

USAGE OF PRESS AS A HEGEMONIC STRUGGLE FIELD

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Abstract

This study discusses ideological effects on media content. According to Hallin (1986), while journalists may serve as defenders and/or sanctifiers in a sphere of consensus, they may also expose those unrelated to politics to harsh criticism, blame and even exclude them from any fair discussion driving them into a sphere of deviance. Antagonism between soldiers and the ruling power in Turkey usually takes place via the media. The discourse of the national press in recent years has illustrated the confrontation of hegemonic military and the civil elites. While the power of Turkish Armed Forces (TAF) in Turkey remained indisputable and even untouchable until recently, with the news discourse, this institution was drawn into a lengthy conflict. Power of the press regarding shifts of hegemonic powers in a society is inevitable. In this study, analysis of news about TAF was carried out relying on the discourse theory of Laclau and Mouffe. More specifically, we focused on the "Sledgehammer Coup Plan" as was published in the Turkish daily, *Taraf*, on Jan 20, 2010. The study presents two significant points: (1) it describes how ideological structuring was shaped via media discourses, and (2) it interprets how conflicts between the military and the civilian powers occurred in Turkey. Bringing together the hegemonic, political and economic structures via discourse, this study suggests that hegemonic ideology of powers can be changed through the media.

Keywords: hegemony, discourse, media, news.

INTRODUCTION

This study aims to analyze the consequences of the shifting neo-liberal policies in Turkey through the media. In a globalized world where the notion of nation-state is questioned, we see the era of capitalization emerging in Turkey. Along with this notion, the position of the military is also questioned. Turkey is a country which has witnessed conflicts between the military and the civilian powers for years since it already has experienced three military coups in the name of democracy. Lately, we can observe a dominant power shift in the society. On the pretext of a civilian coup, military elites have been battered; a civilian campaign has been initiated to eliminate potential military coups, and the media has been used as a platform for all this. In his study, *Power Elites*, Mills (1956) states that interests of commercial, financial and military elites are in constant conflict regardless of social structure. According to Hallin (1986), while journalists serve as defenders and even blessers of those in the sphere of consensus, the same journalists may condemn, sideline and subject those to severe criticism in the sphere of deviance. In Turkey, disagreement between military and the civilian powers has been intensified and the military was pushed into the deviance sphere through journalists. In this country, relations between the army and the nation are politically and

historically multidimensional. The hegemonic power of the military and the civilian power in Turkey have been distortedly presented through the national media. Although the social power of the Turkish Armed Forces (TAF) in Turkey has never been a matter of question since the establishment of the Republic, through media discourses, however, the TAF status has been moved away from Hallin's (1986) sphere of consensus to the sphere of deviance.

Media channels that exist on a major social platform produce various discourses about an event, a phenomenon or a process. Social structures such as racism and sexism or news about disadvantaged groups are all shaped through power relations with the media. The shift in power relations and relocation of an empowered group into a weaker position are all carried out by means of media discourse. As stated by Laclau and Mouffe (2001), the two representatives of Post-Marxist approach, the rising complexity and institutionalism in a capitalist society leads to an increase of social antagonism and new political domains. In the process of implementing neo-liberal policies, those who have stood against the implementation of such ideological policies have been branded as antagonists in the society.

The current study is based on the hypothesis that, since in Turkey the military has got the power to interfere in politics, this institution is moved to a sphere of deviance resulting from the implementations and ideology of the civilian power. Thus, this situation leads to a conflict between the military and the civilian power, which has been pursuing an agenda to reshape the established structure via neo-liberal and Islamic implementations. Globalization and its outcomes, such as neo-liberal policies, have shifted the position of the army amidst administrations (Ahmed, 2007; Yeldan, 2007). One of such conflicts was the disagreement on wearing the turban, to which the military strongly opposed. There, the media bore a vital role for the ruling power to reach its aims, that is, ostracizing the army, since the media has the power to teach people how and what to think (Dearing, Rogers, 1996; 101). So, creating antagonism in media discourse is viewed as a normal activity. The study will look into newspaper discourse showing how the military has been pushed into a sphere of deviance from a consensus sphere.

A national newspaper got hold of a confidential seminar held by the TAF on 5-7 March 2003. This national daily, *Taraf*, interpreted this seminar as a potential coup plan against the ruling civilian power in Turkey. The news and texts related to this potential coup found coverage in the national press under the name of the "Sledgehammer Coup Plan." On 21 January 2010, the TAF issued a press statement that these documents were solely seminars plan. On 22 February 2010, more than 40 officers were arrested and officially charged with attempting to overthrow the government. These officers included four admirals, a general and two colonels, some of whom retired former commanders of the Turkish Navy and the Air Force. Three days later, the former commanders of the Navy and the Air Force were released. This study projects the discourse about this seminar as was covered by this daily.

The Purpose and Scope of the Study

The purpose of this study is to reveal the discourse of the media about the military power and the occurring antagonism. According to post-Marxist approaches, in a hegemonic environment, nodal points are constructed and firmly fixed. The study manifests distortions made by the media referring to articulations and identities created by the news. While a military identity was once associated with terms such as *democracy*, *Kemalism* or *independence*, this very identity has recently begun to be identified with the term, "military coup."

The scope of this study is limited with coverage of coup allegations (including news columns) made by the national daily *Taraf* on 20 January 2010.

Method

The study is based on the discourse theory of post-Marxist approaches. The concepts introduced by this theory have been employed in analyzing discourses in media texts. Such concepts presented by the post-Marxist discourse theory are helpful in showing the way how the army and soldiers in Turkey have been antagonized, explaining their position and the way how their significance has been diminished. According to Laclau and Mouffe (2001;122), the occurrence of such a situation necessitates the creation and fixture of nodal points. Dynamic structures of created identities led to articulations. Thus, the Turkish military was projected with a double-faced structure: in the past, "friend", and in today's discourse, "foe". In order to observe objectivity, the researcher asked 10 graduate students to read the covered news about the alleged coup and comment on the news whether it was depicting a friendly or a hostile picture of the army.

FINDINGS AND COMMENTS

According to Laclau and Mouffe (2008;156), discursive structure is not merely a cognitive or fictive entity but rather an articulation practice that forms and regulates social relations. In this discursive unity, the identities are relational and all discourses are disrupted by a discursive field which exceeds them all. Within this framework, the military power takes place in the media discourse field. In Post-Marxism, neither absolute stability nor absolute instability is possible. This redundancy contained by all discursive situations is the required base for any type of social practice. In post-Marxism, this is defined as "the field of discursivity". Each discourse is established to dominate the field of discursion and stop the flow of differentiations for the aim of uniting them around a center. Media discourse on military power causes a social antagonism towards such power. Antagonism surfaces upon the conflict between the supporters and opponents of this discourse.

Nodal Point and Articulations

Since January 2010, the military power in Turkey has been associated with a so-called "Sledgehammer Coup Plan" in media discourse. The discourse structure, reminiscent of the military power identity, is centered on the "Sledgehammer Coup Plan". This fragile stability forges the nodal point of discourse. Here, the meaning is partially stabilized. Articulation practice is executed over this nodal point, which gives new meaning to a set of elements previously existed by associating these elements with a coup plan. In this regard, the "Sledgehammer Coup Plan" is not only viewed as the articulation point of other elements but it is also regarded to enable the transformation of these elements into a politicized military position. At times, the military did represent different nodal points such as *democracy*, *Kemalism* and even *terrorism*, yet of all, the *coup* discourse is regarded as the most significant to be associated with this institution since it signifies hegemony over the current civilian administration.

Hall (1986) places ideology at the center of discursive field. As a matter of fact, this field functions as a store where all semantic redundancies are collected. In Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory, it is not clear whether the discursive field is structured by using all structures of meaning or comparative discourses (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002). After all, the discursive field where discourse is actualized as a unity of news, columns, comments and/or analysis headings is established to forge a center. In this present study, the national *Taraf* newspaper is identified as the discursive field.

Media discourses on military power emerge through the articulations made about the "Sledgehammer Coup Plan" nodal point (Figure 1). In this discursive articulation, the concept is used to explain the formation of hegemony and discourse. Indeed, each social practice is in a way an articulator. Another dimension of articulation is observed in the subject position. The same indefinite, incomplete and ambiguous quality attributed to all discursive identities by over-determination is present in the subject category as well (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001; 121). This over-determination paves the way for hegemonic articulation. The military power is in the subject position, and its opponents are discoursed hegemonically via certain articulations.

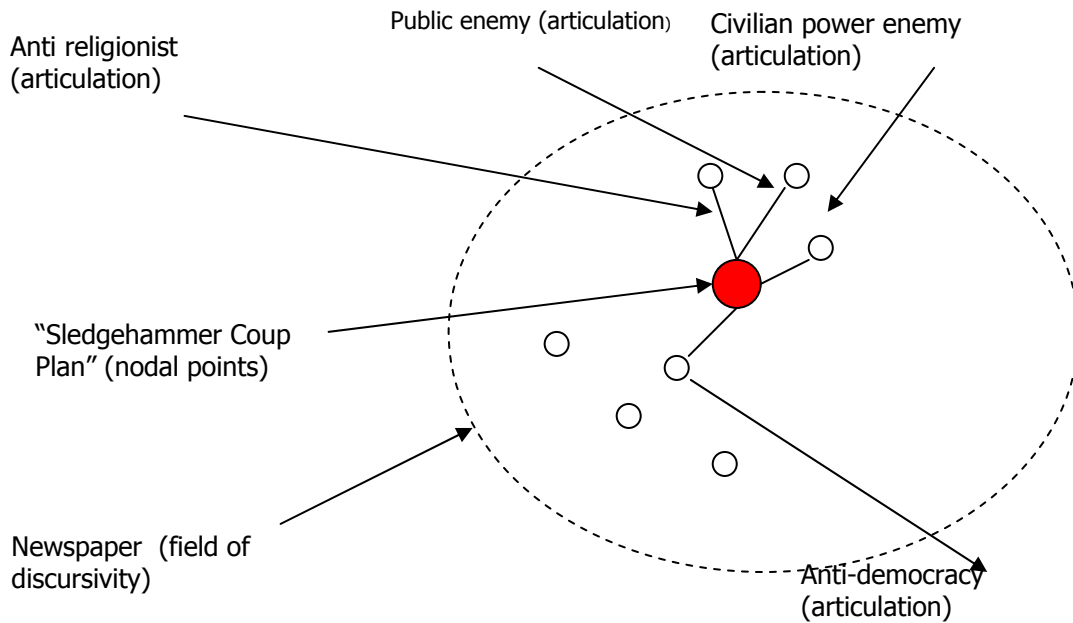


Figure 1. Main components of Post-Marxist discourse theory within the discourse structure of military power in the field of media.

In Figure 1, certain parts of articulations made about the nodal point "Sledgehammer Coup Plan" are illustrated. Within the framework of nodal point, newspaper discursion field, the military power has been portrayed to oppose the public, religion, civilian power and democracy. Additionally, within the media discourse field, there are some articulations which are not associated with the floating nodal points. For instance, on the very same date, another news discourse of *Taraf* relates the statement below about the military power:

"They drove 33 privates to death –ex-PKK leader made striking remarks: They drove 33 privates willingly to death" (Taraf, 20 January 2010)

In the news, allegations of a former prominent PKK leader were reported such that the newspaper attempted to make the impression that the gendarmerie did dispatch the privates intentionally to death. By doing so, a discourse structure was formed by the newspaper portraying the army as the "enemy," and the terrorist leader, who made these remarks, as "friend". By publishing the remarks by the PKK leader that "the army is responsible for the deaths," rather than stabilizing discourse, the newspaper uses a dual good/bad structure. Tyrannical attitude of the military power was placed in the discursive field as an indicator. Besides, three former military coups and association between coups and the military were also

highlighted in the media discursive field as another indicator connected to the nodal point. In a news column, an example of such a discourse was rather illustrative: "... otherwise, we would not succeed in purging the army from this "pro-coup mindset" ailment " (Altan, 2010)

Opponent Identities and Discourse of Enemy

In newspaper discourses, the military power in Turkey was associated with other identities as well. Throughout this association process, discourses turn into floating indicators via an articulation method. Transformation into enemy was supported by discourses and while doing so all dissimilar components were articulated about identities. The enemy discourse was grounded via double structures: "floating" or "empty indicators" (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001; 134). These structures consist of dual expressions such as *good/bad*, *friend/enemy*, *tyrant/tender*. Such dualities are placed in the discourse structure of transformation into enemy. For this reason, analyses of the subjects in columns and headlines were carried out. The position of a subject was determined by discursion over structure which was produced by the probable conditions of its identity.

In order to expose the way military power was discoursed as "enemy" in the press and how it was placed inside discourse as antagonist, an analysis of interviews with 10 graduate students was made utilizing a *focus group interview technique*. Subsequent to reading the news and columns on the alleged *sledgehammer coup plan* published on the 30 January 2010 issue of the *Taraf* newspaper, the matter was opened for discussion. Through this method, emerging themes regarding the subject have been noted. These themes and articulations made about the subject are illustrated in Figure 2.

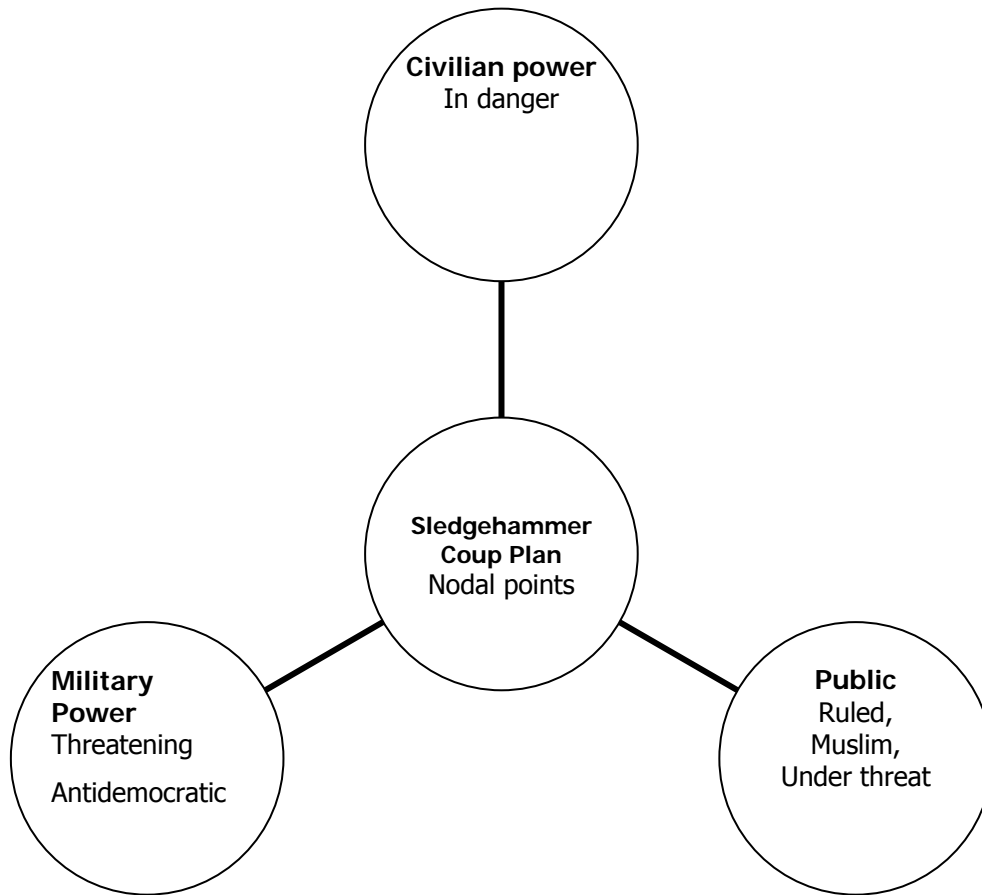


Figure 2. Illustration of subjects and articulations made about the subject within the “Sledgehammer Coup Plan” discourse.

In the analysis, three different subjects emerged in the news and discourse related to the “Sledgehammer Coup Plan”: *military power*, *civilian power* and *public*. What makes a practice hegemonic is the atmosphere created for articulation about an opposing party. Indeed, forging opposing parties gives way to antagonism. Our study has also presented a nodal point of opposing parties forged via the “Sledgehammer Coup Plan”. We have done this through subject-related articulations. Thus, the opposing parties here are the *military*

and the *civil power*, i.e. the *public*. The military was portrayed as antagonistic towards the civil power. This has been achieved through the news. Articulations made via the news indicate that the military had assumed the "enemy identity". Both the civilian power and the public took a similar opposing stand against the military. Some of these discourses are stated as examples below:

News discourses	Subject positions
"Fatih Mosque was going to be bombed" "Blood was going to be shed before reciting the azan" "In Fatih and Beyazit mosques, a bomb attack was going to take place on Friday" "They were going to blow up mosques in İstanbul"	Military power vs. public Threat against the Muslim faith
"Our own army shall kill us with our own bombs" "All the preparations are made to torment their own homeland" "The goal is to increase the number of casualties"	Military power vs. public Threat against right of life
"We were going to crash our own jets" "Let there be a raid to the air museum"	Military power vs. Military power Enemy against its own administration
"They aim to put the AKP (Justice and Development Party) on the spot" A group within the TAF was rather discontented with AKP's ruling power" "The coup directly targets the AKP"	Military power vs. Civilian power Target, under threat

Table 1. Subject position and oppositions in the discourses of *Taraf* newspaper

The subjects illustrated in the table are placed in discourse structures with their opposing positions, and such oppositions uncover the enemy discourse, since in the discourses, there are two parties: the *threatening* and the *threatened*. According to the alleged coup plan, the military power is in the field where antagonism is forged and within this field various articulations are made about nodal points to construct an antagonist position. While the event-related news is expressed via discursive structures, dual structure of *enemy-friend* is strengthened.

While the military power was positioned as the opponent, the public and the media were placed in the defensive position. News was formed to structure a discourse regarding the military power, and through discourses, it was moved to the sphere of deviance resulting from the neo-liberal civilian ruling power and

the imperial setting formed by this power. Following the year, 2002, when the AKP first came to office, all capitalist powers were overtaken by the civilian rule (Uzgel, 2007). The adoption of certain frame of mind by society demands a long process and a variety of mediums, the most effective of which being the media. The use of allegations regarding coup plan in headlines and the analysis of the topic in columns exhibit the hints related to media and ideology discourse. Ideological implantation continues throughout daily news and processes. In the figure below, we can best observe how the military power was portrayed as the opposing power against other subjects, i.e. the civil power and the public.

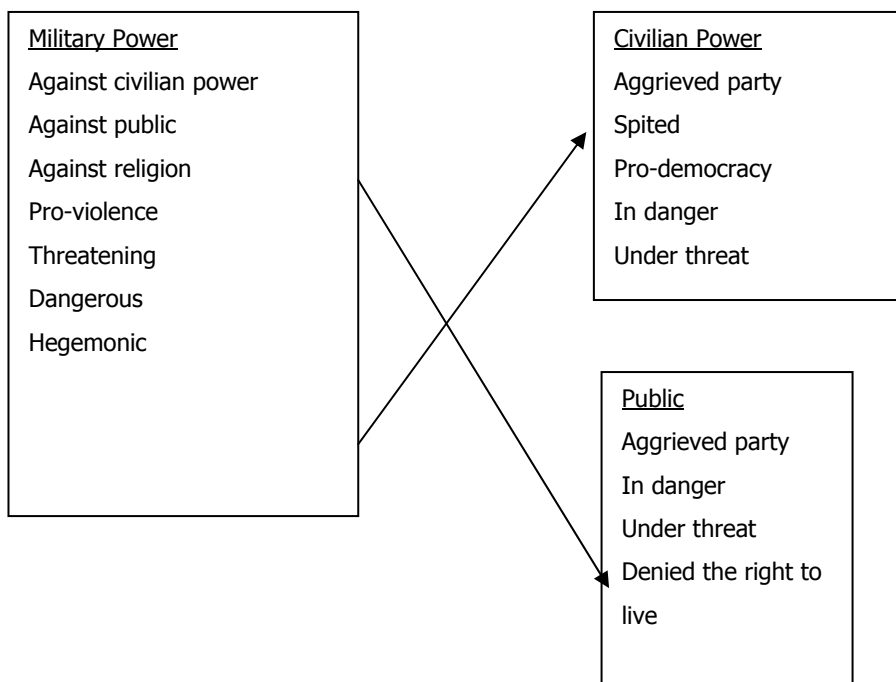


Figure 3. The opposition of military power against other identities

The military power that has an antagonistic relation in discourse possesses negative discourses against others. By bearing a negative expression, this antagonism transformed the military into an enemy against public and civilian power identities.

Conclusion

In the aftermath of the news about an alleged coup plan released by the Turkish daily, *Taraf*, on 20 January 2010, news web sites were visited thousands of times. A search with the syntax "Sledgehammer Coup Plan" on one particular web site provided 10.300.000 headlines (28 May 2010). In spite of such density of news, once randomly selected 20 sites were scanned, headlines with the same context were observed. Headlines such as "our jet will be crashed", "our mosque will be blown up", "we will slaughter our own soldiers" were placed on front pages of such sites. Media discourse where the same discourses were repeated was brought into the agenda by means of ideological implantation. Neo-liberal policies implemented after the 1980s resulted in a variety of changes in Turkey (Bedirhanoğlu, 2007).

The present study has displayed the relocations between powers by means of media discourses. The concepts of *Post Marxist* discourse theory have been employed in a critical analysis of media discourse. In this discourse, the battle for hegemony between the military and the civilian power was discussed at a "Sledgehammer Coup Plan" nodal point, which illustrated the battle to lead to antagonism of the military power. As articulations were made, dual structures were created about the military, the civilian power and the public, which were positioned as subjects in discourses, in which the military was positioned as the enemy.

Changes in the political arena and the economic structure, subjected the position of powers to discussion, particularly, by the press. The TAF was at the very heart of such discussions. However, even though a military document constituting crime existed, the way to tackle this issue should not have been through relying on media discourse, rather, the matter should have been referred to the judiciary, and not to any other authority. Alas, in this matter, we see the media to have played a major role. This situation questions the sincerity of the political power as well as practices of scrupulous and impartial news coverage by the media.

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