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**TRANSLATING COLLECTIVE NATIONAL FEARS THROUGH BEST-SELLERS: MICHEL HOUELLEBECQ'S *SOUMISSION* AND TIMUR VERNES' *ER IST WIEDER DA***

**Abstract:** After 9/11, we have witnessed several backlashes to Francis Fukuyama's theory regarding the *end of the world*. With the credibility of this theory questioned, new maps have emerged and the theories regarding cultural dialogue have been updated, providing support for Samuel Huntington's concept of *clash of civilizations*. In this context, Western Europe produced new forms of *collective anxieties*. In the present paper, I am interested in explaining two particular forms of fears that appear in the European Union tandem France-Germany throughout the 2010s. More specifically, I will explain how the notion of *collective anxiety* is translated from a cultural point of view in two best-seller books: Timur Vernes' *Er ist wieder da* and Michel Houellebecq's *Soumission*.

The first part of this study will be devoted to asking to what extent we may use the notion of *collective anxiety*. In the second part, we will deal with the French case of Michel Houellebecq's 2015 novel, where he explores the possibility of having an Islamic president in the near future. Furthermore, we will deal with Timur Vernes' novel, where he proposes a return of Adolf Hitler in mid-2000s Berlin. The final part contains an attempt to understand the two forms of collective anxiety: *the fear of the past* (Germany) and *the fear of radical otherness* (France). Lastly, we will explore the reception of the two books in Germany and France.

**Keywords:** *Fukuyama*, Houellebecq, *Soumission*, collective anxieties, Timur Vernes

*Introduction: Fukuyama à l'envers*

Throughout the mid-1990s, Francis Fukuyama's theory regarding the end of conflicts and the victory of liberalism was highly acclaimed. His article *The End of History*, published in the summer of 1989, stated without any hesitation: the conflict between URSS and USA, between liberalism and communism and to a certain extent, between liberty and totalitarianism, was won by the democratic faction (Fukuyama, 1989). The events that followed a few months later confirmed this initial hypothesis: the Berlin Wall fell on the 9<sup>th</sup> of November 1989, USSR was dissolved in 1991, and, apparently, American knowledge was shared in the whole world. Therefore, the book where Fukuyama expanded his essay stirred enthusiasm. Published in 1992, during the aftermath of the fall of Communism in Eastern and Central Europe, the demonstration follows a Hegelian interpretation. The German philosopher considers, in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, that human history is determined by a pre-established path, as evidenced by the concept of *dialectics* (Hegel, 1807). By starting from these premises, Fukuyama states that democracy is the final stage of development in human history. In this regard, over the next decades, the world will witness the rise of capitalism and the emergence of democracy. In this optics, the world will speak only one language and the cultural references will all be translatable:

“To Kant's question, Is it possible to write a Universal History from a cosmopolitan point of view? Our provisional answer is yes.” (Fukuyama 1992?,126)

Samuel Huntington engaged himself in this debate against Fukuyama by using more cautious arguments. The American political scientist used a phrase previously mentioned by Albert Camus, in the 1940s, during a radio emission that concerned the Algerian issue<sup>1</sup>, to express the limits of the concept of *the end of history*. While Huntington agrees that the ideological tensions ended, the cultural and religious conflicts will develop in the future through a *clash of civilizations*. He proposed the metaphor of *tectonic plates* in order to explain the existing tensions between Islamism and secular Europe, between Hinduism and Islamism etc. These conflicts are highly visible in contact-areas: Transylvania (between the Western-influenced

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<sup>1</sup>The radio broadcast is available on <http://www.ina.fr/audio/PHD85011203>, *Le problème algérien*, Debate organised by Paul Guimard, with Ferhat Abbas, Raoul Borra, Kaddour Sator and Paul Emile Viard, on the 1<sup>st</sup> of July 1946 (website accessed 15<sup>th</sup> of March 2016).

Catholic mentality and Byzantine Orthodox sphere of influence), Palestine, Ukraine, Hong Kong or Sudan. He argues that these areas are *cleft countries* because they are influenced by two different civilizations (Huntington, 1996).

The Fukuyama-Huntington debate is yet to end. Fukuyama's theory was strongly attacked starting from 9/11, not only by pragmatics such as Samuel Huntington, but also by Alain Badiou, through the work *The Rebirth of History: Times of Riots and Uprisings* (Badiou, 2012) or by *The Guardian* journalist Seamus Milne (Milne, 2012). However, his ideas were found valid and partly demonstrated by others, like John Mueller (Mueller, 2014), who consider that only nationalism stopped the full development of Fukuyama's ideas:

"Beginning with the countries of Eastern Europe, democracy continued its progress after 1989. Moreover, capitalism increasingly came to be accepted. (Mueller 36)

However, an opposite view of this topic belongs to Slavoj Žižek (Žižek, 2010). For the Slovenian writer, the topic of *end of history* (as ideology) is understood from a dystopian point of view, by pinpointing themes such as excessive technology, pollution and dissolution of personal identity through the digital world. The debates around these ideas are highly appealing and to a certain extent even *fancy*, therefore many intellectuals engage with them. For instance, in a re-evaluation review published by *The Guardian*, Eliane Glaser questions the possibility of reviving the ideas presented in *The End of History* 25 years later (Glaser, 2014).

The topic of the *end of history* is recovered from a dystopian point of view in the contemporary debates. The best argument to support this statement is the collection of essays by Slavoj Žižek, as well as Alain Badiou's work. While Samuel Huntington's theory rests in obscurity due to a highly specialized language, Fukuyama's theories, reinterpreted by Žižek and Badiou, are highly acclaimed. We consider these theories to be better appealing to the public due to the fact that they appeal to *collective cultural anxieties*. In other words, the cultural works sometimes make a strong appeal to the affects, to the fears which are created through media and digital discourse. Consequently, I will try to argue in this paper that the consumption of a

specific cultural product may reflect not only an existing intellectual debate, but it can also emphasize a form of *collective anxiety* to which the book may offer an answer.

*Methodology and concepts used*

In order to make our point clear, we have to define the terms. Therefore, what do we understand through the concept of *collective anxieties*? To what extent can we use this term in order to understand it as a mirror of a specific society fear? From a basic anthropological perspective, belonging to a group means sharing common values. When these common values, shared by all the members of a community (a group, a city, a nation) are threatened by an external (or even internal) member, *the collective anxiety* is born. The threat may be real, as Clifford Geertz gives the example of a lion which threatens a group of people- generating mutations in representing the lion, or imaginary- as aliens etc. In our case, when Republican secularism is threatened by radical Islamic movements or when the multicultural contemporary Germany may be menaced by the rise of the far right movements, the people panic and try to search for compensative explanations (through fictions, through raising awareness or through direct confrontations).

We will follow the premises of Jacques le Goff and the principles developed by the Annales School. Historians like March Bloch, Fernand Braudel, Georges Duby, and Ernest Labrousse give credibility to fictional works or marginal opinion texts as historical sources (Besnier 289-314). For instance, Jean Delumeau used fictional and non-fictional sources in order to demonstrate how fear was present in Western Europe starting from the 14<sup>th</sup> century (Delumeau, 1978). This method has similar counterparts. In American universities, following Michel Foucault's revolutionary research (Foucault, 1975), a similar approach was developed by Stephen Greenblatt through the school of New Historicism. By following the principles of New Historicism, we will consider that the text (both fictional and non-fictional) can reflect the con-text (Greenblatt, 1980), especially the existing mentalities.

*Fear of the radical otherness: Michel Houellebecq's Soumission*

An artistic response that questions the validity of Fukuyama's theory is Michel Houellebecq's latest novel, called *Soumission*. In this novel, the concept of *clash of civilization* can be identified. The author proposed a *what-if* scenario in which the France of 2022 would be governed by a Muslim president. In other words, he adjusts Huntington's theory of the clash of civilizations: the conflict is present not only in *cleft countries*, but also in France. It is quite interesting to observe how Michel Houellebecq uses the theme of Western decadence, previously explored in novels such as *Plateforme* (2001) and *Extension du domaine de la lutte* (1994). While in the previous books he questions the hedonist, post-Nietzschean society, but without giving any possible alternative, in *Soumission* the answer is given aloud: the Islamisation of the French atheist society. By default, such a theme would stir many debates in a secular-declared society such as France. Moreover, the book was released on the same day as the terrorist attacks of Charlie Hebdo: 7 January 2015 (Rosenthal 2015). The next day, the Prime-Minister Manuel Valls declared without any hesitation the official position. During a TV interview, he said that France does not reflect the position taken by Michel Houellebecq in the novel *Soumission*:

“La France, ce n'est pas la soumission, ce n'est pas Michel Houellebecq. Ce n'est pas l'intolérance, la haine” (Tronche, 2015)

In this odd context, a cautious political discourse was necessary. Valls strongly accused Houellebecq, associating this book with the manifestation of an intolerant behavior. The writer gladly engaged in the debate: his controversial statements regarding French society already made him *l'enfant terrible* of French culture.

However, while the official discourse accused Houellebecq's argument that France is an Islamophobic country, the book was highly popular with the public. After one week, 250.000 books were sold and the publishing house and Flammarion had to make several reprints. In Germany, the book was released on 16<sup>th</sup> of January in 100.000 copies. After one month, the publishing house Dumont Buchverlag had to make 5 successive reprints for the translation. 300.000 copies were sold from 15 January to 15 February (AFP, 2015). In Italy the book met similar success, with

200.000 books sold in one month. We may ask ourselves what determined this mass interest in the novel *Soumission*. Besides a good marketing campaign and a historical coincidence in publishing the book, what generated such an interest in reading the book? Moreover, what mechanism does Michel Houellebecq use in order to question hot topics such as French identity or multiculturalism?

### 1.1. *Huysmans revisited*

The action of the novel revolves around a Parisian academic, named François, who has just defended his PhD at Université Sorbonne, on the author Joris-Karl Huysmans. This option for this specific writer is not arbitrary, neither for the character, nor for Houellebecq. Huysmans was a 19<sup>th</sup> century cultural figure that converted to Catholicism after exploring various religious movements. Through books such as *À rebours* or *La Cathédrale*, he explains how Catholicism may be a possible solution to the *decadent* movements that were present in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century (*fin du siècle*). For the main character, the justification is stated from the beginning phrase:

“pendant toutes les années de ma triste jeunesse, Huysmans demeura pour moi un compagnon, un ami fidèle; jamais je n’éprouvai de doute, jamais je ne fus tenté d’abandonner, ni de m’orienter vers un autre sujet” (Houellebecq 1)

The structure “*ma triste jeunesse*” [my sad youth] is explained in the later pages. Moreover, the main character explains how he became interested in Huysmans. He had been in the past strongly deceived by the Western world and found a comfortable place where he could hide from the world:

“ pour différentes raisons psychologiques que je n’ai ni la compétence ni le désir d’analyser, je m’écartais sensiblement d’un tel schéma. “ (Houellebecq 1)

From an extra-diegetic point of view, the author’s aim to use this cultural reference is not accidental. Huysmans represents an interesting exception to the 19<sup>th</sup>

century French literary society, being strongly involved with Catholicism towards the end of his life after being a *decadent*. What is more, the references towards the literary works of Huysmans are present also through the interest in description and aestheticism, but also through overt references to similar episodes by Huysmans. While the explicit references are easy to spot and even very carefully explained by the author himself, these parallels may pass without being noticed. The most obvious situation is the end of the novel, when the conversion to Islam is not clearly stated:

“Puis, d’une voix calme, je prononcerais la formule suivante, que j’aurais phonétiquement apprise ; (...) Et puis ce serait fini ; je serais, dorénavant, un musulman“ (Houellebecq 322)

The ambiguity regarding the conversion to Islam is present through the use of the conditional form of the verbs (as *j’aurais, je serais*). In other words, the reader does not know whether the conversion of the character actually took place or if it is just a hypothetical situation. The reference is to the end of the novel *A Rebours*, where a similar ambiguous statement is used to describe a possibility of the conversion of Huysmans’s *alter-ego*, des Esseintes:

“Seigneur prenez pitié du chrétien qui doute, de l’incrédule qui voudrait croire, du forçat de la vie qui s’embarque seul, dans la nuit, sous un firmament que n’éclairent plus les consolants fanaux du vieil espoir“. (Huysmans 1884)

1.2.

### *An Islamic France?*

Besides the explicit paragraphs where the issue of Muslim identity in France is questioned, the use of Huysmans’ reference may equally contribute to the depiction of the conflict between civilizations. While Huntington does not necessarily consider that the European civilization is dead, Houellebecq states, (through the characters’ intervention, as Dostoievski does), that Europe met a deep crisis of values, to which Islam can seem a viable alternative:

“Dans un article destiné à Oummah, où il se posait la question de savoir si l’Islam était appelé à dominer le monde, Rediger répondait finalement par l’affirmative. C’est à peine s’il revenait sur le cas des civilisations occidentales, tant elles lui paraissaient à l’évidence condamnées “ (Houellebecq 280)

We may affirm that this statement is not new in the context of European discourse. Even the theme of Islamic conversion was previously touched upon in the French culture. Following Nietzsche’s questioning of European values, Oswald Spengler stated, in the aftermath of the First World War, that Western Europe is in decline. Other intellectuals from the interwar period, like René Guenon, went even further. For them, the alternatives may be found in Islam or Buddhism. Guenon converted himself to Islam. Also, a biographical detail of Houellebecq’s life may give us a better understanding of the author’s option: his mother, after being engaged with many counterculture movements, converted herself to Islam. From a cultural point of view, the issue of Islamic France was previously explored by Elena Chudinova as well in the novel *The Mosque of Notre Dame of Paris: 2048*. The book was translated in French in 2009, but it was not read intensively (Rosenthal, 2015, 78). However, in this context, Houellebecq revisits this theme. He starts with the same critique of Western society, but he also deconstructs the idea of Islam.

The character mentioned in the previous quote, Robert Rediger, has converted to Islam in order to get the position of dean of Sorbonne University. In the novel *Soumission*, we may notice several reasons for converting: *opportunism* (due to the Socialist Islamic Party gaining power), *existential crisis* or simply, like François, to *escape* from the daily routine, to search for a new spectacular form of existence. The tension between the two main civilizations is strongly exposed not only through the picturesque Parisian neighborhoods, but also by the mixed cultural references (combining pop-art, European high-culture, and Muslim artworks).

We have seen to this point that the clash between Islamic and European civilization is reflected in the novel *Soumission*. First of all, the mechanism functions by referring to writers that belong to multiple ideologies, as Huysmans (belonging to *minor literature*, to use the Deleuzian concept). Furthermore, it uses deliberately

eclectic images and references. However, the most shocking aspect that stirred controversy was neither the re-interpretation of Huysmans's legacy, nor questioning the possibility of a mass conversion, but presenting the scenario of having a Muslim president in 2022. Some of the critics even interpreted it as a near-future dystopia. Marc Smeets considers this to be political science-fiction (Smeets 101). Regardless of the edgy categorization, the particularity of this novel is that it makes references to the existing political figures. The presidential elections gather fictional as well as real characters such as Marine Le Pen, leader of Front National, Mohammed Ben Abbas (a fictional character that represents a party called Fraternité Musulmane), and François Hollande, representing Parti Socialiste. Finally, due to a lack of better candidates, Mohammed Ben Abbas won the presidential election. The main reason for being voted by the French is that he proposed a new form of ideology:

“un nouvel humanisme, présenter l'islam comme la forme achevée d'un humanisme nouveau, réunificateur, et qui est d'ailleurs parfaitement sincère lorsqu'il proclame son respect pour les trois religions du Livre” (Houellebecq 37)

We may spot briefly the irony behind the structure “*nouvel humanisme*”. In history, similar references were used in order to design other reformist attempts, as the well-known structure “*communism with a human face*”. Equally, Jean-Paul Sartre discussed *existentialism* as a new form of humanism.

Rather than through the use of satiric language, *Soumission* shocks even more because of another aspect. The third chapter includes one of the themes that determined the high interest for this book: *the fear of the radical Otherness*. His previous novels had already been somewhat controversial affirmations regarding the Islamic society. In 2002, Michel Houellebecq was accused in court because of his Islamophobic affirmations. Not just this, but the novel *La Possibilité d'une île* dealt with the theme of religious sects (like Raelism). Therefore, the literary critics as well as the readers were highly interested when it appeared. Throughout the novel, slowly but surely, the new administration of Ben Abbas is replacing the old, unprofessional

bureaucracy. Despite what the reader would have expected, the speech of the newly-elected president is not violent. It seems that the ideology is spreading on an empty ground, as a conquering empire. Throughout the novel, there are always references to the Roman Empire. The president identifies himself with the Emperor Augustus and his aim is to remake this civilization:

“Mais sa grande référence, ça sauté aux yeux, c’est l’Empire romain- et la construction européenne n’est pour lui qu’un moyen de réaliser cette ambition millénaire.” (Houellebecq 49)

With this quote, we can understand how Huntington’s theory regarding the clash of civilization is reflected. Houellebecq’s novels were always critical of the idea of triumphant liberalism (especially *L’extension du domaine de la lutte*, which was published in 1994). In *Soumission*, The Roman Empire represents a very subtle metaphor for the civilization decadence. This idea was highly popularized in the European conscience by Oswald Spengler. In *Der Untergang des Abendlandes*, Oswald Spengler considers ancient Rome to have been not a *culture* (seen in a positive perspective), but a *civilization* (seen in a negative perspective) (Spengler 1991). Therefore, the destruction came from inside, because of its own weaknesses and internal conflicts. In the early 1930s, many intellectuals used this pattern, starting from Martin Heidegger, Lucian Blaga, and Miguel de Unamuno. Houellebecq gives a slightly different understanding of this concept. Through this reference, he questions the European Union common heritage, the rhetoric of Western tolerance and multicultural politics:

“l’idéologie multiculturaliste est encore bien plus oppressante en Scandinavie qu’en France, les militants identitaires sont nombreux et aguerris“ (Houellebecq 100)

To sum up, *Soumission*, a highly-aesthetic novel by Michel Houellebecq, reflects a collective anxiety of the French contemporary society: *the fear of the radical Otherness*. This theme is present in the novel through three main points:

- drawing the parallel between Huyman's Catholic conversion and François's Islamic conversion .
- questioning European values and the triumph of liberalism (through the metaphor of the Roman Empire)
- taking into consideration the possibility of having a Muslim president.

*Fear of the past: Timur Vernes' Er ist wieder da*

On the other side of the Rhine River, another commercial book stirred controversy starting from 2012. The bestseller *Er ist wieder da* [Look who's back], translated into English in 2014 questions the heritage of liberalism in German society. While Michel Houellebecq previously wrote satirical novels, for Timur Vernes this was his first published novel. In the past, Vernes only had a journalistic career and he also used to be a *ghostwriter*. He has mixed origins, being the son of a German mother and having as father a Jew of Hungarian origin. Much like *Soumission*, the German novel is a first-person narrative. However, the option for the character is more spectacular. The narration is done by Adolf Hitler, who wakes up in contemporary Germany after a long sleep.

After the long process of de-nazification (both in the former East and West Germany), National Socialist themes are seen as taboo (Thomas 2005). However, Germany still has many supporters of the Third Reich, making the issue more complicated. From a legal point of view, the German law forbids any manifestation of sympathy towards National Socialism, through *Strafgesetzbuch*, S. 86, *Verbreiten von Propagandamitteln verfassungswidriger Organisationen* [Dissemination of Means of Propaganda of Unconstitutional Organizations], particularly art.4 :

“Propagandamittel, die nach ihrem Inhalt dazu bestimmt sind, Bestrebungen einer ehemaligen nationalsozialistischen Organisation fortzusetzen” (Strafgesetzbuch, S.86, art.4)

This law forbids any further propaganda of National Socialist symbols, through

books and other cultural products. However, the law does not refer to individual symbols or to particular persons. Still, the reference to Hitler is seen as very trivial, especially in a contemporary Germany that wants to promote multiculturalism. Even though it deals with a taboo theme such as Hitler's legacy, Vernes' book was highly acclaimed by the public. During the first weeks of 2013, the book was the first fictional bestseller in Germany, followed by Paul Coelho's *Manuscript Found in Accra*. (Publishers Weekly). There are estimations that 2 million copies have been sold until now in Germany. Moreover, about 300.000 audiobooks were put into market. Finally, a movie was set after the original novel. As well as *Soumission's* situation, we may ask ourselves: what determined this high interest in reading the novel? What are the social issues that this novel addresses?

*Conventionalism in form, originality in theme approach*

Like in the novel *Soumission*, the narration is done by a first-person character. This option allows for a more personal, introspective perspective for the reader. The first phrase already insists on the concept of *people*: “*Das Volk hat mich wohl am meisten uberrascht.*” (Vernes 1). The discourse of the fictionalized Hitler develops around trying to understand a new Germany, where he suddenly wakes up. The character tries to understand what is going on, why the habitants of Berlin call him a *loser*, and how can he lead again *the people, das Volk*. It is interesting to spot Vernes's ironical approach regarding the initial popular perception of this strange character. Until the end of the novel, no one actually believes that he is Hitler. Starting from the newspaper vendor to his secretary, Mrs. Sawatzki, all the characters believe that he is just playing a role, through the so-called *method-acting*:

“Begriffend leuchtete ihr Gesicht auf, dann war sie mit einem Satz auf den Beinen: Ick hab det ja jewusst. Genau det isset doch! Messed Ekting! Sol lick et jleich ma'machen?” (Vernes 126)

Initially presented as a game, this *method acting* will engage more and more people.

By using a rhetoric that accuses liberalism in Germany, the fictional character Hitler will receive strong support from the people. Due to the fact that he is constructing himself an image through TV, Youtube and alternative newspapers, we deal with a process of *simulation*. The people cannot and do not have the power to understand whether he is the real Hitler or just a fake. In Jean Baudrillard's terms, we may understand through this character a form of *simulacrum*:

“when the real is no longer what it used to be, nostalgia assumes its full meaning. There is a proliferation of myths of origin and signs of reality”  
(Baudrillard 6)

The reader is faced with an interesting dialectic. On the one hand, the fictionalized character of Hitler always speculates on the nostalgia for the past, while at the same time, the fear of History is always evident. This is one of the great aims of Vernes's novel: to rewrite the Great Narratives. We may assert that questioning historical reality is a theme that is present in other European literatures. Revisiting national stories is one essential aspect of postmodernism, as Jean-François Lyotard stated in *La Condition Postmoderne* (Lyotard 1979). Briefly, we may mention literary works such as Jose Saramago's *The Year of the Death of Ricardo Reis* or Julian Barnes' *England, England* that question the truth of traditional stories. Vernes uses the same principles, but only to a certain point. Even though he revisits a delicate subject, he is not questioning the notion of Truth itself, as Houellebecq does. In other words, his character is based on Baudrillard's theory of *simulacrum*, but the subsequent action is more a counterfactual history than a re-writing of History on other epistemological fundamentals.

From a social point of view, the initial political situation depicted by Vernes is very similar to that presented by Houellebecq: the fail of integration, the rise of radical movements, and the fragmentation of political parties. However, while Michel Houellebecq tries to understand the crisis from a larger cultural perspective, Vernes is not questioning the philosophical or cultural foundations of Germany. Instead, he insists on many daily life aspects, pop-art references and German civilization

insights. Hitler is always criticizing the liberal heritage and the multicultural politics, as seen in the following fragment:

“Den Deutsche der Gegenwart trennt seinen Abfall grundlicher als seine Rassen mit einen eizigen Ausnahme: auf dem Felde des Humors.” (Vernes 160)

While Michel Houellebecq varies many styles and registers, Vernes uses only two main registers: the language used by Hitler (the German which was used during the Third Reich) and contemporary urban German (as in the first cited fragment). While the novel is very original in its choice of theme, the style is not as innovative as the complex phrasing and mixed referencing of the French author's style. Vernes rather uses popular forms of irony.

#### *Fear of the past*

While the satire towards Hitler's regime was present from the 1940s (through the movie *The Dictator* by Charlie Chaplin), in the German space there were few works that used this form of pastiche (Donadio 2015). Up to this day, creating an ironic interpretation of Hitler was not possible in the cultural public sphere, as Vernes himself declared. However, across the Ocean, various forms of art used to satirize Hitler's legacy, contributing to creating wrong stereotypes about Germany, through pop-culture (Oltermann 2014). We consider this lack to be determined not only by certain legal restrictions, but also by a community taboo. Moreover, when representations about Hitler in contemporary Germany actually occur, there are two main directions: *the funny Hitler* and *the monster Hitler* (Vernes 2014). Certainly, Vernes had to take into consideration how he could re-position his own standing without being punished by the German law. We consider that this would be a certain distance from Houellebecq's *Soumission*, Julian Barnes' *England, England* or Saramago's *History of the Siege of Lisbon*: through their postmodern rewriting, these writers engaged in open debates, but they were not risking any juridical pursuit. As a result, certain cautiousness was needed, but at the same time, Vernes wanted to

challenge the reader. Therefore, what he proposed in *Er ist wieder da* a realistic *Hitler* is quite new in the context of German pop-culture.

During an interview with the Irish National Public Service Media, he declared that his aim was not to create only a satire about Hitler, but to show the possible clash between the past and contemporary society:

“he is not that funny as the clash of the two worlds. This Hitler is a bit helpless at the beginning, but he gains strengths and he shows he’s able to able to analyze his surrounding (...) and he’s able to use the abilities we’ve forgotten about” (Vernes 2014)

In other words, Vernes’s questions the supremacy of liberalism, as outlined by Fukuyama, by proposing an ideological clash, which is not stated by Huntington. While Samuel Huntington considers that the possible conflicts are determined by different civilization patterns, throughout his novel, Vernes proposes the hypothesis of a historical clash. His point is not necessarily to prove that a new form of Nazism may emerge. The novel is shocking due to the premise that a charismatic leader such as Hitler could win the elections in Germany. One may spot that Houellebecq has the same starting point: a tired society that needs a Messianic leader. However, Vernes’s critique equally draws on media, on *simulacrum*-making, and on Otherness discrimination (the case of Turks in the novel). Due to the controversial theme, the opinions in the media were quite different. For instance, in *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, Cornelia Fiedler considered that the commercial boost is due to the main character-Adolf Hitler (Fidler, 2013). Also, her opinion is that the satire would not be well received by the public . Marc Reichwein from *Die Welt* had a pertinent review, but in the end he questioned whether the book has actually any humor for a German public (Reichwein 2013). On the other hand, the cultural journalists from the United States and the Great Britain proved to be more relaxed on this topic. To sum up, the fact that the book was highly consumed in Germany shows that the fear of the Hitler’s heritage is still present (why?). While the German cultural journalists accused it (not always in the open), the book was highly purchased. Even though it was later

translated in 42 languages, *Er ist Wieder Da* did not meet the same success in other cultures, even though it was better promoted through cultural media (Donadio 2015).

*Conclusions. Limitations. Further research*

To sum up, translating the *collective anxieties* may be a secret ingredient for the writers in order to have a successful book. We have argued, by using the *New Historicism* and Imagery Studies methodology, that the interests from the large public for several novels may reflect some specific fears. We wanted to understand why these novels were highly read in the European Union tandem- France-Germany. We were also interested, following Emily Apter and Mona Baker's reflections, in understanding to what extent these theories are untranslatable. Therefore, we started from the accurate analysis by Samuel Huntington in order to demonstrate that these two novels reflect a *clash between two civilizations*. We have argued in the second part that Michel Houellebecq's novel *Soumission* reflected *the fear of radical otherness*. This idea is constructed through three main points: drawing the parallel with the Catholic conversion of Huysmans, questioning European values through the metaphor of the Roman Empire and proposing, for the commercial sake, the hypothesis of having a Muslim president. While Michel Houellebecq used a highly-sophisticated language and many intercultural references, Timur Verne questioned the legacy of Hitler by using a simple vocabulary. Even though from an aesthetic point of view *Er ist wieder da* is not as successful as *Soumission*, the irony is based on other fundamentals. We have seen that Hitler's character is built on the model of *simulacrum* and that this approach is not singular in the postmodern tradition. However, while the other novels deal with more delicate historical subjects, Verne risked more due to the law concerning the Third Reich heritage promotion: *Strafgesetzbuch*, S. 86.

One of the limits of this research is the fact that we did not have access to the full critical reception of these novels in all countries. Moreover, we do not have a full understanding of the French and German mentality. Finally, there were few critical works that deal with these novels, since they were published only a few years ago.

In the future, it would be interesting to see how these novels were received in the Arab countries (for *Soumission*) and in Israel (for *Er ist Wieder Da*). Also, it would be useful to consult psychological and anthropological works that deal the main features of German and French mentality, in order to better argue the existing *collective anxieties*. It would be equally good to have literary critique works that deal with the writings that reflect the *collective anxieties*, especially in the context of the refugee crisis and the Syrian war.

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