductions of the myths of the golden age. Action/adventure movies with historical settings were mainly dominated by the War of Independence. The Ottoman Empire was depicted in relation to the conquest of İstanbul. The selective appropriation of the Ottoman past can be considered as a step towards Turkification of the past because it justifies the myth of the Turkish nation's superiority and the warriors being benevolent conquerors. Mehmet II is introduced as a tolerant Turkish ruler, and

the conquest is considered an exception to all these representations is the evil depiction of the Bulgarians. This might be an indication of anti-communist leanings of the Turkish political culture. Besides, in these films, the Turkish nation is imagined as a homogeneous body with members fighting for the same interest. Therefore, nothing is provided about the ethnicities and classes of the characters. In this fight, the lower-ranking soldiers always accompany the lieutenants, who are giving orders. None of the characters are represented at the forefront. Therefore, the ideal national warrior is still collaborative and fights as part of a group.

The political myths of the 1960-1965 period were mainly shaped by the May 27 intervention of by the military/bureaucratic elite. The focus was primarily the War of Independence. This time, the filmmakers did not ignore the heterogeneity of the population but reduced it to class-based and hometown-related differences. For example, soldiers with different social backgrounds are depicted as coming from different areas of Turkey. Despite that, they are still homogeneous because they all fight for the national interest in solidarity. No conflict emerges between lower-ranking and higher-ranking soldiers, and no character is at the forefront. Besides, as in previous representations, the Western enemy is depicted as technologically superior, civilized, heroic, and respectful. In this context, for the first time, women of other are inserted into the picture. They appear as the daughters of European commanders. Unsurprisingly, they are never evil. So, as the Turkish nation's heroism influences them, they fall in love with the lieutenant protagonists. Then, they decide to stay in Turkey, leaving their homelands; their fathers also appreciate these choices. This narrative, of course, reproduces the myth of the Turkish nation's superiority.

The first half of the 1960s ended with the Johnson Letter, which marked Turkey's marginalization in the international arena because of the Cyprus crisis. This was also a period of disengagement in the society following the 1965 elections that increased the rhetorical emphasis on the 'common man' with the electoral success of the AP despite the efforts of the founding elite. In addition to the rural-urban one, the generational encounter also contributed to the vibrant political atmosphere of the country. The decade ended with the criminalization of social movements and the leftist leaders' withdrawal from their support. The 1970s started with the 1971 memorandum, which caused the suppression of all political activities besides the execution or imprisonment of the leaders of social movements. Consequently, the disengagement has turned into 'the cut' with the increasing polarization in society. Given 'the cut,' the political outcome of the oil crisis, the opium crisis, and the Cyprus Operation was the formation of national front governments, which implicitly and explicitly prepared convenient conditions for ethnic and religious strife in the country.

The reflection of all these events since 1965 in cinema was the inflation of national warriors fighting in the name of a homogeneous nation both in Central Asian times, the ascendancy of the Ottoman Empire, the War of Independence, and the time of the Cyprus Operation. These warriors are all men of action, rather than men of ideas, who came to the fore. An overwhelming majority do not fight as members of a harmonious group but as loners who are sometimes accompanied by low-profile characters. They are more aggressive, nationalist, violent, and religious than previous warriors. In fact, except for those featuring Central Asian heroes, the films included many religious references, from praying soldiers to hymns. The enemies, therefore, are mostly Christians, particularly Greeks. They are represented as much more evil than ever with scenes in which they attack innocent and unarmed Turkish civilians. Among the enemies, the Greeks were the cruelest. The closeness of the enemy also justifies the Turkish mission. In this vein, the films include many close shots of one-to-one fights between two sides. These scenes help the audience take revenge, at least symbolically, while also justifying the Turkish side's cruelty.

Thus, in 1965-1971, the myth of the national warrior was first forged through a free-spirited raider, who is not a regular soldier and even indistinguishable from civilians. This warrior is far from any marks of state structure and receives orders directly from the ruler as being his loyal warrior. However, as political polarization in the country increased, this active, free-spirited, and secular Turkish warrior was transformed into a more traditional, conservative, religious, and violent man. Besides, as the 'common man' grasped more political power, the warrior has found himself placed in the state hierarchy.

Therefore, the 1970s' idealized national warrior was insignificant, anonymous, easily controllable, and more loyal than the free riders of 1965-1971. This reproduction of the myth of the national warrior perfectly fits into the oppressive environment of the 1970s. Then, given the evolution of the political myth of the national warrior into a more anonymous one, the answer to Davut's question mentioned above as "I am Kara Murat" means that all of 'us' are expected to be Kara Murat(s). Therefore, the image of the national warrior confirms the representation of the idealized Turkish citizen. This citizen is a male, moreover a Muslim male. He must be ready to sacrifice his life voluntarily for the survival of the Turkish ruler, and by extension the nation, state, and homeland, because 'all Turks are born as soldiers,' as the myth of warrior nation puts forth.