

İSTANBUL BİLGİ UNIVERSITY ★ FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

**From Reality to Spectacle: The Dramatization of Politics and the Case of
CNNTurk's *No Man's Land***

MASTER OF ARTS THESIS

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ABSTRACT

Evaluated within the context of post-truth era, establishing emotional engagement with the viewers became an essential factor for television success, more so than factual reporting. As a result, political information and portrayal of reality has been slowly replaced by a spectacle of information. This thesis focuses on Turkey, where television entertainment is defined by television dramas. The thesis argues that political information programs such as newscasts and political debate shows are dramatized. I focused on the period after the attempted coup of July 15, 2016 and analyzed two CNNTurk debate shows. I argue that despite their purpose of informing viewers, these shows are overrun by dramatic elements. Through content analysis of select programs, netnographic research of social media reception among viewers and interview with Ismail Saymaz, I aim to highlight elements of dramatization within political debate shows.

Keywords: Political Debate Shows, Turkey, Dramatization of Politics, CNNTurk, Infotainment

ÖZET

İçinde bulunduğumuz post-gerçeklik döneminde televizyonculuk başarısı için izleyiciyle duygusal bağ kurmak gerçekliği paylaşmaktan daha önemli hale gelmiştir. Tüm bunların sonucunda, gerçeklik yavaşça yerini bilginin gösterileşmesine bırakmıştır. Bu tez, televizyondaki dramatik dizilerin televizyon eğlencesi anlayışını oluşturduğu Türkiye’de politik bilgi içeren haber ve tartışma programlarının dramatikleştiğini iddia etmektedir. 15 Temmuz 2016 darbe girişimi sonrası CNNTürk kanalındaki tartışma programları ele alınmıştır. Bu tartışma programlarının amaçları toplumu bilgilendirmek olsa da, birçok farklı şekilde içeriğin dramatize olduğu gözlemlenmiştir. Programların içerik analizi, sosyal medya üzerinde netnografik araştırma ve İsmail Saymaz ile yapılan söyleşi aracılığıyla bu tartışma programlarındaki dramatik elementlerin ortaya çıkarılması amaçlanmıştır.

Keywords: Politik Tartışma Programları, Türkiye, Politikanın Dramatikleşmesi, CNNTürk, Infotainment

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CHAPTER 1

1.1 A brief history of reality on television

Among all mass communication tools, television has a unique role as both an information provider and an entertainment tool. Television's popularity as a research subject has begun in 1950s and scholarly interest increased further as of 1980s as television became a more integral part of everyday lives. John Corner mentions three aspects of television that sets it apart from other media: its electronic, visual, mass/domestic character. These aspects give television "a reach, potential instantaneity, scopic range and penetration of everyday living" and make it a very powerful medium (Corner, 1999: 4). Most of television research has been about its influence over mass audiences.

One of the most critical influence areas of television is politics. Research has focused on both television as a supply and mediator of political information. The belief that television replaces primary participation through tele-presence of politicians and tele-events of politics and thus impacting political action (Corner, 1999: 4) led to anxiety about television's strategically rendered content having high credibility among its audiences. The deviation Corner implies is a deviation from print press, and thus the concern is about television's visual and talk formats and their framing. As the main media source that shapes our understanding of public information, television plays a crucial role in disseminating information (Postman, 1985). Postman argues that television "undermined traditional definitions of

information, news, and, to a large extent, of reality itself' (1985: 74) mainly through pleasing and amusing audiences. It is critical to discuss here the two key aspects that impact television framing and thus the portrayal of reality: media discourse and media ownership.

The way in which the information is delivered – discourse – can be an element of framing and agenda setting. Saussure defines language as “a system of signs that expresses ideas” (1959: 16). Language, unlike discourse, is a social institution and is not something which the individual can change or create again. Informative television discourse, such as news discourse, is defined as special information, a set of expressions that enables us to talk about a certain subject (Hall, 1996). According to Foucault (1980), Fontana (1993) and Van Dijk (2006), those who have the social, cultural, economic and political power in a society (hegemony), also have a significant role in creation of dominant discourse in the public sphere. A group of opinion leaders or cultural élites who hold the power in society can manipulate the perception about current issues with their thoughts and judgments related to certain issues, and with the power they have, they can be effective in prompting certain fractions of the society to certain fields of action.

This brings us to the second means of framing of information on television: media ownership. One of the representatives of this school, Gitlin points out that media have the power “to define normal and abnormal social and political activity”, “to say what is politically real and legitimate and what is not”, “to establish certain political agendas”, “to draw social attention on certain topics” or/ and “to exclude

others off the agenda” (Gitlin, 1978: 205). Media ownership has a significant role in the production process of news stories and on what is and cannot be the news.

In *Manufacturing Consent*, Chomsky and Herman (1988) state the following:

The increase in corporate power and global reach, the mergers and further centralization of the media, and the decline of public broadcasting, have made bottom-line considerations more influential both in the United States and abroad. The competition for advertising has become more intense and the boundaries between editorial and advertising departments have weakened further. Newsrooms have been more thoroughly incorporated into transnational corporate empires, with budget cuts and a further diminution of management enthusiasm for investigative journalism that would challenge the structures of power. (1988, xvii)

Net, political and economic relationships of media conglomerates with governments are naturally expected to define and deliver a certain type of reality on television.

1.2 From Reality to Spectacle

For television is a very profitable business with large advertising revenues, commercial pressure have a toll on television news programs. Pestano Rodriguez argues:

[news programs] constitute a passband between programming slots, from morning to afternoon, from afternoon to night, and so on, which are

authentically differentiated programmes that must retain the audience inherited and take it to the next slot. (Gutierrez San Miguel et. al., 2010: 7)

Thus arises a hybrid form, which merges information and fiction, knowledge and entertainment; resulting in what Postman (1985) would claim to be a distracting vaudeville. According to Imbert this new television requires “the use of journalistic techniques and genres for the purposes of spectacularity, through the dramatization and trivialization and the production of a reality parallel to the ‘objective’ reality, undoubtedly due to wastage of the latter” (Gutierrez San Miguel et. al., 2010: 125). As a result, the separation “between news and fiction, between interpretation and facts, between spectacle and reality, between accident and crime and commentary, and between reproduction and valuation” disappeared (Aguaded as cited in Gutierrez San Miguel, 2010: 126).

Gutierrez San Miguel et al. (2010) introduce a concept to define the construction of Spanish news stories: spectacle. What is a spectacle? Dictionary definition is as follows: i) anything presented to the sight or view, especially something of a striking or impressive kind ii) a public show or display, especially on a large scale (“Spectacle”, n.d.). In *The Society of the Spectacle*, Guy Debord (1994) explains: “The spectacle is not a collection of images; rather, it is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images” (1994: 4). He follows:

The spectacle cannot be understood either as a deliberate distortion of the visual world or as a product of the technology of the mass dissemination of images. It is far better viewed as a *Weltanschauung* that has been actualized, translated into the material realm a world view transformed into an objective force. (Debord, 1994: 5)

Debord's account of spectacle accentuates its impact as a captivating force that defines all social life through mediated images. Raymond Williams (2000) also claims that we have a new need and exposure to spectacle in Debord's sense and that "our society has been dramatized by the inclusion of constant dramatic representation as a daily habit and need." (2000: 56) According to Williams, these dramatic representations "leave us continually uncertain whether we are spectators or participants." (2000: 57)

Such a situation in which we cannot distinguish between spectatorship and participation, resembles the third order of simulacra in Baudrillard's terms where representation precedes reality and there remains no distinction between reality and representation:

Today abstraction is longer that of the map, the double, the mirror, or the concept. Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being, or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal. The territory no longer precedes the map, nor does it survive it. It is nevertheless the map that precedes the territory - precession of simulacra - that engenders the territory. (Baudrillard, 1981: 1)

As such, reality is replaced by a hyperreal, a simulacrum, a sign of the real:

It is no longer a question of imitation, nor duplication, nor even parody. It is a question of substituting the signs of the real for the real, that is to say of an operation of deterring every real process via its operational double. (Baudrillard, 1981: 2)

The real 'real' becomes less than its representation – the hyperreal- and thus the distinction between reality and fantasy is dissolved. In the context of media, Baudrillard argues that there is “more and more information, and less and less meaning” and “[information] devours communication and the social” (1981: 79-80).

Rather than creating communication, [information] exhausts itself in the act of staging communication. Rather than producing meaning, it exhausts itself in the staging of meaning ... The hyperreality of communication and of meaning. More real than the real, that is how the real is abolished. (Baudrillard, 1981: 81)

Trapped within the circular process of simulation, it becomes impossible to distinguish between the spectacle and the real. Baudrillard argues the masses' demand for a spectacle may be enforcing media to deliver:

Are the mass media on the side of power in the manipulation of the masses, or are they on the side of the masses in the liquidation of meaning, in the violence perpetrated on meaning, and in fascination? Is it the media that induce fascination in the masses, or is it the masses who direct the media into the spectacle? (Baudrillard, 1981: 84)

Considering mass media conglomerates operate within the free market economy, the fundamental economics equation of supply and demand would be valid in this context: consumers of mass media demand more spectacle and thus the process continues. Television turns any reality into a consumable product, a spectacle.

In the “Dialectic of Enlightenment”, Adorno and Horkheimer coin the term ‘culture industry’ to describe cultural products of capitalism from theatre and music to movies and television. According to them, under monopolized ownership, formulaic, repetitive formats of cultural products that only slightly vary are delivered to the public. The commodified products of culture industry leave no room to the watcher to think and make his own meanings:

They are so constructed that their adequate comprehension requires a quick, observant, knowledgeable cast of mind but positively debar the spectator from thinking, if he is not to miss the fleeting facts. This kind of alertness is so ingrained that it does not even need to be activated in particular cases, while still repressing the powers of imagination. ... The required qualities of attention have become so familiar from other films and other culture products already known to him or her that they appear automatically. (Adorno and Horkheimer, 2002: 100)

Adorno and Horkheimer believe meanings are pre-determined by the culture industry and reactions are homogenized. Evaluated in a political context, homogenized reactions resemble Marcuse’s “one-dimensional thought”: “One-dimensional thought is systematically promoted by the makers of politics and their purveyors of mass information. Their universe of discourse is populated by self-validating hypotheses which, incessantly and monopolistically repeated, become hypnotic definitions or dictations” (Marcuse, 2007: 16). Thanks to this universe of discourse created by the media, the possibility of any debate or criticism about the existing rules of the system is rendered impossible.

Homogenized viewpoints and automatized reactions are not the only consequences of mass media consumption. Adorno and Horkheimer argue the influence of culture

industry over the consumers is established by entertainment (2002: 9). In a way, mass liberation occurs through amusement:

Pleasure always means not to think about anything, to forget suffering even where it is shown. Basically it is helplessness. It is flight; ... from the last remaining thought of resistance. The liberation which amusement promises is freedom from thought and from negation. (Adorno and Horkheimer, 2002: 13)

An escape from thinking through entertainment generates consent among the public according to Adorno and Horkheimer. Mass media tools, but especially television, with its unique position as an everyday audio visual medium that consistently serves both information and entertainment, by default enables this phenomenon.

1.3 Manufacturing Consent through Amusement

Amusing Ourselves to Death is Neil Postman's account on how the age of television brings about the Huxleyan dystopia through entertaining the audience and leaving serious cultural content devoid of meaning. Postman (1985) argues that in the age of typography, print press enabled the discourse to be "coherent, serious and rational" while in a televised world, discourse is "shriveled and absurd" (1985: 16).

This absurdity brought about by television is especially critical in the context of television's indispensable place in our culture:

[television] encompasses all forms of discourse. No one goes to a movie to find out about government policy or the latest scientific advances. No one buys a record to find out the baseball scores or the weather or the latest murder. No one turns on radio anymore for soap operas or a presidential address (if a television set is at hand). But everyone goes to television for all these things and more, which is why television resonates so powerfully throughout the culture. Television is our culture's principal mode of knowing about itself. (1985: 92)

In his explanation of media epistemology, Postman argues that truth-telling and structure of discourse has taken various forms over history of mankind as a result of changes in the means of media and communication (1985: 24). In the age of television, all discourse has become entertaining: "Entertainment is the supra-ideology of all discourse on television. No matter what is depicted or from what point of view, the overarching presumption is that it is there for our amusement and pleasure" (1985: 87).

In one of the TV debate show he examines, Postman lays out how there was no time for discussion, no debate, no detailed explanations (1985: 90). The audiences got accustomed to this format of discontinuity in tone and content, abrupt switches between serious news (such as a nuclear war) and trivial advertising about consumer products were normalized. Such juxtapositions, according to Postman, seriously "damaged ... our sense of the world as a serious place" and form the impression that "all reports of cruelty and death are greatly exaggerated and, in any case, not to be taken seriously or responded to sanely" (1985: 104-105). As a result, such framing of television news "[features] a type of discourse that abandons logic,

reason, sequence and rules of contradiction” (1985: 105). Postman simply compares it to theatre’s vaudeville genre (1985: 105), which was a popular type of entertainment in North America in the early 1900s.

Postman understands that television medium’s dynamics do not enable thinking and reflection. According to him:

...television demands a performing art, and so what the ABC network gave us was a picture of men of sophisticated verbal skills and political understanding being brought to heel by a medium that requires them to fashion performances rather than ideas. (1985: 91)

Deprived of concreteness and seriousness and served in a performing arts and entertainment format, public information becomes trivialized. Since television:

... is the paradigm of our conception of public information ... [it has] the power to define the form in which news must come, and it has also defined how we shall respond to it. In presenting news to us packaged as vaudeville, television induces other media to do the same, so that the total information environment begins to mirror television. (1985: 111)

As a result of such ‘mirroring’ of television, newspapers adapt to television’s discontinuous and entertainment-driven discourse: USA Today adapted short stories, heavy presentation of colorful pictures, charts, graphics and gained commercial success (1985: 111).

The behavior induced by the age of television, according to Postman, proves Aldous Huxley’s prophecies in the Brave New World, not that of Orwell’s:

... the public has adjusted to incoherence and been amused into indifference. Which is why Aldous Huxley would not in the least be surprised by the story. Indeed, he prophesied its coming. He believed that it is far more likely that the Western democracies will dance and dream themselves into oblivion than march into it' single file and manacled. Huxley grasped, as Orwell did not, that it is not necessary to conceal anything from a public insensible to contradiction and narcotized by technological diversions. (1985: 110)

Finally, Postman warns about a potential 'culture-death' when "a population is distracted by trivia, when cultural life is redefined as a perpetual round of entertainment, when serious public conversation becomes a form of baby-talk, when, in short, a people become an audience and their public business a vaudeville act, then a nation finds itself at risk: culture-death is a clear possibility" (1985: 155). Trivialization of public information through entertainment becomes an even more relevant concept in the age of postmodern television.

CHAPTER 2

2.1 The Age of postmodern Television and the Evolution of Political Talk

In the summary of postmodern era's distinguishing features, Dino Felluga (2011) highlights extreme self-reflexivity and increased use of irony and parody in artistic works. There is also a questioning of grand narratives and a decline thereof, as well as a rise in paranoia narratives linked to late capitalism fears. In addition, increased use of visuals and simulacrum and loss of historical context results audience disorientation, as per Baudrillard's analysis. Another feature of postmodernism is that despite increasing education levels, people do not prefer to read on a daily basis, and thus there is a rise in the consumption of media through oral media sources such as TV, film and radio (Felluga, 2011). Frank Webster (as cited in Jones, 2010) summarizes postmodernism as follows:

The modernist enthusiasm for genres and styles [of which news is one] is rejected and mocked for its pretensions [by postmodernists]. From this it is but a short step to the postmodern penchant for parody, for tongue-in-cheek reactions to established styles, for a pastiche mode which delights in irony and happily mixes and matches in a 'bricolage' manner. (Jones, 2010: 165)

There are numerous applications of postmodernism on television, a popular example would be *The Simpsons*. The show captures all aspects of daily life but does not include any temporality (characters do not age, for example). It also does not follow a single mega narrative – each episode includes various stories and does not have a standard flow. *Family Guy* is another example where pastiche and parody

are commonly used. The show is self-reflexive in that it quotes previous episodes, and also mocks real life pop culture events – in an episode aired in September the show included Trump’s sexist comments about women during the election period (Burnip). Reality TV is an excellent example of postmodern television as well. *Keeping up with the Kardashians* peeks at the Hollywood family’s private life, *Survivor* showcases malnourished contestants playing difficult games to win awards. These shows range from *Candid Camera* through *Cops*, *Survivor*, and *Big Brother*.

Postmodernism also finds home in the informational content on television, in the form of faux-news. *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* and *Last Week Tonight with John Oliver* are examples of such faux-news shows. *The Daily Show* is a mockery of broadcast news shows: it follows traditional news show format with similar footage and commentary by reporters, followed by Jon Stewart’s ironic commentary. It is found to be the main source of news among 21% of young population according to a 2004 study (Cosgrove-Mather, 2004). According to Amber Day, “Stewart made his name by delivering insightful critiques of contemporary political issues, analyzing how the press discussed those issues, and monitoring the mass media pandemonium of the cable news era” (Kenny, 2014). John Oliver, who worked as a correspondent on *The Daily Show* created *Last Week Tonight*, which is more international in content and has additional comedic element due to John Oliver’s characteristics being an outsider to America as a British citizen. The format of the show is “recap, rant, crescendo” (Kenny, 2014), “sharp satire, slapstick comedy and even some musical ensembles” (DeJarnette, 2016) which serves well to its objectives as a comedy news show.

Such faux-news shows are a result of the evolution of political television talk. Talk is a common feature across various television formats, be it scripted or unscripted, entertainment or informational shows. Erving Goffman coined the term “fresh talk” to define television talk - it appears to be spontaneous, although it may be scripted (Timberg, 2004). The television talk show is unique in the sense that the show is entirely structured around the act of conversation (Timberg, 2004: 3). Ong (2002) argues that with the age of radio and then television, we have entered a state of ‘secondary orality’. The old orality refers to the illiterate times of humankind in which communication relied heavily on myths and tales, and rhetorical speech was common currency. In contrast to primary orality, secondary orality “generates a sense for groups immeasurably larger than those of primary oral culture—McLuhan’s ‘global village’” (Ong, 2002: 133) and television is a key enabler of such broad reach.

The basic talk of the ancient cultures, such as the dialogues of Socrates or the Five Books of Moses, were passed down to us and thus private daily conversations had been publicized to a broad audience (Timberg, 2004: 16). With the rise of publishing industry and celebrities in the 18th century in the United States, public talk has become a commodity. As of the 1990s, critics started to “recognize the power of TV talk show as cultural institution and social text as well as performance event and profitable form of entertainment” (Timberg, 2004: 16). TV talk shows were considered to define topics of national interest and set the agenda, and by the end of 1990s these shows had become a forum of national values. TV talk show

hosts such as Phil Donahue and Oprah Winfrey brought important national issues to the public's attention and made them popular. In this way, television talk shows also became a part of the "ideology machine" (Timberg, 2004: 18).

Talk shows in the United States date back to 1948, and have been marked by a series of distinct cycles determined by cultural and economic developments. As a result, different types of talk shows and new kinds of hosts emerged in each cycle. (Timberg, 2004: 2). There are three major types: 1) late night entertainment talk show, such as those of Johnny Carson, David Letterman, Jay Leno, Larry King 2) day time audience participation talk show, such as the Phil Donahue Show and The Oprah Show 3) the morning magazine format show, such as Dave Garroway's *The Today Show* (Timberg, 2004: 6-7). Each format has tremendous history that goes beyond the scope of this thesis. It should suffice to highlight the common principles of each talk show format: i) there is a host who is in charge of setting the tone and direction of the show ii) it is experienced in "present tense", like a conversation, which enables immediacy and intimacy, iii) it is a product, commercial commodity with exchange value and is subject to competition iv) there is a group of people that structures the show in the background, despite it appearing spontaneous. (Timberg, 2004: 4-5).

An important aspect of television talk shows is that the talk show host and the guests become public influencers. Katz and Lazarsfeld put forward the Personal Influence model in 1955. Personal Influence model assumes a two-step-flow in communication: "ideas often flow from radio and print of the opinion leaders and

from them to the less active sections of the population” (Gitlin, 1978: 219). Gitlin rightly points out that in a capitalist society where “fickleness of loyalties” is required, changing of attitude is not surprising and should be considered routine (1978: 215). Media’s role as a creator of opinion and reinforcing those opinions is critical, especially in situations where there is no already existing opinion among the public or the opinion leaders (Gitlin, 1978: 217). This is the way media directly controls audience perception and “solidifies attitudes into ideology ... determines how people may perceive and respond to new situations” (Gitlin, 1978: 216).

The way political information is discussed on television today has evolved from traditional television talk to a hybrid form called *infotainment*. As a result, the potential impact of these shows on public opinion formation has also changed.

2.2 Infotainment: the new political television

In the 1980s, a new form of talk show that blends information, news and entertainment emerged: the *infotainment*:

Infotainment in talk programming encompassed news as entertainment (*The McLaughlin Group*); carnivalesque relationship shows (*Ricki Lake* and *Jerry Springer*); blends of comedy, opinion, and public-affairs discussion (Bill Maher’s *Politically Incorrect*); news parodies (the *Dennis Miller Show* and Jon Stewart’s *The Daily Show*); blends of dramatically scripted and improvised talk (*The Larry Sanders Show*); and specialized topics that blended information and entertainment (the *Dr. Ruth Show* or MTV’s *Loveline*). (Timberg, 2004:12)

In a similar manner, Dörner introduces the concept of *politainment*, which specifically links politics and entertainment: politainment is a mediatized form of public communication in which political methods, actors, processes, identities, meaning-making processes are reconfigured within the entertainment format (Bora, 2001). Since politainment is a broader concept, I will continue referring to the term infotainment in the context of television talk.

In *Entertaining Politics*, Jeffrey P. Jones (2010) refers to infotainment shows like Bill Maher's *Politically Incorrect* and Jon Stewart's *The Daily Show* as the "new political television" (Jones, 2010: 63). The new political television is a continuation of the previous talk shows in the sense that it is still the primary means through which the audience makes sense of politics. *Politically Incorrect* challenged the previously accepted notion of talk shows are the domain of experts and elite discourse, and brought together a wide range of people: celebrities, citizens and less well-known public personalities (Jones, 2010: 67). *The Daily Show* was created in 1996 and Jon Stewart started hosting it in 1999. The faux-news show's first coverage was the 2000 Elections and the absurdities of candidates' campaigns provided a wealth of material for the show. Jon Stewart himself became a "recognized, viable pundit" and the show was considered to "[have] a place in social commentary" (Jones, 2010: 71).

In a world where cable news broadcasting is criticized as presenting content "without essential seriousness ... as pure entertainment" (Postman, 1985: 100), some critics argue that hosts like Jon Stewart and John Oliver, in their comedic

approach, is able to explain important and complex issues that did not get enough attention from broadcast news shows “better than the programs he parodies” (Uberti, 2014). One of the proponents of this thinking – that faux-news are more real than ‘authentic’ newscasts – is Jeffrey P. Jones (2010). He claims that “structured fakeness to produce ‘news’ that is more real-istic and truth-ful even though such programming brands itself as unreal” (Jones, 2010: 28). In his analysis of both *The Daily Show*’s and CNN’s coverage of the campaigns the 2004 Elections, he found that *The Daily Show* even surpassed CNN’s coverage of this particular event. *The Daily Show*’s audience saw more material, highlights of populist statements, reminders of the bigger picture (such as there were no weapons of mass destruction and it was administration’s bad judgment) and thus better informs citizens on which fronts they should evaluate political candidates. In traditional news media, most of this was left unquestioned or not mentioned (Jones, 2010: 163). Similarly, Suebsaend (2014) argues that *Late Night with John Oliver*’s postmodern format – self-reflexiveness, pop culture references and irony – does the job of real journalism. It is also critical to understand the context in which these postmodern new political television shows exist: post-truth era of politics.

2.3 Post-Truth Politics and Political Opinion Formation

The concept of ‘post-truth politics’ was introduced by the blogger David Roberts, an environmental activist, in a critique of the United States federal climate bill in 2010. He defines post-truth politics as: “a political culture in which politics (public opinion and media narratives) have become almost entirely disconnected from

policy (the substance of legislation)” (Roberts, 2010). Since then, the concept came to define the current era of politics. In the UK, post-truth politics are said to have begun as of New Labour, British Labor Party under the leadership of Tony Blair and Gordon Brown during 1990s and early 2010s (“New Labour”, n.d.). Recent vote on Brexit featured blatant falsehoods told by politicians that were not backed up by data (Marcus, 2016). In the 2008 US elections, John McCain’s campaign featured unreal information about Barack Obama (Ganeva and Fitzgerald, 2008). Today, president-elect Donald Trump in the United States is considered a popular representative of post-truth politics: “It simply doesn't matter whether what he says is true or not. He doesn't care, the press don't care and his supporters don't care”, “reality is not just overruled, but made effectively irrelevant” (Dunt, 2016). In fact, it is scientifically proven that people do not always look for facts. Psychologist Daniel Kahneman calls this cognitive ease: “humans have a tendency to steer clear of facts that would force their brains to work harder” and they tend to believe what is familiar (“The Post Truth World”, n.d.) In fact, American comedian Steven Colbert coined the word *truthiness* in 2005 (“Truthiness”, n.d.), to define the lack of facts and increase in ‘gut-feel’ in current political discourse (“The Word”, The Colbert Report).

Media and television are powerful tools in making topics familiar, evoking emotion, and appeal to viewers’ gut-feeling. Shanto Iyengar (1991) refers the concept “accessibility bias”, that “information that can be more easily retrieved from memory tends to dominate judgments, opinions, and decisions” (Iyengar, 1991: 125). Media and television enable such accessibility bias especially in the area of

public affairs, where television is the “mind’s eye” of the public (Iyengar, 1991: xiii) and “where people are highly dependent upon the media for information, more accessible information is information that is more frequently or more recently conveyed by the media” (Iyengar, 1991: 125). Research findings prove that the content of television news influences the public’s opinion and support on policies, evaluation of political candidates and voting behavior. Agenda-setting effects, priming effects and bandwagon effects in political campaigns are ways in which accessibility bias is manifested in public opinion. Research on the effects of agenda setting show that when asked about national and local problems, individuals mostly mention topics that have been recently extensively covered in the news. A recent reception study on what Americans claim to have read, seen or heard before the U.S. election in 2016 proves that opinion formation about candidates were very much in line with media coverage on candidates (Allen-West, 2016). An example of this is also observed in Turkey, after the June’15 elections when terror activities in the East peaked and thus were heavily covered in the news. Konda researchers (2015) observed an increase in respondents who say ‘terror’ is the biggest risk threatening Turkey in August and September’15 compared to pre-election figures (Appendix 1, Table 2).

Hannah Arendt (1976) argues that the masses trust their imagination more than reality and are susceptible to totalitarian propaganda especially because of their longing for consistency:

They do not believe in anything visible, in the reality of their own experience; they do not trust their eyes and ears but only their imaginations, which may be caught by anything that is at once universal and consistent in

itself. What convinces masses are not facts, and not even invented facts, but only the consistency of the system of which they are presumably part. ... What the masses refuse to recognize is the fortuitousness that pervades reality. (Arendt, 1976: 351)

In the context of post-truth politics, television can be a powerful tool for political opinion formation: it has the capacity to satisfy the masses' longing for consistency through repetitive sharing of information while providing entertainment to enable an escape from reality and thinking.

Iyengar (1991) refers to two common considerations on how public forms political opinion: i. Global world view ii. Domain specific cues. Global world view argues that universal associations like conservative vs. liberal, republican vs. democrat drive political opinion formation (Iyengar, 1991: 1). The basic premise of domain-specific approach is that "opinions are based on narrower and more focused considerations relevant to particular issues" (1991: 2). Operating within the framework of domain-specific opinion formation, Iyengar argues:

...the primary factor that determines opinions concerning political issues is the assignment of responsibility for the issue in question, that is, individuals tend to simplify political issues by reducing them to questions of responsibility, and their opinions on issues flow from their answers to these questions. (1991: 2)

Therefore, it is important to determine how people attribute responsibility for political issues. Iyengar mentions two types of responsibility: causal responsibility – why problems occur – and treatment responsibility – how they may be treated.

(1991: 2). Attribution of responsibility is dependent on contextual influences, and thus television and television framing of the news is a critical contributor (1991: 4).

In his discussion of news framing formats, Iyengar remarks two main types, episodic and thematic. Episodic news framing depicts issues in terms of ‘concrete instances that illustrate issues’ and “make good pictures” and thus “attract and keep viewers' attention”; while thematic framing “places public issues in some more general or abstract context”, “presents collective or general evidence”, “feature talking heads” and “tends to be dull and slow-paced, [does not] strengthen viewer interest” (Iyengar, 1991: 8 and 132). Television is dominated by episodic news framing. Thanks to the dominance of episodic news, issues that need to be covered thematically and cannot be reduced to a level of specific events or occurrences, like global warming, are seldom covered at all. Episodic news are event-centric. Labor disputes are covered via scenes of workers rather than systemic discussions on the political and social reasons of such disputes. International terrorism is also covered in an event-oriented format, deprived of historical and social context. Iyengar quotes Altheide on Iran hostage crisis:

...was reduced to one story—the freeing of the hostages—rather than coverage of its background and context, of the complexities of Iran, of alternative American policies, and of contemporary parochial politics in a world dominated in the face of counts of the number of days of captivity and more footage of angry demonstrators and emotional relatives of hostages. (1991: 9)

How do the two types of framing impact the viewers' attribution of responsibility?

Iyengar concludes that “episodic framing tends to elicit individualistic rather than

societal attributions of responsibility, while thematic framing has the opposite effect” (Iyengar, 1991: 9-11). Namely, viewer of an episodic frame considers the situation as a specific issue and blames the individual person portrayed in the news (e.g. person may be poor because he is lazy); while the viewer of a thematic frame would question the broader historical and social context of the situation (e.g. socio-economic conditions of poverty). The dominance of episodic news frame causes Americans to develop political opinions that are “concrete rather than abstract, specific rather than general” (Iyengar, 1991: 131) and reduces the chance of viewers to hold politicians accountable for the creation and the treatment of the problem. Iyengar concludes:

In the long run, episodic framing contributes to the trivialization of public discourse and the erosion of electoral accountability. Because of its reliance on episodic reporting, television news provides a distorted depiction of public affairs. The portrayal of recurring issues as unrelated events prevents the public from cumulating the evidence toward any logical, ultimate consequence. By diverting attention from societal and governmental responsibility, episodic framing glosses over national problems and allows public officials to ignore problems whose remedies entail burdens to their constituents. Television news may well prove to be the opiate of American society, propagating a false sense of national well-being and thereby postponing the time at which American political leaders will be forced to confront the myriad economic and social ills confronting this society. (1991: 137-138)

Net, television news programs effect public opinion formation and electoral responsibility by trivializing political information and reducing complex social

issues into specific occurrences. In a post-truth world where feelings overrun facts, an additional phenomenon is at play: dramatization of political information.

Mackenzie and Porter (2011) define dramatization as follows:

... to qualify something as dramatic is to claim that it has a vivid, striking, heightened, illuminating or powerful affect. As such, to dramatize is to discover the ‘forces’ within the novel, poem, text, painting and so on by making them vivid. Dramatization, therefore, even in common parlance is the process by which a text or situation is brought to life such that it effects a change in the emotional state of those involved. (2011: 489)

News programs bring striking and vivid imagery and reporting to our homes on a daily basis. News broadcasts are often a ‘media circus’ meaning sensationalistic media coverage where the coverage of the event exceeds or is disproportionate to the event being covered (“Media Circus”, n.d.). Such media coverage uses dramatization to heighten our emotional states. Dramatization is typically performed “with the use of heroic characters as protagonists, with their opponents, a narrative approach, a conflict and an end, i.e. with the identification of the characters like it was a film or the diegesis of a narrative.” (Gutierrez San Miguel, 2010: 125). Epstein (as cited in Morris 2004) quotes a news producer, who claims that a good news story should have “structure and conflict, problem and denouement, rising action and falling action, a beginning, a middle and an end. These are not only the essentials of drama, they are the essentials of narrative” (Morris, 2004: 313). Therefore, “political world is understood by the public in terms of characters, conflict and the evolution of the story” (Morris, 2004: 323). This is not a new phenomenon and there are numerous global examples of it.

One of the ways in which news content is dramatized is through creating and augmenting conflict. This is usually achieved through polarization and creation a vivid image of the opponent or the 'Other'.

Essentially, the idea of otherness stems from the projection theory of Freud. We split what is considered weak, faulty, and evil from the self and place them into an Other. Freud (1918) also mentions that the ego pushes the reality of death to exterior locations, to foreign populations, to an 'Other'. Edward Said (1979) had demonstrated how the Orient was the 'Other' for colonialist Europeans: it stood as a "counter-image of everything Western, holding the features the westerners did not wish or dare to include into their cherished self-image" (Vuorinen, 2012: 1).

In his *Discourse Analysis as Ideology Analysis*, Van Dijk (2006) talks about the social identity theory of ingroups and outgroups and how they are represented in discourse:

...if ideologies are organized by well-known ingroup–outgroup polarization, then we may expect such a polarization also to be 'coded' in talk and text. This may happen, as suggested, by pronouns such as us and them, but also by possessives and demonstratives such as our people and those people, respectively.

Thus, we assume that ideological discourse is generally organized by a general strategy of positive self-presentation (boasting) and negative other-presentation (derogation). This strategy may operate at all levels, generally in such a way that our good things are emphasized and our bad things de-

emphasized, and the opposite for the Others—whose bad things will be enhanced, and whose good things will be mitigated, hidden or forgotten. (2006: 126)

Once created, the ‘Other’ needs to be systematically dehumanized to build on the dramatic narrative. Many scholars studied the US military action – the War of Terror – following September 11. In their analysis of metaphors in war propaganda, Steuter and Wills found that “the war metaphor promises a clear narrative of aggressors and victims, winners and losers, soldiers and insurgents” (2010: 154). However, this framing obscures who or what the enemy is. In her article, Susan Sontag (2002) argues that because of its indefinite ‘enemy’, the anti-terror war can never end, a “sign that it is not a war, but, rather, a mandate for expanding the use of American power”.

Other aspects dramatization of news include serialization and character development. Serialization can be considered as continuity in narrative. Dramatic content is emphasized in the news, talk-shows and magazine programs by inducing curiosity by presentations such as ‘coming up next’. In magazine shows, celebrities’ daily lives are presented within a dramatic narrative; with an exposition, conflict and resolution. Character development in news television may be evaluated as the host and the guests’s television personas. Globally, TV talk show hosts set social, political, and cultural agendas and are considered to be the “barometers of public opinion”, as well as the “most important shapers of it” (Timberg, 2004: 14).

CHAPTER 3

3.1 Prevalence of Dramatic Content on Turkish Television

In line with the social and economic developments, Turkish television went through a rapid modernization in the 1990s. Until 1990s, only TRT's (Turkish Radio and Television) four channels that were on air. On May 7th, 1990 Star 1 channel, owned by Magic Box, started test broadcasts and the monopoly of TRT (the national Radio and Television network) came to an end. However, Star 1 was on air for limited hours and only had foreign content, mostly music videos (Çelenk, 2005: 190). Later on, channels like Teleon, Kanal 6 and Show TV, owned by large holdings, emerged. These channels were obviously linked to commercial interests and contributed to the creation of a consumer society by airing shows such as: 'Tükenmeden Tüketelim' (Let's consume before we are consumed), 'Pazarlama Kuşağı' (Marketing Hour), Tüketici Dosyası (Consumer Files), 'Tüketicinin Sesi' (Voice of Consumer) (2005: 196). However, economic indicators showed that only very few privileged people, mostly in Istanbul, had access to and had the means for such consumption. A 1991 newspaper article in Milliyet titled "Imported goods: 99 Turks watch them, only 1 Turk eats them" highlights the gap between reality and what is portrayed on television. (2005: 196-197). Such commercial programming defined the audience, first and foremost, as consumers.

The evolution of society both determined programming choices and was in turn influenced by them. Çelenk's (2005) analysis shows that prime time shows in Turkey generally consist of i) television dramas and soap operas, ii) talk shows,

music shows, game shows iii) news debate shows and forums iv) reality shows (2005: 206). In 2011, average TV watching time in Turkey was 3.9 hours/day (for perspective, in the US the number was 8.5 hours/day) (Yaveroglu, 2014: 6). Among those who watch TV, almost 80% say they watch local television dramas and series (2014: 8). Today, television dramas dominate prime time programming and have the highest rating. I have randomly selected a week (week of October 31st, 2016), to determine most viewed content on television. Analyzing daily top 10 watched shows for the full week, I have found that 44% of the top watched shows were television dramas – either new episodes or repeats (Chart 1), proving that watching television dramas is a favored pastime activity for Turkish audience. Within this week, 25 different television dramas were aired. In a given year, there are hundreds of productions and many sub-genres, but only a limited few manage to remain on air. It is not surprising that these few successful productions have many commonalities in terms of narrative structure, theme and characters. Despite increases in the number of productions, commercial pressures bring about an impoverishment in the content which leads to uniformity (Özsoy, 2015).

In terms of quality of production and acting, Turkey's TV drama industry has been reaching new heights, and television dramas have been an important export. Turkey's television drama exports was a 250 million USD business in 2015 ("250 Milyon Dolarlık Türk Dizisi İhraç Ettik, 2016). Turkish dramas are watched in more than 140 countries by more than 400 million people (Tali, 2016). In many geographies, Turkish shows are preferred over American shows thanks to their cultural familiarity. A 42-year-old Chilean woman says that Turkish dramas are

“easier for her to connect to than US television series” as they “focus more on old fashioned romance instead of ... Hollywood's over-sexualisation.” Themes pertaining to the developing world, such as urbanization and migration, are also reasons why Turkish dramas are well-received in regions like South America. As such, Turkish dramas disseminate Turkish culture by showcasing “Turkish flags, food, music” and they “achieved something that most diplomacy tactics wouldn't have” (Tali, 2016). The fact that politicians both in Turkey and abroad are very much engaged in the content of Turkish dramas proves their influence over viewers (Reuters). Actors and actresses in Turkish dramas enjoy popularity at home and in the world, too. Kenan İmirzalıoğlu, Kıvanç Tatlıtuğ, Burak Özçivit are considered the ‘hottest’ characters on Turkish television (“The Top 10 Hottest Turkish Actors”). Fanaticism of Turkish drama characters is so strong that many newborns in the Middle East are now named after Turkish actors and actresses (“Newborns in Middle East named after Turkish TV stars”, 2016).

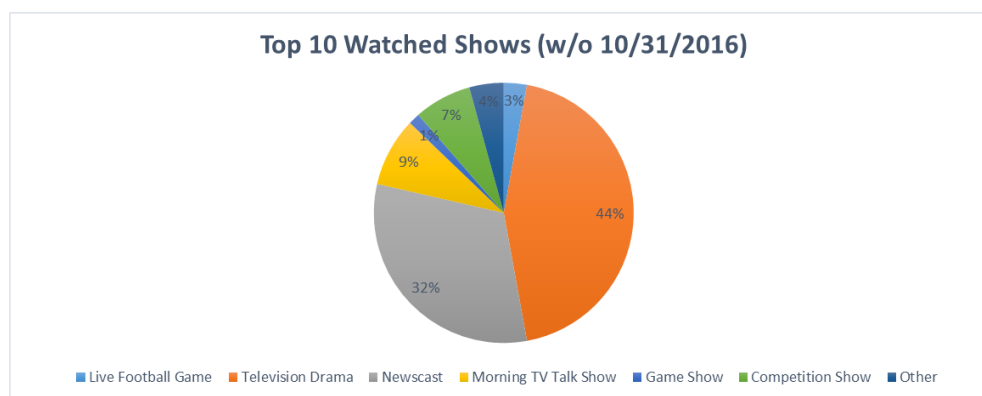


Chart 1 – Content of the Top 10 Watched Shows on Turkish Television in the week of October 31st

Thanks to its wide reach across audience in Turkey and abroad, reception of Turkish drama has been addressed by numerous articles and studies (“Soap Opera Diplomacy: Turkish TV in Greece”, 2013). Turkish dramas, despite differences in

theme compared to their American counterparts, are essentially television series and thus do not differ drastically in terms of narrative structure and thematic formula. What is it that makes television series so popular, and beyond that, addictive?

In their article “TV Addiction is No Mere Metaphor”, Robert Kubey and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (2004) quote researchers who found that TV watching makes people feel relaxed and passive. When the TV set is turned off the sense of relaxation ends but:

the feelings of passivity and lowered alertness continue. Survey participants commonly reflect that television has somehow absorbed or sucked out their energy, leaving them depleted. They say they have more difficulty concentrating after viewing than before. After watching TV, people’s moods are about the same or worse than before. (2004: 51)

According to Kubey and Csikszentmihalyi, television works like any other drug as a tranquilizer – deprivation causes more viewing. Another reason for television addiction is biological: as per Pavlov’s findings, we have an ‘orienting response’ to any sudden and novel stimulus and a protection against predatory threats.

Typical orienting reactions include dilation of the blood vessels to the brain, slowing of the heart, and constriction of blood vessels to major muscle groups. Alpha waves are blocked for a few seconds before returning to their baseline level, which is determined by the general level of mental arousal. The brain focuses its attention on gathering more information while the rest of the body quiets. (Kubey and Csikszentmihalyi, 2004: 51).

Television's cuts and edits constantly evoke an orienting response in the viewer, causing the body to relax and therefore making the activity attractive. This is why many survey participants define their TV watching experience as addictive: "If a television is on, I just can't keep my eyes off it," "I feel hypnotized when I watch television" (2004: 51).

Addiction to television series is often referenced in popular culture as 'binge-watching', a term that defines "the practice of watching television for a long time span, usually of a single television show" ("Binge-Watching", n.d.). Grant McCracken (2013), a cultural anthropologist, argues that we:

...binge on TV to craft time and space, and to fashion an immersive near-world with special properties. We enter a world that is, for all its narrative complexity, a place of sudden continuity. We may have made the world "go away" for psychological purposes, but here, for anthropological ones, we have built another in its place. The second screen in some ways becomes our second home.

Although binge-watching is typically considered within the context of global streaming networks, such as Netflix or Hulu, a typical Turkish drama in a given week night lasts for 180 minutes and thus already creates a binge-watching episode: the first half is the summary of the previous episode, followed by the new episode, and numerous ad-breaks. Considering 44% of top 10 shows in a week are dramas, and the top rated channels prime time hours are filled with dramas, it is safe to say that Turkish viewers are in a constant state of hypnosis and they have created 'a second home' through television dramas – they craft a new time and space and live in another reality.

3.2 Turkish Politics as a Spectacle

The 1980s marks a critical point in the evolution of socio-cultural, political and economic life both internationally and also in Turkey. Ali Ergur (2002) explains this evolution very clearly. Fast urbanization and disconnect with the tradition since the 1950s has peaked in the 1980s with the global standardization. As a result, neo-liberalism operated beyond economic applications and became a part of social consciousness. Interactions at both individual and class levels begun to be determined by money and material ownership. Money was no longer the means to an end, the capital for production, but the end itself - thus also disconnected from physical production process. In parallel, technological advances turned economic activity into cyber, electronic interactions. As a result of all this, production, once of central importance in determining social relationships, started to play a marginal role. Instead, consumption became the force that defines social relations and this consumer society was regulated by market ideology. Such socio-economic and ideological changes inevitably influenced the political rhetoric in Turkey. (Ergur, 2002: 17-19)

The elements of political rhetoric in Turkey has been the same since after World War 2: populist, polarizing rhetoric based on differences, creating dualities such as ‘communist – patriotic’, ‘Sunni – Shiite’, ‘nationalist – traitor’ (2002: 19). However, in a neoliberal context where social and class relations are fluid and changing, such distinct classifications were irrelevant and no longer guaranteed

political success. Devoid of real social dynamics and an intellectual dimension, politics became a spectacle, something that has intrinsic market value for the masses (2002: 20).

The evolution in mass media in the 1980s enabled politics to become a spectacle. Ergur claims this happened via: i) political party leaders directly addressing the public through radio and television networks ii) the emergence of political advertising and iii) image making of politicians (Ergur, 2002: 23-25). Politicians realized that their image now impacts how credible and persuasive they are perceived. In Baudrillard's (1981) terminology, politicians' representation came to precede their reality and there remained no distinction between reality and representation. Reality is replaced by a 'hyperreal'. The politician is designed as a persona that needs to be operational within a larger universe of spectacle. His discourse, rootless and ahistoric, short-term, self-reflexive, overemphasizes lacking, 'real' components, in a way to compensate for the lack. Throughout the 1990s and until today, mass media in Turkey serves as a means to such performance rhetoric, continues makes it visible and spreads it.

Politics becoming a spectacle is a global phenomenon. Jones (2010) argues that "politics is naturally interesting, dramatic, strange, unpredictable, frustrating, outrageous and downright hilarious", that the politicians are showmen, and politics as such has always been entertaining the nation (2020: 23-24). He believes that politics and television are inseparable within this performance rhetoric, and the American public is aware:

... that both television and politics are spectacle performances, and indeed, that the press and government are two mutually reinforcing and constituting institutions. News media are part of the political spectacle, including journalists cum talk show pundits who act more like lapdogs to power than watchdogs of it, cheerleading embedded reporters, and patriotic news anchors who wear their hears on their sleeve. (Jones, 2010: 165)

Turkish media enables dramatization in the ways described in previous chapters. Examples of othering and polarization are widely available in Turkish news. Polarization and duality has been a critical part of political discourse in Turkey. Bezirgan Arar and Bilgin (2010) analyzed 5249 Turkish newspaper news over a 12 year time span and identified 16 different ways of Othering applied by these newspapers. Although yearly results differ, newspapers analyzed executed Othering on average 31 to 48 times per year. Esra Arsan's (2002) analyses on anti-Islam and anti-Kurdish discourse that has been sustained over years are additional cases of commonplace Othering within Turkish media. Therefore, we can conclude that Othering is a strong element of dramatization and continuous narrative formation in Turkish news. In news and talk shows, such as *Film Gibi*, *Ateş Hattı*, *Reha Muhtar'a İtiraf* and *A-Takımı*, dramatization is achieved through calculated tensions and specific emphasis on dramatic elements throughout the show, sustaining viewer curiosity. In Turkish television, anchormen are very influential in creating a brand identity of TV channels and determine public's perception of the news (Çelenk, 2005: 280). Anchormen such as Mehmet Ali Birand, Uğur Dündar, Reha Muhtar, Ali Kırca, Fatih Portakal host shows multiple times a week if not daily, and their character develops and becomes familiar to the viewer over the course of time. Similarly, in news debate shows such as *Siyaset Meydanı*, *Tarafsız*

Bölge, Türkiye'nin Gündemi etc., invited guests also develop television personas, familiarizing their characteristics and narratives about the debated subject influence the viewer.

3.3 Political Debate on Turkish Television

According to Noam Chomsky (1989), what differentiates a democratic system from a totalitarian one is that thinking and debate cannot and should not be completely eliminated, because “it has a system-reinforcing character if constrained within proper bounds” and thus “what is essential is the power to set the agenda” (1989: 71). As such, in democracies, propaganda system encourages “spirited debate, criticism, and dissent, as long as these remain faithfully within the system of presuppositions and principles that constitute an elite consensus, a system so powerful as to be internalized largely without awareness” (Chomsky and Herman, 1988: 302). Chomsky (1989) uses Cold War as an example:

The basic assumption has already been established: the Cold War is a confrontation between two superpowers, one aggressive and expansionist, the other defending the status quo and civilized values. Off the agenda is the problem of containing the United States, and the question whether the issue has been properly formulated at all, whether the Cold War does not rather derive from the efforts of the superpowers to secure for themselves international systems that they can dominate and control—systems that differ greatly in scale, reflecting enormous differences in wealth and power. (1989: 73)

In Turkish television, too, debate shows are featured within certain limitations on discourse as set by the host and the invited guests, making the format a carefully constructed one.

One of the most defining political debate shows of Turkish television history is *Siyaset Meydani*, which has been on air since 1994 (“*Siyaset Meydani*”, n.d.). In the 1990’s, the show’s unique concept was that it included both experts, academics, politicians as well as the public in the studio. People were a part of the debate and were able to discuss the topic with the experts. As the host, Ali Kırca often emphasized that the show’s objective was not to seek consensus, it was for different viewpoints to be discussed (İnal, 1995: 66). Thus, we can argue that the show reached a greater representation of the public sphere compared to its predecessors on TRT (1995: 66). In her in depth review of Habermas’ concept of the public sphere, Beybin Kejanlıoğlu argues that public sphere is an important frame for a country like Turkey, where democratization is often talked about but not applied, where active political participation is not possible for many. In bringing the public on same stage as the experts and politicians, the 1990s *Siyaset Meydani* was a good attempt at initiating debate. Why the debate cannot be sustained, Kejanlıoğlu argues, was due to the lack of a real public sphere, one that enables real life interaction among different publics. (Kejanlıoğlu, 1995: 60-61).

In his article “*Siyasetin Sınırsız Meydani*”, Mahmut Mutman (1995) argues that *Siyaset Meydani* is a representation of democracy, it is a fictional form that, by bringing the public and the elite together and rendering their differences visible,

establishes control of the differences. The elite, the experts and academics, establish their authority by speaking with a certain confidence in their opinions. They portray themselves as the defenders of universal truth. The public, on the other hand, do not have such an authority. The public's power comes from the fact that what they say is the bare truth. (Mutman, 1995: 26-27). Despite promoting democratic debate on the surface, Mutman argues that there is no debate to begin with. Debate requires a secondary speaker, someone who reacts to an already stated opinion. However, in *Siyaset Meydani*, each speaker voices his/her own opinions, and the interaction between differing opinions does not take place. Despite lengthy hours of talking, there is no discussion. Mutman calls this a "phantom public sphere" of a phantom democracy. (1995: 28-29).

Regardless of its success as a platform that enhances democracy, *Siyaset Meydani* was the first widely popular television political debate show. The show brought a new format to the Turkish audience and was widely popular in mid-1990s, so much that it was aired on Saturday nights at a time traditionally spared for entertainment shows, and lasted until early morning hours. In a way, not having a limit on the length of the show created the impact of 'binge-watching' and perceived as a 'feast' by the audience (İnal, 1995: 66).

Siyaset Meydani is a significant show which marks a turning point as an enabler of a critical democratic process: debate. Whether or not the show was successful in increasing participation in any democratic activity is not the point here; but it may

be said that the show re-emphasized dominant hegemonic discourse through expert guests and the presence of regular citizens created the feeling of participation.

Today, the most popular television debate shows are aired on thematic news channels like NTV and CNNTurk. I will be focusing on CNNTurk for the purpose of this thesis.

3.4 Dramatization of Political Debate on CNNTurk

3.4.1 Background and Importance

CNNTurk was founded in 1999 as the Turkish version of the cable news channel CNN (“CNNTurk”, n.d.). According to Konda Research, in 2015, CNNTurk was the most preferred channel among thematic news channels. It also had the most educated audience with the highest income. Its viewers are mostly CHP and HDP supporters – two parties make up 65% of CNNTurk viewers (Konda, 2015, Appendix 1, Table 1). Although the channel does not overtly engage in anti-government or opposition broadcasting, it appears that the non-AKP voters find relevancy in CNNTurk. It’s important to note that the channel had been criticized for its lack of coverage during the Gezi Protests of 2013. The channel aired irrelevant shows such as ‘flavors of Nigde’ and the infamous penguin documentary, while the protesters were clashing with the police. Interestingly, CNN International was very much focused on the protests and covering all details (Fleishman, 2015). CNNTurk, along with other mass media, was heavily criticized during this period. CNNTurk was recently protested at a university for censorship about the Aladag dormitory fire and the law

about rape law that would pardon rapists who marry victims (“CNN Türk Genel Müdürü öğrencilerin 'tarikat' sorularının ardından etkinliği terk etti”, 2016).

Despite all, CNNTurk played a critical role on the night of July 15th following the coup attempt, thanks to the interview of Hande Fırat with President Erdogan. Erdogan connected via FaceTime and addressed the public, which ended the coup. Fırat has been awarded a few times for her successful journalism (“CNN Türk'e 15 Temmuz Demokrasi Ödülü”, 2016). The attack to CNNTurk studios during the coup attempt, followed by Hande Fırat’s FaceTime interview with President Erdogan put CNNTurk in the spotlight during the aftermath of the attempted coup. Political debate shows were aired daily on CNNTurk and were widely watched, reaching highest ever ratings (“CNNTurk Reytingleri Altüst Etti.”, 2016) and thus they deserve specific attention.

In the post-coup attempt period, there were two main political debate shows on CNNTurk during prime time: Ahmet Hakan’s *Tarafsız Bölge* and Didem Arslan Yılmaz’s *Türkiye’nin Gündemi*¹. CNNTurk aired one or the other every night in the first four weeks following the coup attempt. In terms of format, the closest American equivalent to these shows could be the Sunday morning talk shows such as *Face the Nation*, a traditional political round table discussion. In each episode of the CNNTurk shows, multiple experts are invited to discuss a current political issue. Occasionally, hosts choose to do one-on-one interview type programming with

¹ Didem Arslan Yılmaz left CNNTurk early September 2016. Yılmaz now has a political debate show on HaberTurk called *Türkiye’nin Nabzi*.

important guests. Both *Tarafsız Bölge* and *Türkiye'nin Gündemi* have commonalities to the classical television talk show: the host is critical in setting the direction. Intimacy and immediacy is achieved through direct interactions between guests, which results in a dynamic interchange and evokes a desire to watch further in the viewer.

Although they are not equivalent to the satiric, cynical, humorous faux-news and infotainment formats found in the United States (e.g. *The Daily Show* or *John Oliver*), in their seemingly informational and thematic format, I will argue that *Tarafsız Bölge* and *Türkiye'nin Gündemi* feature elements of entertainment.

Most political entertainment research has focused on the positive affect and hedonic experience generated by the infotainment formats in the United States (Roth et al., 2014: 383). Roth et al. argue that political entertainment needs to be evaluated within a broader context, as in the case of being entertained while watching sad movies or serious political content (2014: 383). In this regard, they mention Oliver & Raney's research, which defines entertainment as a meaningful experience that is "triggered by thought-provoking media content that poses questions about the meaning of life and other existential issues", "a multilayered and complex psychological experience that involves positive emotions like feeling moved or inspired and negative emotions like sadness" (2014: 383). Such non-hedonic entertainment is referred to as "eudaimonic entertainment" (2014: 383).

The entertainment elements I observe in *Tarafsız Bölge* and *Türkiye'nin Gündemi* are also “eudaimonic” in a sense. Evaluated within the Turkish media and cultural context, given the prevalence of drama on television, the popularity of watching drama series as a pastime activity and the commercial pressures facing television channels; it is not surprising that these political debate shows resemble television dramas to a certain extent, and as such they behave like “dramatized political serials” and stand somewhere between information and entertainment programming.

3.4.2 Methodology and Hypotheses

I utilized content analysis to identify and highlight dramatic elements in two of CNNTurk’s political debate shows, *Tarafsız Bölge* and *Türkiye'nin Gündemi*, during the post-attempted coup period (July 15, 2016 until October 10, 2016).

I particularly chose this time period for two reasons: i) the frequency and rating of political debate shows increased in the post-coup period ii) the coup attempt in itself was a highly dramatic and tragic event, with many aspects open to dramatization; enabling political debate shows to further extend the drama over a longer time period.

Content analysis helps researchers make sense of large data sets. Holsti defines content analysis as: "any technique for making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages" (as cited in

Stemler, 2001: 1). I will specifically evaluate show format and frequency, content and guest choice and moderation. As a result, I hope to highlight specific elements of dramatization in these shows.

I also used netnographic research in my analysis. Netnography is defined as “participant-observational research based in online fieldwork” (Kozinets, 2011: 60). My objective is to understand how audiences perceive and identify with the guests and their point of views. I collected data from two social sites, Twitter and EksiSozluk, as well as video and newspaper comments (Appendix 2, 3, 4, 5).

Finally, I interviewed Ismail Saymaz to understand his perspective on the topic and to further discuss his popularity (Appendix 6).

My hypotheses are as follows:

1. Debate becomes dramatic rather than informational due to the format, daily frequency and long duration of the shows.
2. Content is dramatized as the structure enables polarization and conflict.
3. Debate shows do not spread multiple world views, but rather reproduce dominant discourse thanks to repeating guests, who become “talking-heads”.
4. Debate show personae generate strong affective relationship among the audience, similar to drama series celebrities.

3.4.3 Format, Frequency and Length as Enablers of Dramatization

During the first two weeks following the coup attempt (July 15th until August 1st) either of the two shows, Ahmet Hakan's *Tarafsız Bölge* and Didem Arslan Yılmaz's *Türkiye'nin Gündemi*, were aired daily. Each show started around 9 PM during week nights and lasted between 150 – 300 minutes. This is the equivalent of prime time on non-thematic channels and the same time when all popular television drama series are aired for the same period of time. In essence, these debate shows are competing against television drama series in terms of rating. In my interview with Ismail Saymaz, he argues that during the post-coup period, thanks to debate shows, thematic news channels were ahead of mainstream channels for the first time (Appendix 6).

In the paragraphs above, I discussed the effects of binge-watching of television and quoted Kubey and Csikszentmihalyi's (2004) findings on how TV watching makes people feel relaxed and passive (2004: 51). Although binge-watching usually refers to watching series or reality television over an extended period of time, given the length of exposure, these political debate shows would also qualify for binge-watching. It is important to note that the shows analyzed here were not the only political debate shows on Turkish television. On both thematic and non-thematic channels, there was a heavy coverage of the attempted coup with various debate shows. Ismail Saymaz claims that discussing FETO within a 10-20 year long time span, turned the topic into a novel-like storyline (Appendix 6). Therefore, it can be said that the Turkish audience was surrounded by dramatic post-coup coverage and

debate shows, overloaded with dramatized information, and may well have had symptoms of binge-watching explained in previous chapters, such as the crafting of a secondary reality, a ‘second home’ which, in a way, is a fantasy world. A vaudeville, in Postman’s words, that causes a freedom from thought as Adorno & Horkheimer would argue, leading to passivity.

Binge-watching dramatic political content may be leading to public passivity. A contrary argument is that entertaining information has a positive impact on political participation: Roth et al. (2014) found that the specific form of entertainment experienced by watching political debate shows increases the feeling of being informed, which the authors consider an indicator of political participation and find the link between entertainment and political participation promising (2014: 393-394). Regardless of the effect on audience, the airing time, length and frequency of these shows enhance their dramatic qualities.

Another format related aspect of dramatization is the episodic framing of the issue at large: FETO – Fethullahci Teror Orgutu. I am utilizing Iyengar’s (1991) thematic vs. episodic framing terminology here. In a nutshell, by episodic framing, I mean that every day, one aspect of FETO is handled with multiple guests and experts.

Within the first two weeks, FETO is discussed in relation to military, judiciary, safety, politics with numerous experts. Didem Arslan Yılmaz’s *Türkiye’nin Gündemi* opened with news footage from the night of the attempted coup, which by nature are episodic in Iyengar’s (1991) terms – snapshots of events taken from

different places. Didem Arslan Yilmaz usually opened the program with this footage and a summary of the day's hot news about FETO, and then started the debate. Ahmet Hakan's *Tarafsiz Bolge* opened by introducing the guests and laying out the agenda items. A few examples from the first week are as follows:

“Tonight at *Tarafsiz Bolge* we would like to inform, instead of debating. This informative program will be an analysis of FETO. ... How was FETO organized in the army, judiciary, police; who was the leader, how did they communicate? How did the government's measure impact FETO, is the threat still viable? We will be discussing these with our guests.” (July 24, 2016)

“Tonight we will be discussing the new findings about the coup attempt and other current news; along with the permanent damages done by the coup. We will kick off the program with the arrest of the journalists.” (July 25, 2016)

“Tonight we will be discussing the coup attempt with the generals who were subject to conspiracy theories such as Ergenekon and Balyoz; and were arrested linked to these theories. What do they think about July 15th? Did they expect it, how do they interpret the actions by the army officers, did they know there were as many FETO officers in the army? We will be asking all these questions and everything else you want to know.” (July 26, 2016)

Hakan continued to ask similar questions in the following programs as well. In each show, it was similar questions, slightly tailored for the specific audience (academics, lawyers, military officers...). During the show, Hakan laid out additional topics to steer the discussion, causing episodic framing.

A detailed analysis of July 25th's *Tarafsız Bölge* indicates that multiple topics were covered within three hours: arrest of journalists, differences between Ergenekon and FETÖ, how did FETÖ infiltrate into the government, media, and military, why and how was the FETÖ threat not realized by the government before, previous coups, secularism vs. religious cliques. In this particular show, there were 5 guests who debated these topics. Discussing 8 topics with 5 guests within three hours and making sure each guest's argument is fully developed, every topic is fairly debated and concluded is practically impossible. Also, often the discussion steered away from Hakan's agenda items and became a conversation. In fact, Hakan called this out: "We need to move systematically, everyone is stating their opinion now". Although these different topics are discussed for hours every night, the numerous switches between different topics within a single show is an example of episodic framing. As a result, viewers may not grasp a single topic to full extent and be fully informed about each topic. Following Iyengar's (1991) conclusion, "episodic framing tends to elicit individualistic rather than societal attributions of responsibility" (1991: 9-11). As a result, viewers develop political opinions that are "concrete rather than abstract, specific rather than general" (1991: 131) and reduces the chance of viewers to hold politicians accountable for the creation and the treatment of the problem. By being subject to such episodic dramatization, political debate shows lose their informational purpose. The debate becomes almost 'ritualistic': moving away from information purposes to emotional hooks. Greenberg (2009) mentions presidential debates:

presidential debates are rituals rather than as transmitters of information. They are, after all, rites like holidays or parades, which gain meaning from

the way they figure in our daily experiences. They may not educate, but they evoke feelings, bolster sentiments. ... (2009: 16)

A similar ritualistic debate practice can be observed on CNNTurk's episodic debate shows. Every night, these political debate shows produce a new plot with similar characters. As such, similar to television drama series, they create emotional engagement rather than mental engagement.

3.4.4 Conflictual Content as an Enhancer of Drama

In the time period analyzed in this thesis, the topic on political debate shows was FETO and the coup attempt. This topic in itself is a very sad, highly dramatic, emotionally striking event that led to the death of many civilians, shocked and traumatized the entire nation and attempted to damage the social, political, military, judicial and economic foundations of the Republic of Turkey. Some analysts even argued that the coup attempt turned into a founding myth for AKP (Akyol, 2016). Whether or not this is the case is not a point of discussion here, however the fact that some analysts found 'mythic' elements in the attempted coup is an important indicator of its potential for further dramatization.

The political debate shows took this naturally dramatic event to a next level in the way they structured the content. They have done this through the selection of topics and the choices of guests; further enhancing drama by facilitating polarization and conflict.

I have discussed the definition and means of dramatization in previous chapters. MacKenzie and Porter argue that dramatized content changes the emotional state viewers. But how exactly can a political debate show's content impact the emotional state of the audience?

In their analysis of 9662 television news items across six countries, Cottle and Rai (2006) sought to define a common 'communicative architecture' (2006: 164). They discerned 12 structures of news presentation, both conflictual and consensual. Namely, conflictual frames are 'dominant', 'contest', 'contention', 'campaigning', and 'exposé/investigative' (Exhibit 1). Consensual frames are 'community service', 'collective interests', 'cultural recognition' and 'mythic tales' (2006: 170). All these frames lead to both analytic (propositional-argumentative) and expressive (affective-aesthetic) engagement of the public (2006: 164). Although Cottle and Rai's analysis refers to television news, I find them applicable to other television journalism, such as political debate shows. Just like the news story is crafted, the narrative flow and format of the debate show is also carefully formulated by the channel/host; making it susceptible to framing.

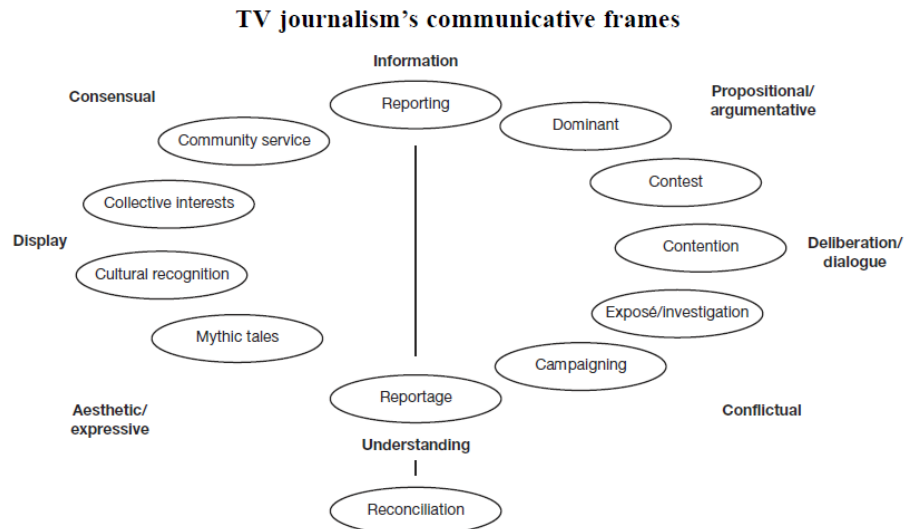


Exhibit 1 – Cottle & Rai's communicative frames

Ahmet Hakan's show is called *Tarafsız Bolge*, which by definition means "No Man's Land". As such, Ahmet Hakan positions his show within the classic 'reporting frame' with the objective to inform people with factual and accurate display of ideas and events (Cottle and Rai, 2006). Similarly, *Türkiye'nin Gündemi* means "Turkey's Agenda" and the name does not imply anything beyond reporting of current events. However, I would argue that Cottle and Rai's conflictual frames are often visible in these shows.

The conflictual framing of the shows is evident in the choice of guests, usually two opposing camps, pro-government and anti-government; speaking about binaries like secularity vs. religion. These television personas, whose point of views are usually well-known by the public, also contribute to the establishment of conflict. According to Bourdieu (1998), democratic debates are modeled on wrestling: "There must be conflicts, with good guys and bad guys ... Yet, at the same time, not

all holds are allowed: the blows have to be clothed by the model of formal, intellectual language” (1998: 35).

One can argue that inviting guests from both sides of the argument is a balancing act – however in many cases the arguments are not fact-based, rather emotional attacks between two parties who talk over one another. Whoever is more assertive wins the argument, regardless of whether what he says is true or not. And such an argumentative, confrontational tone is what creates emotional connection with the audience. Beckett (2015) argues that “using emotional cues helps to get audiences’ attention and to prolong engagement”. Recalling the fact that we live in a post-truth era where gut-feel and cognitive ease shape our opinions, it is emotions rather than facts that grasps audience attention. In my interview with Ismail Saymaz, he also suggested that laying out too many facts would turn off the audience. Political debate shows analyzed here successfully achieve such emotional connection. The operating system is very similar to television drama’s serial narrative. Coles (2000) explains serial narratives further: “Serial narratives, using delayed resolutions and cliffhanger endings, can hook viewers. ... As with most dramatic narratives, the interaction hoped for (and planned for, in terms of who are chosen as the main participants) is one of conflict” (35). Ellis (as cited in Joselit, 2007) explains the success behind serialized narrative further “[it] establishes cycles of conflict and resolution that produce ‘a steady state to which audience and fiction return each week.’” (2007: 149). New cycles of conflict about the same topic are produced with every new political debate show through emphasizing elements of mystery and there seems to be no resolution – which, as in television drama series, is potentially what evokes curiosity in the viewer and brings him back to watch the next day.

3.4.5 “Talking Heads” as Performers of Drama

In his account of debate show guests, Bourdieu (1998) argues that authorities usually look for:

...“fast-thinkers,” specialists in throw-away thinking-are known in the industry as “good guests”. They're the people whom you can always invite because you know they'll be good company and won't create problems. They won't be difficult and they're smooth talkers. (1998: 35)

As a result, despite its seemingly multi-world view format, debate shows feature the same people – also referred to as “talking heads” (Mance, 2015) – and reproduce the same dominant ideology through their repetitive participation. In fact, a quantitative analysis of the appearing guests on CNNTurk proves Bourdieu’s point.

During the analyzed period, mostly journalists were invited on CNNTurk’s debate shows, followed by legal practitioners, politicians, military officers and academicians. A few occurrences of think tank representatives, police officers and ex-Gulen supporters are also observed (Chart 2). It is important to note that the representation of professions may not be in line with the speaking time allocated to the guests: for example, Ilker Basbug, the ex-military chief, had a full, one-on-one program with Ahmet Hakan. Similarly, Nurettin Veren, a journalist and an ex-Fethullah Gulen supporter, had a full, one-on-one program with Didem Arslan

Yilmaz. Since the majority of programs had multiple participants, I will be focusing on those.

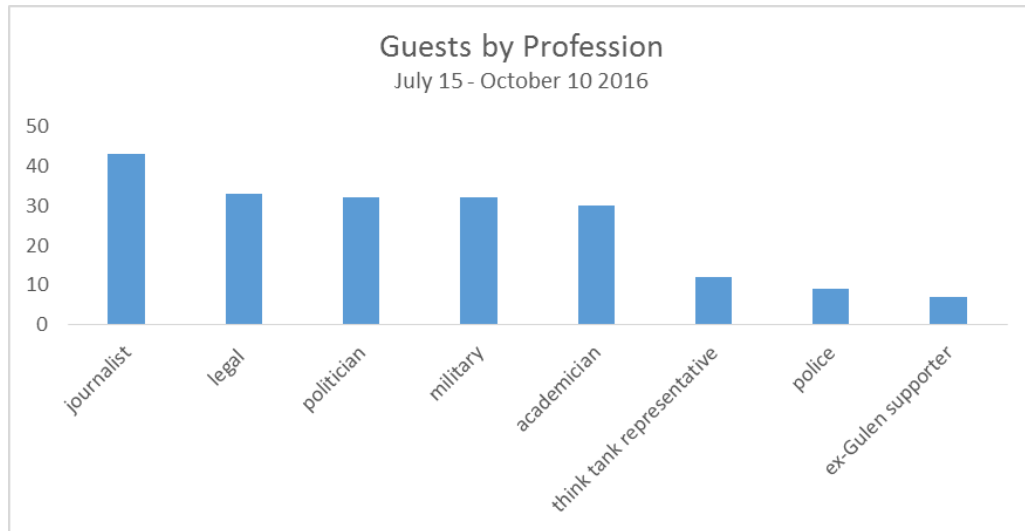
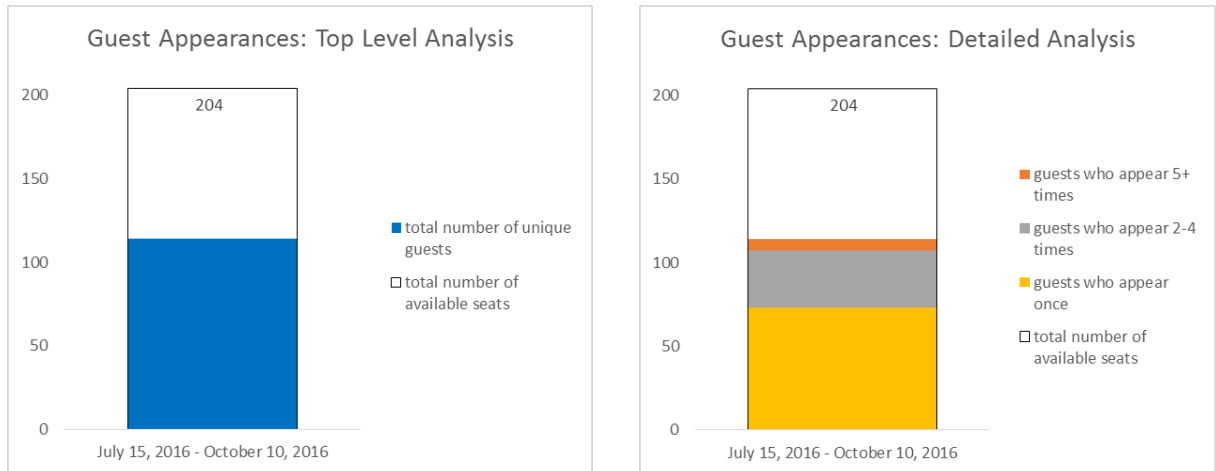


Chart 2 – Frequency of Guest Appearances by Profession

In a detailed analysis of the guest appearances, I have found that there were 204 seats available in the 45 shows of *Tarafsiz Bolge* and *Turkiye'nin Gundemi* between July 15, 2016 – October 10, 2016. For these 204 seats, 114 unique guests were invited – which is around 56%. We can call this a “diversity ratio”, as it determines how many times the audience had a chance to hear a diverse point of view. Based on this ratio, it seems that more than half of the time audiences were exposed to the same people and the same ideologies. Out of the 114 unique guests, 41 of them appeared 2+ times on *Tarafsiz Bolge* and *Turkiye'nin Gundemi* (Charts 3 and 4). The top three appearances belonged to: 1) Prof. Dr. Ersan Sen, a lawyer, who appeared 11 times in total, 2) Ismail Saymaz, journalist, who appeared 8 times and 3) Ahmet Zeki Üçok, an ex-army officer, who appeared 7 times on the two debate shows analyzed.



Charts 3 and 4: Unique vs. Repeating Guests and the Number of Times They Appeared

Net, while *Tarafsız Bölge* and *Türkiye'nin Gündemi* are multi-participant shows, they are not necessarily multi-point of view. The dominant ideology is manufactured again and again through repetitive, frequent daily shows, in which a combination of the same set of guests appear. These specific people have the opportunity to develop their on-screen characters fully and become celebrity 'talking heads'. Joselit (2007) argues:

Television, then, simultaneously constructs character and maintains it in a spectrum of proper social roles. This is why politics in Media-America can be both excessively "personal" and thoroughly bereft of individual agency, let alone dissent. Identities are sold as coherent stable properties on television, in its fiction and nonfiction genres alike. All day long and throughout the year, character is abstracted and quantified. (2007: 149)

Examples of character development is seen in traditional talk shows, too. McLaughlin's show in the United States has a cast of panelists where each represented a character:

... McLaughlin himself was the overbearing, opinionated father; Fred Barnes the preppy favorite son; Eleanor Clift a liberal-leaning sister; Mort Kondracke the straitlaced brother-in-law; and Pat Buchanan the pugnacious uncle. Occasional guests—Clarence Page, Michael Barone, and Mort Zuckerman, for example—formed an extended family of cousins. The “family” structure of *The McLaughlin Group* and the verbal fireworks that occurred each week unquestionably made the show entertaining. (Timberg, 2004: 161)

In the case of CNNTurk's political debate shows, representing a family structure would be irrelevant. However, within the conflict-driven, polarized nature of these shows, each participant develops a certain character and maintains his/her role throughout the show. As such, specific television personas are constructed.

One of these personas is Ersan Şen, a lawyer who has been a re-occurring guest since the very first *Türkiye'nin Gündemi* after the coup, aired on July 17th. Ersan Şen, with his passionate and animated character, quickly became very popular. In this first show, his response to İdris Şahin, an AKP politician who argued that the Ergenekon and Balyoz operations were indeed ‘coup attempts’, became his legacy:

I have to point to the mistake about Ergenekon and Balyoz. Please have mercy. The Turkish criminal law is there... You just said ‘if there is no external support, I don't take coup accusations seriously’. Then what is the ‘external support’ in Ergenekon and Balyoz? Let's see it. We would like you to explain. ... How do you conclude that Ergenekon and Balyoz were

attempted coup, and those people who have been tried and whose years have been taken away from them are guilty in front of Turkish criminal law? How can you say that these were attempted coups, despite the Supreme Court's decision?

Another persona is journalist İsmail Saymaz. İsmail Saymaz's first appearance within the scope of this analysis was on July 25th's *Tarafsız Bölge*. He was invited as a journalist on the mainstream newspaper, *Hürriyet*. İsmail Saymaz appears to be 'one of us', unassuming yet a straight-talker. His words on September 2nd's *Türkiye'nin Gündemi* about Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and the foundation of the Republic quickly became his legacy. In response to İhsan Aktas, owner of the think tank GENAR, who stated that the Turkish Republic was found by an 'elite' and not by the people, İsmail Saymaz said:

People may think that the 'elite' here means people who drive jeeps, who live in large apartments with a swimming pool. Who you call 'elite', if you mean Mustafa Kemal, is an orphan from Salonica. And because he is an orphan, he did not have anywhere else to go but the military school. He has fought in many fronts since the age of 14, even to Libya as a guerilla. This generation could not come back to Anatolia for a while due to wars. Most of his friends are the same: people from Salonica, Circassia, places that are no longer in Turkish territory. If these are who you call 'elite', these are the military officers of the Ottoman Empire. And when they come to Anatolia, they are confronted with the following as Sevkettin Sureya Aydemir explains in his book: they ask the soldiers who their prophet is. One says Mohammed, one says Moses, one says Jesus, one says Ali... Some don't even know the prophet's name and say Enver. These 'elites' were able to start the national struggle within such context, with a society who does not know further of his village, is not aware of each other, in the harsh circumstances of 1919 against the imperialist powers. These are the Republic's 'elites'.

Ahmet Zeki Üçok is another persona. He is an ex-military judge, a serious natured man who knows the army and the judiciary system well and whose account of FETO events is very much data based. His appearance on July 24th's *Tarafsız Bölge* made his legacy. It can be argued that his account on the military-FETO complex was the clearest, data based account. He explained the percentages of top ranking military officials who were promoted in the last 4 years and who were, at the time of the show, arrested related to the coup attempt. In summary,

1. Among the promoted officers in 2012, today 40% of the lieutenant generals, 25% major generals and 26% of the brigadier generals,
2. Among the promoted officers in 2013, 20% of lieutenant generals, 18% of major generals, 72% of brigadier generals,
3. Among the promoted officers in 2014, 33% of generals, 40% of lieutenant generals, 46% of major generals and 57% of brigadier generals
4. Among those who were promoted in the last promotion before the coup attempt, 34% of lieutenant generals, 23% of major generals and 70% of brigadier generals were arrested in relation to the coup attempt.

Ahmet Zeki Üçok concluded that if continued, all critical military ranks would have been taken by FETO militants within 6 years. Such a critical statement supported with such clear facts was one of the first on these debate shows.

Separately, the moderator is a permanent persona within this context. Here I would like to focus on Ahmet Hakan. As the moderator, he not only sets the agenda, but

also determines the interactions between characters. Bourdieu (1998) says the following about the moderator:

He determines the subject and decides the question up for debate. ... He keeps debaters in line with the rules of the game ... The moderator decides who speaks, and he hands out little tokens of prestige. The moderator also allots time and sets the tone, respectful or disdainful, attentive or impatient. For example, a preemptory "yeah, yeah, yeah" alerts the discussant to the moderator's impatience or lack of interest. ... All moderators turn themselves into representatives of the public at large: "I have to interrupt you here, I don't understand what you mean." (1998: 32-33)

Ahmet Hakan decides who speaks, how long he/she speaks and often interrupts guests by asking clarification questions. He interrupts by cutting them off with abrupt "OK"s or "one second"s, or by questioning their argument: "what are you trying to get at?" His interruptions occasionally build the episodic rhetoric in the show: on the July 25th's Tarafsız Bölge, Ismail Saymaz wanted to elaborate his arguments with details, with historic references to previous cases, which would have been a more 'thematic' approach in Iyengar's terms; but Hakan stopped him and asked him to "not go into details". In addition, how Hakan treats each guest also adds to the guest's persona. For example, in the same show on July 25th, in the very beginning of the show he asked Ismail Saymaz to confirm the number of arrested journalists. Saymaz reported the numbers and the facts, which automatically set his character as a factual, objective reporter.

Net, both the guests and the moderators develop their on-screen characters and become television personas and performers of this political drama. Their frequent

appearance on television enables viewers to get to know them and develop feelings about them and their ideologies. As a result, spreading popularity and fanaticism of these television personas and strong identification with their world views is inevitable.

3.4.6 Increased popularity of television personae and viewer identification

Coles (2000) quotes Christina Geraghty: “the question determining a soap opera narrative is not ‘What will happen next?’ but ‘What kind of person is this?’” (2000: 36). Character development is a critical hook in serialized content. The characters’ everyday lives is the main focus on the narrative and the narrative is successful inasmuch as the characters connect with the experiences of the audience (Hobson, 2008: 26). Characters become popular and the audience identifies with them when they are believable and their behavior is convincing and recognizable.

There are numerous studies on soap opera fandom (Horton & Wohl, 1956; Baym, 1993; Jenkins, 1992) in which television fandom and character-viewer relationship is analyzed. Across all media forms, some form of social interaction between the on-screen characters and the spectators is observed. An example of strong identification with a television drama character in Turkey occurred when Süleyman Çakır, a character in the action/mafia television series *Kurtlar Vadisi*, died in the series and his fans wrote an obituary in a local newspaper (Güneş, 2004). Volkan Yücel argues that people considered *Kurtlar Vadisi* as a newscast that reports what happened and what will happen in the country and that the series was very

successful in creating such contradiction between reality and fiction (Özcan, 2014), which may be why viewers developed such strong identification with the Çakır character. Another example of blurring lines between reality and fiction occurred when a viewer sued Suleiman the Magnificent when he ordered to have his son, Mustafa, killed on the television series *The Magnificent Century*. (“Mahkeme Kanuni Kararını Verdi ama O Vazgeçmedi”, 2015). After 6 years since the series have ended, on the death anniversary of *Aşk-ı Memnu*’s Bihter Ziyagil character, fans still commemorate her (“Milli Anna Karenina’mız: bihter Ziyagil”, 2016). Fanaticism of characters result in behavior change: fans of Kuzey, played by Kıvanç Tatlıtuğ in the series *Kuzey Güney* started holding their phones like Kuzey and even had a name for it: kuzeying (“Kuzeying”, n.d.). *Kurtlar Vadisi*’s Polat Alemdar’s fans started walking like him (“Polat Alemdar Gibi Yürümek”, 2016).

In the case of informational political television content, we are dealing with not only a viewer, but a viewer-as-citizen (Joselit, 2007: 153). The relationship of the viewer-as-citizen with the political television personae determines his/her civic engagement. Joselit (2007) quotes John Ellis:

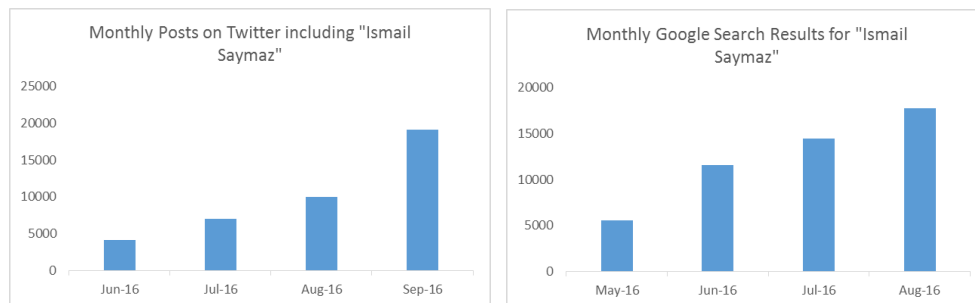
The viewer-as-citizen is uninvolved in the events portrayed, yet can manifest (as a result) a generalised concern and vague sense of scandal by turns. ... Citizenship recognises problems outside the self, outside the immediate realm of responsibility power of the individual citizen. The citizen is at ease with the world, but is not in the world. Citizenship therefore constitutes the TV viewer as someone powerless to do anything about the events portrayed other than sympathise or become angry. (2007: 153)

In this view, television is considered to render the viewer powerless by separating the viewer from his role as a citizen. In contrast to this pessimistic view of viewer-as-citizen, Elizabeth van Zoonen puts forward a more positive link. In her review of Elizabeth Van Zoonen's "*Entertaining the Citizen: When Politics and Popular Culture Converge*", Blaagaard (2005) calls out the analogies Zoonen makes between fandom and citizenship, "which she uses to develop 'the contours of entertaining citizenship'", and she concludes, "articulations between politics and entertainment should be seen as inviting the affective intelligence that is vital to keep political involvement and activity going" (2005: 525). Along the same lines as Zoonen, Jones is also against the audience vs. citizen dichotomy and examines how identification with celebrities help viewers build a better and more informed relationship to the public sphere (Jones, 2010: 27). Whether or not fanaticism of television personae leads to political civic action could be an area for further study. What is critical is that an affective relationship develops between the viewer-as-citizen and television personae. In the case of Turkish political debate shows, strong social media support for the television personae, indicates that a similar identification and representation is achieved. I will be analyzing social media posts Ismail Saymaz to understand this affective relationship further.

It is interesting to observe the drastic increase in Ismail Saymaz's popularity in the post-coup period. A recent article by Necef Uğurlu asks women: "Ladies, who do you choose: Kıvanç Tatlıtuğ or İsmail Saymaz?" In the article she explains in detail why she thinks İsmail is a hero, and how impressive his arguments are. By comparing İsmail Saymaz, a journalist, to the handsome Turkish beau, Kıvanç, she

– perhaps unknowingly – proves the blurry boundaries between facts and fiction, between drama and politics on television.

Ismail Saymaz has become a television debate show hero who is considered a truthful, realistic, just representative of the underrepresented. His Twitter followers increased from 10K to 600K within one year. The number of total Twitter posts including “Ismail Saymaz” in them reached to around 20 thousand in September 2016 (Chart 5). Google search results for “Ismail Saymaz” also quadrupled between May’16 and August’16 (Chart 6). Surely, these figures are nowhere compared to a celebrity like Kıvanç Tatlıtuğ who is extremely popular at home and abroad and who has 1.7MM followers on Twitter. Nevertheless, the increase is striking.



Charts 5 and 6 – Total number of monthly Twitter posts and Google search results.

Jones (2010) explores the idea of viewer representation on television through interviews, online forums and mail coming from viewers of *Politically Incorrect with Bill Maher*, a talk show in the United States. Many viewers expressed gratitude to Bill Maher for representing their views or expressed a desire for representation. According to Jones’ findings, viewers recognize that:

...television can and should represent them in some way – either their bodily representation through the surrogate citizen panelist (or guests known for a

particular point of view), vocally through the issues they wish to have aired publicly, or mentally through the participatory realm. To see one's self, one's desires, and one's concerns shared and experienced publicly is what makes popular culture such a powerful attachment in modern society. (2010: 196)

We observe a similar desire for representation among the Turkish political debate show viewers as well, based on their social media responses. Beyond his increased popularity on social media platforms, some of Ismail Saymaz's specific responses on debate shows became viral video hits. The most popular example is Saymaz's response to GENAR's owner Ihsan Aktaş's, who called Atatürk and the founders of Cumhuriyet 'elites'. Saymaz's account on the founders was very well received by pro-republic supporters and he immediately became a hero. In the following shows, he continued to build on his character as the 'voice of those unheard'. An analysis of Twitter posts, EksiSozluk entries and video comments (Appendix 2, 3, 4, 5) indicates clearly that Saymaz was quickly accepted as a representative of an alternative world-view, for the under-represented, which did not find its representation before. Some quotes are: "He is the voice of our feelings, good job", "Every time he speaks I go 'Yes, this is it!'", "The guy who throws the best punches at the tyrants on behalf of the underdogs", "At the moment he is slapping Resat Petek", "He is challenging everyone again", "As Saymaz speaks, enemies of Ataturk are going mad". One comment reads: "We are not represented in the parliament, but in debate shows with Ismail Saymaz we are represented at the forefront." There was even a campaign to have Ismail Saymaz as the main opposition party CHP's president, which Saymaz quickly shut down ("İsmail

Saymaz'dan 'CHP'nin başına geç' önerisine yanıt: Beni bu işlere karıştırma şekerim”, 2016).

In my interview with Ismail Saymaz, he argued that there is a ‘crisis of representation’ in Turkey (Appendix 6). Merkel’s (2013) diagnosis of electoral regime crisis is as follows: “... changes of voting behavior, such as increasing voter abstention, increasing volatility or actual discrimination against ethnic groups, classes, or women are an early warning sign that participation and representation do not sufficiently reflect the totality of the demos” (2013: 8). In the case of such insufficient representation, a journalist and a celebrity television persona who represents the views of a certain demos gains popularity and fanaticism. Jones (2010) notes:

As the viewing public attempts to make sense of political life, a television program that offers such representative public personalities with whom audiences maintain an affective relationship (from other cultural sources) is embraced for the feelings it ignites, more so than any reasoned logic these celebrities might offer. As Marshall argues, “What is privileged in the construction of public personalities is the realm of affect. Affect moves the political debate from the realm of reason to the realm of feeling and sentiment” (2010: 198)

Ismail Saymaz achieved an affective relationship with the viewers certainly for the rationality in his argument and his opposition journalism; but also for the positive feeling and sentiments that results from his becoming a television persona dearly loved by public (Bilgici, 2016). In my interview with him, Saymaz mentioned how much love he receives from everyone at each event he participates across the

country: some people hug her, some cry, some want to take him home to accommodate him (Appendix 6). These are behaviors which, based on viewers reactions to television series characters discussed above, would not be surprising to see if series characters such as Kuzey, Bihter Ziyagil or Süleyman Çakır were, in fact, real people. Developing emotional cues is a powerful tool for maintaining engagement in television shows – Ismail Saymaz’s persona appears to increase emotional engagement in political debate shows and thus render them more watchable.

Conclusion

The rise of mass society, postmodernism, capitalism and commercial pressures on media conglomerates led to creation of standard television content that often has entertainment value. In post-truth political era we currently live in, establishing emotional engagement with the viewers has become an essential factor for television success, more so than factual reporting. As a result, even serious information is now entertaining. As emotions and gut feel become important factors of political opinion formation, reporting of political information and portrayal of reality has been slowly replaced by a spectacle of information.

In Turkey, watching television dramas is a popular pastime activity – 80% of Turkish people claim to watch local series. Television entertainment is defined by television dramas in Turkey. In my analysis of a randomly selected week's television programs (including news, live football, other entertainment shows and the rest), I have found that nearly half of highest rating shows across channels was television dramas. Evaluated in this media context, this thesis argues that political information programs such as newscasts and political debate shows have also become dramatized in line with audience demands.

I have identified elements of dramatization in my analysis of CNNTurk's *Tarafsız Bölge* and *Türkiye'nin Gündemi* in the period after the attempted coup of July 15, 2016. The frequency and duration of political debate shows increased after the coup attempt both in thematic and non-thematic channels, similar to television dramas

frequency and duration. Framing of the debate often enabled polarization and conflict, elements of curiosity and mystery were further enhanced by the host to maintain the narrative flow. FETO was discussed at length with experts – heads of foundations or think tanks who are pro-government, journalists from many different backgrounds, lawyers, soldiers, academics and these people quickly became popular television personae. In my analysis I have found that nearly half of the guests were repeating guests who developed their character over time. Given the limited time allocated per guest, important topics were not fully covered in depth as it would be expected from an informational program, leaving room for emotional interpretation of events through the affective relationship these personae build with the public, a phenomenon similar to the one observed with television drama series celebrities.

Further studies could elaborate further on the reasons behind a need for such dramatization, audience reception of dramatized debate shows, para-social relationships between debate show personae and the viewers and the impact of dramatized debate shows on civic engagement.

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Appendix

Appendix 1: Tables from Konda Barometer, 2015

Table 1: Konda Barometer 2015 – TV Channels' Viewers Political Inclinations

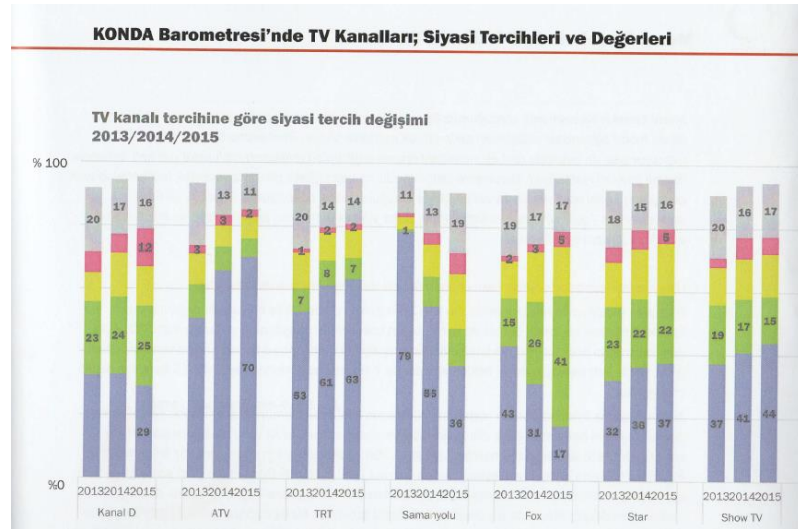
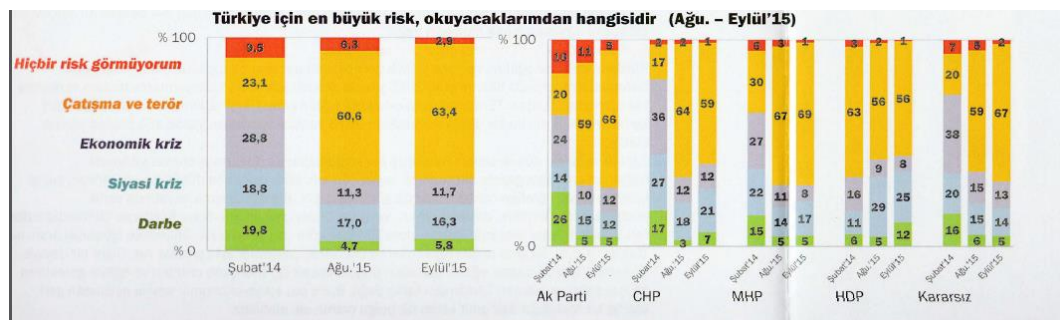


Table 2: Konda Barometer 2015 - Which of the following is the biggest risk in Turkey?



Appendix 2: Comments on Gerçek Gündem article “İsmail Saymaz’ın cevabı rekor kırdı”



Suna Sertbaş · Şişli siyasa bilimler yüksek okulu

ağzına sađlık canım kardeşim İsmail Saymaz.ah CNN daha doymadın yandaşlık yapacağım diye Cumhuriyet düşmanlarını ekrana dizmeye...

Beğen · Yanıtla · 7 · 3 Eylül 2016 15:47



Katip Tekci

İSMAIL SENİ ÇOK SEVİYORUZ...

Beğen · Yanıtla · 3 · 3 Eylül 2016 16:13



Aydın Akkaya · Çimentaş'Da Fizik laborantı

Bu Ülkede Cumhuriyeti Sevmeyenlerin hepsi Fetocudur

Beğen · Yanıtla · 4 · 3 Eylül 2016 16:56



Ergin Yucel · Anadolu University

İsmail Saymaz adam gibi adamsın yani perincekin partisine geçmiş bir subayda vardı orada onlarida utandirdin bence tam bir kepazelik perinceekler de partisinde kalpazanin bir diğeri kuyruğu olmuş ama anlıyorum bir kac kemik için yandaşlık fena sayılmıyor onlar için!!!!

Beğen · Yanıtla · 2 · 3 Eylül 2016 20:10



Bilal Ertokus · Dokuz Eylül Üniversitesi

ağzına sađlık ismail seningibi gazeteciler sayesinde özgür basini susturamazlar sen bin yasa cumhuriyet evladı

Beğen · Yanıtla · 1 · 4 Eylül 2016 02:03



Cemalettin Şenol · Karadeniz Technical University

Sayın İsmail SAYMAZ

Programı izlerken bu şahsın ifadelerine karşı içimde kopan fırtınayı verdiğiniz muhteşem cevap ile dindirdiğiniz için ne kadar teşekkür etsem azdır. Bu gibi tartışma programlarında Cumhuriyetin temel değerlerine dolaylı veya açıktan saldırmanın dayanılmaz hafifliği on onbeş yıldır moda oldu. Eline bir tornavida alan gelecekte bir paye sahibi olmak hevesiyle Cumhuriyet aygıtının vidalarını sökmekle meşguller. Fıkırdaki olduğu gibi "Her gün arpası çalınan atın bir gün öleceği" gerçeğini bilmiyorlar. Beynine ve diline Allah sađlık versin.

Beğen · Yanıtla · 1 · 4 Eylül 2016 14:33

Appendix 3: Comments on Bilgici's Hurriyet.com.tr article "Tartışma Programlarının Tartışmasız Yıldızı"



VEDAAt ayar
13 Eylül 2016

Mecliste temsil edilmiyoruz ama İsmail SAYMAZ'ın tartışma programlarında en önde temsil ediyoruz.Çok sağol İsmail kardeş.



Sedat Yıl
13 Eylül 2016

İsmail bu toplumun en gür sesi ve en vicdani tarafıdır. Tebrikler. Seninleyiz.



Sentinel Prime
13 Eylül 2016

CNN Türk te katıldığın tartışma programlarını Kanadadan kacırmadan zevkle izliyoruz..sevgiler saygılar..

Appendix 4: Entries under “Ismail Saymaz” title in EkşiSözlük:

hislerimizin tercümanı olan gazeteci. bu akşamki programda kendine söz verildiğinde bu günlere nasıl geldiğimizi öyle güzel anlattı ki konuklardan akp'li amca ve ablalar tek kelime edemedi. helal olsun!

f t ^ v

31.07.2016 01:17 jolteon ...

ersan şen ile birlikte türk solunun tandeminde uche - hogh gibi popescu - bülent gibi ronaldo - zago gibi oldular. sadece savunma değil duran toplarda ileri çıkıp rakiplerine vuruyorlar.

f t ^ v 12

30.07.2016 23:59 ~ 31.07.2016 mertuccip ...

namuslu kalem.

bir karşısındaki yalakalara bakın bir ismail saymaz'a. vicdan çerçevesinden ayrılmadan, gerçekleri söylemeye çalışan kaç insan kaldı ki şu memlekette.

iyi ki var.

f t ^ v 1

31.07.2016 00:45 ayriliksevdayadahil ...

okuyorsan bil ki seviliyorsun reis arkandayız.

f t ^ v 1

31.07.2016 01:08 cemaatkenar ...

(bkz: takır takır döşüyor)

(bkz: helal)

f t ^ v

30.07.2016 22:32 cryoflove ...

önüne gelene fatality çeken adam gibi gazeteci. kendisini her izlediğimde içimin yağlarında muazzam miktarda bir erime meydana getirmektedir.

f t ^ v

30.07.2016 22:35 fauna ...

eğer bir street fighter dövüşçüsü olsa reşat petek'e attığı tokatlarla dhalsim olurdu.

f t ^ v 1

30.07.2016 22:01 rakisarapvotkabira ...

keşke kendisi gibi gazeteciler daha çok olsa. cnn türk'ü kendisi için izliyorum.

f t ^ v 1

30.07.2016 22:10 simten ...

sözleriyle vurup vurup saymaz bir tavrı olan kral gazeteci.

f t ^ v 3

30.07.2016 23:42 pontiarchus ...

konuştuğunda "evvet işte bu" dedirten gazeteci. işini sağlıklı bir şekilde yapmaya devam etmesini umduğum tatlı insan.

f t ^ v 1

30.07.2016 23:44 kedininbildigi ...

konuştukça, "oh be" dedirten gazeteci.

hastasıyız.

f t ^ v 2

26.07.2016 00:16 fisildayan kadın ...

mazlumların son yıllarda zalimlere attığı en güzel yumrukların sahibi...

f t ^ v 4

30.07.2016 22:41 liwex ...

bu memleketteki en haysiyetli gazetecilerden biridir. konuşmuş olmak için konuşmaz. konuşuyorsa biliyordur, emindir. ayrıca [bavul dergi](#)'deki yazıları da harikadır, takip edilesidir.

şuan evlenelim dese evlenirim, o derece hayranım kendisine.

f t ^ v 1

30.07.2016 23:12 bu sarki size gelsin hacilar ...

yalan dolan konuşulunca dayanamıyor dalıyor lafa " ne zaman yasaklandı ezan? yapmayın" canım benim.

f t ^ v 9

30.07.2016 23:16 tahrikindirimi ...

biraz önce cnn turk'te eski fetöcülere çok fena girişmiştir.

an itibarıyla akp'nin savcısı [reşat petek](#)'i tokatlamaktadır.

f t ^ v

30.07.2016 21:46 ~ 21:47 29 mayıs 1453 günü hasta olan yeniceri ...

Appendix 5: Select Twitter Posts about Ismail Saymaz

(05/15/16 - 10/15/16)		
Date (EST)	URL	Contents
7/30/2016 14:13	http://twitter.com/biberlisuzi/status/759466997952413696	RT @tgmcelebi İsmail Saymaz Reşat Petek'i rezil etti CNN Türk'te! Hala utanmadan Ergenekon-Balyoz diyen bu zihniyetin Fetö ile bağı araştırılmalı.
8/29/2016 18:19	http://twitter.com/engineer60/status/770400437816160256	RT @Halitisci İsmail Saymaz konuştuğa Atatürk düşmanı,cahiller çıldırdı. #30agustoszaferbayramı @ismaildukel @mrtslm40 @odatv https://t.co/GPcnuAdHBY
9/30/2016 9:48	http://twitter.com/OgunKaradag/status/781868326507188224	RT @140journos İsmail Saymaz #Lozan'a ilişkin: "Çağ 500 binlik orduyla Süleyman Şah'ı kaybettiğin çağ değil, 20 bin kişilik orduyla Yunan'ı yendiğin çağ." https://t.co/XYDavoze9
9/16/2016 2:22	http://twitter.com/ferihan2/status/776682676698906624	Anlamayanlara izletelim.. Yüreğine sağlık sevgili İsmail Saymaz.. https://t.co/KWcwPORbal
9/29/2016 11:10	http://twitter.com/NDevres/status/781526505696456704	@siring ismail saymaz deyince akan sular durur.
9/30/2016 8:27	http://twitter.com/ErginElif12/status/781847894244589568	RT @Halitisci Gazeteci İsmail Saymaz Lozan'ı eleştirenlere tarih dersi verirken Yandaşın yüz hali-:)) https://t.co/6WlomNJOCp @mrtslm40 @TRCumhuriyeti_ https://t.co/2erHXufl8g

8/27/ 2016 23:34	http://twitter.com/intuition68/status/769754911487787008	@__AyyildizORG_ Dün gece İsmail Saymaz AKP milletvekili Selçuk Özdağ ı deşifre etti. Neden AKP den kimseyi deşifre ettiğinizi göremiyoruz?
9/9/2 016 17:01	http://twitter.com/SimitSatOnurluY/status/774367119542747141	İsmail Saymaz: Zekeriya Öz'ün heykelini dikelim diyen sizin eşiniz değilmiydi? @Nagehanalci
7/31/ 2016 3:08	http://twitter.com/begonvil10/status/759661915203366912	İsmail Saymaz saydıyor... https://t.co/VeWEYJudlG
9/11/ 2016 1:49	http://twitter.com/ossiriandsakini/status/774862521484337152	Tartışma programlarının tartışmasız yıldızı: İsmail Saymaz - Hayat Haberleri https://t.co/dMsKHbXOQG via @hurriyet
9/10/ 2016 1:14	http://twitter.com/koraysenovaa/status/774491251890593793	RT @nedentoldu Nagehan Alçı: "Cemaati Kemalistler semirtti" İsmail Saymaz: "Size hangi Kemalist ev kredinizi Bank Asya'dan alın dedi?"
7/1/2 016 4:10	http://twitter.com/DirenAcibadem/status/748805866464292864	İsmail Saymaz Belgeleri Konuşturuyor : Devletin Her Şeyden Haberi Vardı https://t.co/KYk9T43afY #unutmuyoruz
9/29/ 2016 13:52	http://twitter.com/rskaraman/status/781567280673153024	İsmail saymaz ne kaliteli bi gazetecidir yav hastayım sana
9/10/ 2016 2:33	http://twitter.com/UppDestLee/status/774511019045621760	RT @avcimucahit Nagehan Alçı: "Cemaati Kemalistler semirtti" İsmail Saymaz: "Size hangi Kemalist ev kredinizi Bank Asya'dan alın dedi?"
10/1/ 2016 8:17	https://eksisozluk.com/ismail-saymaz--1860623?day=2016-10-01&p=1	beğenmiyorum, şunları niye söylemedi filan. algı oyunu yapabilirsin ama ismail saymaz,in söylediği somut gerçeklerle senin savunduğun fikri yerle bir ettiği gerceğini

9/16/ 2016 6:23	http://twitter.com/1907tiesto/status/776743228871680000	RT @DenizBasaran34 #TarıkAkan "Çıkardığımız tek sanatçı Atalay Demirci" oda FETÖcü çıktı! İsmail Saymaz AKsalaklara güzel cevap varmış👏 https://t.co/Y9abLJfD0P
9/5/2 016 2:08	http://twitter.com/proferhad/status/772692783891156992	ismail saymaz: https://t.co/3fEP0Gkvdx @sozluk
10/1/ 2016 10:48	http://twitter.com/yasarozen52/status/7782245880770560000	RT @Halitisci İsmail Saymaz "Vatan kazandıran Atatürk'e hesap soracaksınız, milli mücadele yürütürken Türkiye'yi peşkeş çekenlere laf etmeyeceksiniz". https://t.co/v4DNqx3MNW
9/10/ 2016 0:21	http://twitter.com/GkeSrS/status/774477875756011520	RT @hy_peygamber Nagehan Alçı: Cemaati Kemalistler semirtti. İsmail Saymaz: Size hangi Kemalist ev kredinizi B. Asya'dan alın dedi? https://t.co/L9KgpaSIVV
9/10/ 2016 11:41	http://twitter.com/tipikagnostik/status/774648942873239552	RT @DamadUn İsmail Saymaz, Nagihan Alçı'ya Zekeriya Öz'ün heykelini dikecekti kocan.. Artık heykeli eve götürebilirsin dedi. CNN https://t.co/E0ns4IC7uL
9/10/ 2016 3:59	http://twitter.com/akhmurat/status/774532675998720000	RT @nedentoldu Nagehan Alçı: "Cemaati Kemalistler semirtti" İsmail Saymaz: "Size hangi Kemalist ev kredinizi Bank Asya'dan alın dedi?"
8/8/2 016 15:40	http://twitter.com/Afrennn/status/762750338160033792	Hele şükür İsmail Saymaz beklediğim soruları sordu
7/30/ 2016 14:21	http://twitter.com/slmurs/status/759468866888237057	RT @buruk_64 İsmail saymaz CNN de yine meydan okuyor
8/30/ 2016 13:07	http://twitter.com/zge_serhat/status/770684454293626881	RT @Halitisci İsmail Saymaz konuştuğu Atatürk düşmanı,cahiller çıldırdı. #30agustoszaferbayramı @ismaildukel @mrtslm40

		@odatv https://t.co/GPcnuAdHBY
8/9/2 016 13:02	http://twitter.com/Husamettin_TC/status/763072914547699712	RT @Halitisci İsmail Saymaz "Atatürk'ün deyimiyle,devletin bütün tersanelerine,kalelerine girilirken Sn.Cumhurbaşkanı Başbakanı. https://t.co/gRVTaH721Z
8/25/ 2016 15:07	http://twitter.com/anti_UStA/status/768902562837766144	İsmail Saymaz diyor ki, komiserler AKPlı yetişiyor, her programda AKP öven Mehmet Şahin diyor ki ; yoo ben orada ders veriyorum :)
8/7/2 016 17:34	http://twitter.com/Kobane44/status/762416618802585600	RT @tgmcelebi "AKP secdeye alını degen, kulağı ezan duyanlar bize ihanet etmez dedi, Fethullahçılarını kamuya yerleştirdi." İsmail Saymaz @ismailsaymaz
10/4/ 2016 0:00	http://twitter.com/Wigan91/status/783169794954686464	RT @AliCemilKaya_ #panikyok İsmail Saymaz Kabataş yalancısı Elif Çakır'ın yüzüne yüzüne YARGILANMALISIN dedi. https://t.co/9pwtUDruH8
9/9/2 016 17:34	http://twitter.com/Srhath29Ekim1923/status/774375396003483649	Nagehan Alçı: "Cemaati Kemalistler semirtti" İsmail Saymaz: "Size hangi Kemalist ev kredinizi Bank Asya'dan alın dedi?" ☐ 🖐 ☐
9/10/ 2016 10:02	http://twitter.com/SeferAydogan/status/774624097254924288	yapıştır ismail saymaz))) https://t.co/KFCeWrROfh
8/21/ 2016 16:26	https://eksisozluk.com/20-agustos-2016-gaziantep-patlamasi--5174467?a=popular&p=44	patlamada ölenlerin kimliğini, ırkını soranlar merak etmeyin sizden kimse yok,ölenlerin hepsi insan =====:==== =====
9/11/ 2016 4:07	http://twitter.com/HatipGuyen/status/774897245783228416	Tartışma programlarının tartışmasız yıldızı: İsmail Saymaz - Hayat Haberleri

		https://t.co/0vOwEys9wc @hurriyet aracılığıyla
5/18/ 2016 14:53	http://twitter.com/grayica/status/733022699933585408	Gülse Birsal, İsmail Saymaz gibi topluma yerinde ve akılcı ulaşabilen kişilerin Hürriyet'i meşrulaştırması çok boktan.
10/3/ 2016 10:12	http://twitter.com/mahirakbulut001/status/782961409453883392	RT @Halitisci İsmail Saymaz "Vatan kazandıran Atatürk'e hesap soracaksınız, milli mücadele yürütürken Türkiye'yi peşkeş çekenlere laf etmeyeceksiniz". https://t.co/v4DNqx3MnW
9/10/ 2016 8:08	http://twitter.com/oktayonder7/status/774595501308215296	RT @kacsaatoldunet İsmail Saymaz, Nagehan Alçı'ya "Zekeriya Öz'ün heykelini götürün evinize koyun..." diyeli 24 saat oldu. https://t.co/Pxc4z4R1Qg
9/10/ 2016 3:18	http://twitter.com/hasavrat/status/774522379305414656	RT @kacsaatoldunet İsmail Saymaz, Nagehan Alçı'ya "Zekeriya Öz'ün heykelini götürün evinize koyun..." diyeli 24 saat oldu. https://t.co/Pxc4z4R1Qg
9/28/ 2016 16:36	http://twitter.com/ebruguvenc/status/781246315577614336	@haykobagdat sakın bırakmasın çünkü umut güven ismail saymaz.
8/27/ 2016 16:51	http://twitter.com/ahmetvehbi/status/769653713917075456	RT @ustunn_ahmet Vah vah Ak Partinin haline.. İsmail Saymaz @selcukozdag ı rezil etti FETÖ konusunda..
9/10/ 2016 0:29	http://twitter.com/bankat1907/status/774479810236149761	RT @canleroy İsmail Saymaz;; "Zekeriya Öz'ün heykelini dikelim diyen eşiniz Rasim beydi." Nagehan Alçı haftaya buna da çalış:) https://t.co/JmZm0Kqn7b
6/30/ 2016 11:06	http://twitter.com/erisaydin/status/748548178874609668	RT @JeansBiri İsmail Saymaz IŞİD'in Türkiye yapılanmasıyla ilgili Emniyet İstihbarat Dairesi'nin raporunu anlattı Lütfen izleyelim! https://t.co/fqzU5Imydd
7/30/ 2016 15:52	http://twitter.com/Kokokluh/status/759491989029187584	RT @TurkPars İsmail Saymaz: Reşat Petek'in yıllarca

		desteklemesi sayesinde Cemaat ülkeye saldırdı
7/1/2 016 4:22	http://twitter.com/zctuk/status/748809114881449984	ismail saymaz on Twitter https://t.co/6lavuxlV3e
9/30/ 2016 8:19	http://twitter.com/WildLifeRT/status/781845833440428034	RT @Halitisci Gazeteci İsmail Saymaz Lozan'ı eleştirenlere tarih dersi verirken Yandaşın yüz hali-:)) https://t.co/6WlomNJOCp @mrtslm40 @TRCumhuriyeti_ https://t.co/2erHXuFL8g
7/31/ 2016 13:17	http://twitter.com/FerhatCebioglu/status/759815327098077184	İsmail Saymaz ile Sabri Uzun arasında Cemaat tartışması BU FETOCUNUN, DÖNEMİN ANKARA EMNİYET MÜDÜRÜNE NELER YAPTIĞINI NİYE SORMAZSIN !

Appendix 6 – Transcript of Phone Interview with Ismail Saymaz (26 December 2016)

Yasemin YILDIRIM (YY): [Tezin konusunu kısaca anlattıktan sonra] Darbe teşebbüsü sonrası tartışma programlarının dramatize olduğunu düşünüyorum. Sen ne düşünüyorsun bu konuda?

İsmail SAYMAZ (İS): Doğru, doğru, yani reyting verileri de tartışma programlarının 15 Temmuz'dan sonra hergün dizileri geçtiğini gösteriyor. Tabii yazın dizi var mı bilmiyorum ama, başladığında da dizileri geçmişti. Ve normalde 23:30 – 00:00'de biten tartışma programları artın 03:00 – 04:00'e sarkıyordu. Ondan sonra... Gece 3'te 4'te stüdyodan çıktığımız oluyordu. Ayrıyeten de böyle itirafçılar, Fethullahçı itirafçıların gelmesi, Fethullahçılık meselesinin bir 10 yıl, 20 yıl bağlamında ele alınması işi hikayeleştiriyordu, merak uyandırıyor, ondan sonra... dolayısıyla bunlar tartışma programlarını cazip hale getirmişti. Bir de şöyle olmuştu, bir ara dönem oluşmuştu. Yani, Gezi'den sonra da böyle bir ara dönem vardı. Bu ara dönem, herkesin herşey hakkında konuşabildiği bir ara dönem oldu. Yani iktidarın da eleştirilebildiği, hiç dokunulmaz denilen cemaatin yerden yere vurulduğu, ilk defa ... takılanların atak hale geldiği bir duygusal eşitlenme durumu meydana gelmişti. Dolayısıyla bu bakımdan da bir ara dönem olarak eşitlik hissi yaratıyordu. Hatta baskın çıkma.

YY: Bu dönemselsel bir şey diyorsun.

İS: Tabii, bu ara dönem geçtikten sonra tartışma programları eski cazibesini korumayabilir. Çünkü türdeşleşme başlayabilir, tekrar ve türdeşleşme.

YY: Bir eşitlenme var mı?

İS: Yok hayır, yok hayır... Esasen yok. Ama azdık ama haklıydık hissi veriyor. Azdık ama haklıydık... Yani, yenildik ama iyi oynadık gibi bir hal.

YY: Peki sence programlar neyi başarıyor, amaçları ne?

İS: Önceliği reyting tabii. İlk defa haber kanalları, ki az izlenir normalde, dizi veren ana akım kanalların önüne geçti. CNNTurk çok net KanalD'yi falan geçti. Öncelikle reyting kaygısı. Ve tabii şu da var, uzun süredir bir sosyal medya hakimiyeti vardı. İnsanlar özgür haber alıyorum özgür yorum yapıyorum diye sosyal medyaya yönelmişti. Televizyon o alana biraz daha kuvvetli girdi. Çünkü o dediğim ara dönemde, 15 Temmuz sonrası ara dönemde, işte Yenikapı Ruhı diyor iktidar buna, bu dönemde cemaati savunmamak kaydıyla herşey söylenebiliyordu. Ve bu da cemaatten çok çekmiş çeşitli toplum kesimlerini biraraya getirebiliyordu. Ve işte mecliste muhalefet, meclis dışında etkisiz olmuş siyasi

kesimlerin ana akımda kendisini gösterebilmesine, görebilmesine, ifade edebilmesine araç olarak hizmet ediyordu. Bu da evinde vaktini geçiren vatandaş için cazibe noktasıydı... Noktası hala, belki.

YY: Peki sen neden programlara çıkıyorsun?

İS: Ben darbe öncesinde de çıkıyordum.

YY: Ama sanki sıklığı arttı... Darbe teşebbüsü sonrası CNNTürk'te en çok yayına çıkan kişiler Ersan Şen, Ahmet Zeki Üçok ve sen olarak görünüyor.

İS: Doğru, üçümüz de AKP'li değiliz. Yani Ersan Hoca hukukçu, Ahmet Zeki Üçok eski asker, ben gazeteciyim. Biz üçümüz hem AKP'li değiliz, hem de AKP'den çok çok önce cemaate karşı tutum almış, Ahmet Bey aramızda en ağır bedeli ödeyenlerden, cezaevine girdi yıllarca yattı. Ben 2009'da, 2010'da, 2011'de bu konuyla ilgili kitaplar yazdım. Ersan Hoca AKP'li değil ama hukukçuluğu herkesin kabul edebileceği ölçüde. O nedenle yansızlık bakımından itibar edildiğimizi düşünüyorum. Bu yansızlık nedeniyle biz çıkmış olabiliriz tabii. Bir de, şöyle birşey var, şimdi cemaat meselelerine, siyasi davalara, kumpasa şuna buna karşı bilgi sahibi olup, iktidar yanlısı olmayan da az insan vardır. Bir de tabii kendini ifade etmek. Bilgi sahibi olmak tek başına yetmiyor, ifade etmek de gerekiyordu. E televizyonda da tahmin edersin ki 3 dakikada derdini iyi, net, kısa bir şekilde anlatabileceğin bir platform. Anlatamıyorsan da zamanla kaybolup gidebilir.

YY: Peki, sence bu programlarda hakikaten bir tartışma oluyor mu?

İS: Oluyor evet, yani bir süre sonra tekrara düşülüyor... Tekrar oluyor. Ama şey oluyor bence... faydalı birçok husus da oldu yani meselenin açıklığa kavuşturulması açısından bu tartışmaların faydası oldu. Zannedildiği.. yani kapalı devre bir tartışma değil çünkü sosyal medya üzerinden, ve bazı programların belirli yerlerinin klip yapılarak dolaştırılması üzerinden aslında interaktif bir programa dönüştü bu. Yani halkın katılımı da bir ölçüde sağlandı. Eskisi gibi sadece halk izleyici değil yani edilgen değil, aslında etken bir unsura dönüşüyor. Mesela trend topic olunca, Twitter'daki gündem tartışma programına kayınca, televizyondan yani o an tartışma programından da cevap verme ve o nabza göre programın seyrini değiştirme ya kendini düzeltme gibi refleksler geliyor. Ya da Twitter gündemine tartışma programının gündemini netleştirme gibi tavırlar geliyor. Bu bakımdan eskisine oranla daha interaktif diyebilirim.

YY: Yani o esnada mı bunlar yapılıyor?

İS: Tabii tabii, mesela bakıyoruz Twitter'a, ne oluyor ne konuşuluyor, insan hata ettiyse kendini düzeltmeye çalışıyor. Ya da o bilgiyi canlı yayına nakletmeye çalışıyor gibi.

YY: Gördüğüm kadarıyla içlerinde en detaya girip geçmişten gelen verilerle detaylandırmaya çalışan sensin – ki ben bu yaptığma ‘tematik’ diyorum – ama sanki moderator episodik olabilecek sorularla (detaya girmeyelim, geçmişte neydi, şimdi ne? gibi sorularla) seni kesiyor gibime geliyor. Çünkü yarın da bunu konuşmak istiyorlar... Yani sen normalde olabileceğin kadar bilgilendirici olamıyorsun. Buna katılır mısın?

İS: Belli zamanlar için evet. Ama şunu da gözardı etmemek lazım. Kişi her bildiğini nakletmeye kalkınca detaylarda hem program hem toplum boğulabilir. Çünkü yani bu detayları çoğu insan hakim de değil. Unutma yani yaşadığımız hikayelerin bir kısmı 10 yılı buldu. Ve 10 yıllık bir hafızayı örneğin 20 yaşındaki bir izleyici bilemiyor, onun için çok yeni. Ve oturup bir yerden de benim örneğimdiki cümle içindekiler oturup Google’den taraması lazım ya da Wikipedia’dan bakması lazım. Televizyonculuk bakımından anlaşılır bu, çünkü daha detaycı değil, daha detaycı değil, daha yüzeysel bilgilerin anlatılması televizyonda izleyiciyi bazen rahatlatıyor. Çünkü bazen izleyici içinde kaybolabiliyor bu detayın. Şu var, ben gazeteci kökenliyim, yazılı basından geliyorum. Bizde detay önemlidir, televizyonda bu kadar detay için vakit yok.

YY: Sen gazetecilik kökenlisin, tarafsız oluşunla çağrıldığını düşünüyorsun. Ama gel gör ki insanlar sende kendini buldu, sen birilerinin de tarafı oldun bu durumda. Bu konuda ne diyorsun?

İS: Evet... Ben tabii şimdi bunu planlamadım. Bunu da öngörmedim. Bir aşamadan sonra buraya gelmesini de esasen çok maddi verilerle tanımlayamıyorum. Yani ben sonuçta çıkıp gazetecilik yapmaya çalışıyorum. Öyle popülizm, bir yanıyla ajitatif bir söylemden mümkün olduğunca uzak durmaya çalışıyorum aslında. Hatta siyasal söylemimi çok ötelediğimi, çok geri planda bıraktığımı da düşünüyorum bazen. Yani zaman zaman yorum yapılacak yerde bile yapmadığımı düşünüyorum. Buna rağmen, sadece kuru ve duru bilgi aktarmama rağmen bu toplumsal kırılmada ya da karşı karşıya gelişte bir kesim, kendisini ifade edemeyen bir kesim, etmeyen ya da edemeyen bir kesimin argümanına dönüşüyor. Yani zamanla bu oluyormuş ama benden bağımsız işliyor. Yani ben aktardığım bilgiyi, mesela ... meselesi değil mi – ... meselesini ben AKP’li MHP’li CHP’li herkese anlatıyorum aslında ama gündelik politikada bu bir siyasal ya da toplumsal kesimin argümanı da olabiliyormuş. Dolayısıyla gitgide öyle bir figure dönüştüm.

YY: Hangi mesele, elit meselesi mi?

İS: Elit meselesi mesela ben öyle kendimi politik anlamda Kemalist diye tarif eden biri değilim. Tarihsel okumalarım var, bir background’um var, bu bana müdahale etme gereği hissettirdi. Bu şu gibi, örneğin İŞİD’in bir saldırısındaki bir yanlış bilgiyi düzeltircesine bir gazeteci müdahalesiydi aslında bu. Ordaki de

benim için öyle bir müdahaleydi ama o milyonlarca kez izlenip, izleyenlerin bir kısmının ağladığı, gittiğim yerlerde bana sarılmalarına yol açan bir tesir yaptı. Bazen istemediğim bir boyuta vardı. Aslında “CHP’nin genel başkanı İsmail olsun” diye bir kampanya açıldı bunu hemen kapattırdım. Çünkü yani benim arzum o değil, ben gazetecilik yapıyorum. Böyle bir siyasal iddiam yok, temsiliyetim yok. Fakat şunu gördüm, toplumda temsiliyet krizi var. Temsiliyet krizi olduğu için içinden çıkardığı bir gazeteciyi ya da bir figürü, kendi o temsiliyet krizini giderebilecek bir figür olarak değerlendiriyor toplum. Bu doğrudan bir hal olarak açığa çıkıyor anladığım kadarıyla. Yoksa benim öyle bir arzum yok yani.

YY: Gittiğin yerlerde neler diyorlar sana?

İS: Siyasete gir diyorlar, görüp ağlayanlar oluyor, sarılanlar, zorla eve oraya buraya götürmeye çalışanlar. Yani panellerin sayısı olağanüstü biçimde, yani kitleliliği olağanüstü biçimde arttı. Yani ben ulaşamayacağım kitlelere ulaştım. Gerçekten. Bu sempati halkasına MHP’liler de dahil oldu mesela, CHP’liler de oldu. Yani bir panel içersinde bazen AKP’lilerin de olduğu, MHP’lilerin, HDP’lilerin, CHP’lilerin de olduğu kitlesel paneller yapabiliyorum mesela. Bu bakımdan bana böyle bir dönüşü oldu. Ne bileyim, bazı yerler var, hala daha sürüyor mesela. CHP’nin her yeni ilçe örgütünden bana ... geliyor. CHP’le çok görülmemesi için bunları kabul etmiyorum mesela. MHP’lilerden geliyor. Ve şeyi görüyorlar, bunu gazetecilik için yaptığımı, bir gündelik çıkar elde etmediğim için bir dürüstlük ve parayla satın alınamayacak bir itibara dönüştü bu. Korkunç bir itibar, anlatamam. Farklı şekilde bir güven oluştu. Ve mesela bu hem sokakta oluyor hem sosyal medyada. Benimle ilgili aleyhte bişey yazılsa, ben bunu göstersem, yüzlerce kişi tepki gösterebiliyor. Böyle tuhaf bir popülarite oldu.

YY: Seni Kıvançla karşılaştıranlar da olmuştu:

İS: Evet, o estetik olarak... Siyasete gir diyen, her panelde çok oluyor.

YY: Peki sence Türk halkı seni nasıl tanımlar?

İS: Herhalde dürüst gazeteci derler. Ama ısrarla tabii bir muhalif tanımını da yapıyor. Zaten ben bütün bunları muhalif olduğum için yapmıyorum. O muhalif gazeteci tanımına da karşı çıkıyorum, doğru bulmuyorum onu. Yani ben gazeteciliğin zaten eleştireliliği içerdiğini, olmazsa olmaz olduğunu düşünüyorum. Yani muhaliflik güncel bir iktidara karşı değil, belki sisteme karşı yapıldığı varsayılırsa belki kabul edilebilir, yani işsizlik sorununa, kadına şiddet sorununa, ne bileyim, yoksulluğa karşı sistematik bir itirazın var mı dersin var derim. Muhalifliğe dair burdan bir çıkarım yapıyorsan buna karşı çıkmam ama herhangi bir güncel iktidara karşıtlık ilişkisi dersin hayır böyle değil. Ama işte bir de muhalif tanımını var tabii her ne kadar itiraz etsem de beni takip eden.

YY: Çok teŖekkürler İsmail. Kolay gelsin.

İS: Ne demek, kendine iyi bak.