

The Reflections of Privalization Policies in Turkish Newspapers: The Case of Türk Telekom

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Abstract

Basically, this study, which deals with the ideological construction process carried out to create a common sense against privatization policies by using media tools, consists of four parts. In this context, in the first part, the emergence of capitalism, which forms the basis of neoliberal ideology, which is the intellectual infrastructure of privatization policies, and its transformation in the historical process are mentioned. The second part of the study is organized under two main headings. Under the first heading, the emergence of the concept of ideology and the perspectives of scientists with different worldviews on the concept are discussed. Under the second heading, the media phenomenon is examined and the position of the media as a means of producing social consent within the capitalist hegemony is mentioned by discussing the intellectual differences regarding the media. In the third section, where the concept of privatization is discussed in detail, firstly, what the concept of privatization means, how it emerged, what its objectives are and the privatization methods used are examined. In this chapter, the development process of neoliberalism in the world and in Turkey, which forms the basis of the concept of privatization, is discussed in detail, and the relationship between privatization policies and neoliberal ideology is discussed and the privatization process of Türk Telekom is examined in detail. In the fourth and final chapter, which also constitutes the practical dimension of the study, the industrialization process of media organizations in the world and in Turkey is first mentioned. Then, in the last part, where the relationship between media and reality is examined, the effective role of the media in producing social consent for privatization is revealed through the analysis of the news in the print media.

Keywords: Generating social consent; ideological construction; media; privatization; Türk Telekom

INTRODUCTION

Following the 1973 Arab-Israeli War, a major oil crisis erupted in the world. In this period, the production power in developed countries, which had shaped their industrial structure according to cheap oil, came to a standstill and thus the capitalist system faced a major crisis. As a matter of fact, as a result of the strategies produced to exit this crisis, Keynesian economic policies, which argued that the state should be effective in the economic sphere, were gradually abandoned and replaced by neoliberal economic policies. With the coming to power of M. Thatcher in the UK and R. Reagan in the US, this process accelerated and neoliberalism soon became the dominant political and economic system in the world. This wind of transformation, which meant the restructuring of the capitalist system in line with neoliberal principles, soon took Turkey under its influence. As a matter of fact, with the economic decisions taken on January 24, 1980, Turkey abandoned protectionist economic policies and adopted a new economic model dominated by the rules of free market economy. Thanks to these decisions, which consisted of articles prepared within the framework of neoliberal principles such as liberalization of imports, leaving foreign exchange and other price formations to market forces, state-centered economic policies were abandoned and a market-centered model was adopted. (Atağenç, 2017, p. 80) However, as a result of these decisions taken with the aim of minimizing state intervention in the economy and integrating Turkey into the global market in line with the rules of free market economy, the economic system was dominated by large capital groups. This economic system, which completely eliminated the effectiveness of the state in the economic sphere, led to the unilateral, unlimited and uncontrolled opening of the market in the country to global capital groups. (Öztürk, Nas, & İçöz, 2008, p. 16) In other words, as a result of the January 24th Decisions, Turkey has been integrated into the neoliberalization process in the world in the worst way. (Timur, 2004, p. 75) As Turkey entered the neoliberalization process, privatization practices have become one of the most important actors of political and economic life in the country. As a matter of fact, privatization practices have become an indispensable part of Turkey's political and economic life, especially with the economic policies implemented during the Özal era. Indeed, one of the most dominant principles of neoliberalism, which is the elimination of the state's efficiency in the economic sphere and the opening of the market in the country to foreign capital groups, was tried to be implemented through privatization practices. In fact, privatization practices have been the most important agenda item in the economic policies of all governments that have come to power in Turkey since the Özal era. In this context, a major wave of privatization was launched in sectors of strategic

importance such as mining, energy and communications. (Akbaş, 2019, p. 22) In addition to these, the media has been the area in which this process of change and transformation in Turkey since 1980 has been felt the most. Especially in the 1990s, when the media left the dominance of the state and became a conglomerate, the media understanding in Turkey changed completely and a boss-centered media order was established. Of course, this situation has led to a change in the content and quality of the news in media outlets. In fact, since the early 1990s, the media sector in Turkey has become the biggest advocate and supporter of neoliberal economic policies and privatization practices, the most important argument of these policies. In fact, when the privatization practices carried out or planned to be carried out in Turkey in the 1990s are examined, it is seen that some companies operating in the media sector have been the buyers in these privatization practices. This, of course, led the media to become a direct party to the privatization practices in Turkey and to openly support these privatizations. On the other hand, one of the most controversial privatization practices, which is the most important instrument of the neoliberalization process that started in Turkey after 1980, is undoubtedly the privatization of Türk Telekom (TT). The sale of Türk Telekom, one of Turkey's most strategic enterprises and one of the most profitable state-owned enterprises (SEE), to a foreign-owned corporation led to a number of political and social reactions. However, Türk Telekom was privatized and sold to the Saudi-based Oger Telecom Group as part of the strict privatization policies implemented during the Justice and Development Party (AKP) period, when neoliberalism was on the rise again in Turkey (Kalaycı, 2018, p. 5). As can be seen from the above, despite some reactions to the privatization of Türk Telekom, the privatization process was not halted; on the contrary, the process continued unabated. The main reason for such a situation is the attitude of the media towards the privatization process. This is because almost all of the media organs broadcasting during the privatization of Türk Telekom supported this privatization either directly or indirectly and succeeded in producing social consent for this privatization through their broadcasts. In fact, thanks to the publications of media outlets, a very positive understanding of the privatization of Türk Telekom prevailed in the society. As a result of this situation, which is a typical example of the process of generating consent through the media, no major social reactions were encountered against this privatization practice despite its many strategic and economic drawbacks.

RESULTS

Considering all these issues, in the news articles published in Hürriyet, Sabah and Yeni Şafak newspapers between 1 October 2004 and 31 August 2005 on the privatization of Türk Telekom;

- 1) Privatization was emphasized as an inevitable and universal economic policy to solve the structural problems of the Turkish economy.
- 2) Privatization practices were presented as a scientific reality.
- 3) It was stated that the privatization of Türk Telekom was long overdue and that this delay was detrimental to the national economy.
- 4) Numerical elements such as graphs, statistics and expert opinions were used to rationalize all privatization practices, especially Türk Telekom.
- 5) People and institutions opposing privatization are portrayed as authoritarian, totalitarian and anti-democratic.
- 6) The structural defects of SEEs were mentioned and it was emphasized that this situation harms the economy.
- 7) It was alleged that large-scale corruption was taking place in SEEs and it was argued that the solution was to rapidly privatize these companies.
- 8) Through the metaphors used (shackles, hunchback, farm, etc.), a negative perception of SEEs was created and it was stated that the symbolic tool to get rid of this situation was privatization practices.
- 9) SEEs were shown as the cause of political and economic corruption in Turkey.
- 10) Privatizations were presented as the shortest way to integrate into the world economic system and to integrate with international economic circles.

As can be seen, the privatization of Türk Telekom has emerged as an issue closely followed by the Turkish print media. However, when an evaluation is made in the context of the above-mentioned issues, it is understood that the print media in Turkey did not remain in an impartial position during the privatization process of Türk Telekom; on the contrary, it made efforts for the privatization to take place. Moreover, the news articles published during the privatization process of Türk Telekom and analyzed in this study are clear evidence of this situation. Indeed, in the news reports about the privatization of Türk Telekom in the Turkish print media, regardless of the political identity and capital structure of the newspaper, a pro-privatization attitude was displayed and privatization policies were supported in this direction. Of course, this is a result of the neoliberal evolution of the media sector in Turkey since the 1980s. Developments in the media sector after the 1980s transformed the media into a major industry and paved the way for media companies to operate in many different sectors ranging from energy to food. Thus, media organizations, whose primary duty is to inform and educate the public, have abandoned this duty and started to act and broadcast in line with the interests of the capital groups to which they are affiliated. The relationship between privatization and the media has been shaped precisely in this direction. Indeed, especially since the early 1990s, the most important buyers of privatization tenders in Turkey have been companies operating in the media sector. This situation led to biased news reports on privatization policies and undermined the principle of impartiality and credibility of the media. On the other hand, this study, which reveals the relationship between privatization policies and the media based on the news reports published during the privatization process of Türk Telekom, is important for future studies on the triangle of media, economy and politics. In this study, the framing analysis method, which is a method that is rarely used in media research in Turkey, was used. Therefore, this study may be useful for researchers who want to use the framing analysis method in media research. In addition, in this study, where quantitative and qualitative research methods were used relatively together, the example of Türk Telekom was used to determine the relationship between media and privatization policies. However, this study can also be conducted for other privatized SEEs other than Türk Telekom. In addition, a similar study can be conducted to show the change in broadcasting policies of companies operating in the media sector after they are included as buyers in privatization practices. In this context, the above-mentioned conclusions and recommendations have been reached according to the findings obtained in this study. However, more conclusions and recommendations can be reached by using different methods and techniques. Changing or increasing the sample, asking new questions, evaluating the

relationship between media and privatization practices from a different perspective will lead to new results and recommendations.

DISCUSSION

In this study, privatization news in the issues of Hürriyet, Sabah and Yeni Şafak newspapers published between October 1, 2004 and August 31, 2005 were analyzed. In the said period, these newspapers covered the privatization of Türk Telekom the most. Accordingly, a total of 562 privatization news items, 308 of which were related to Türk Telekom, were encountered in these newspapers during the said period. Moreover, Hürriyet, Sabah and Yeni Şafak were among the newspapers with the highest circulation during the privatization of Türk Telekom. In addition, when the news published on this privatization practice were examined, it was seen that the news in Hürriyet, Sabah and Yeni Şafak were the most appropriate news for the hypothesis put forward in the thesis. Moreover, as mentioned above, the news items analyzed in this thesis were limited to the period between October 1, 2004 and August 31, 2005. This is because after the AKP came to power in November 2002, the privatization process of SEEs in Turkey accelerated. In this context, the privatization process of Türk Telekom was put back on the agenda with the principle decision taken by the Council of Ministers in April 2003. Following this, the privatization process of Türk Telekom was officially resumed with the announcement published on 25.11.2004. However, as a result of the examinations made during the preparation of the thesis, it was observed that the news about the resumed privatization process of Türk Telekom started to intensify one month before the announcement date. Therefore, October 1, 2004 was set as the starting date of the news items to be analyzed in this thesis. In addition, the privatization process of Türk Telekom, which started on 25.11.2004 with the announcements made to local and foreign media organs, ended with the sale of the company to Oger Telecoms as a result of the tender held on 1 July 2005. However, as a result of the analysis, it was observed that the discussions on the privatization of Türk Telekom continued even after the tender. For this reason, the time period of the news analyzed in this thesis ended on August 31, 2005, one month after the sale of the company.

In this context, in this study, the issues of Hürriyet, Sabah and Yeni Şafak newspapers published between October 1, 2004 and August 31, 2005 were examined and the news items related to the privatization of Türk Telekom in these issues were analyzed.

CONCLUSION

As is well known, the 1980s are the years when the economic transformation in the world gained momentum. In this period, Keynesian economic policies were abandoned under the pressure of countries led by the UK and the US, and a new period dominated by neoliberal economic policies was entered. Accordingly, in this period, concepts such as deregulation and liberalization were brought to the fore and economic policies around the world were reshaped within the scope of neoliberalism. With the January 24, 1980 economic decisions, the economic system in Turkey was also reshaped in line with neoliberal policies. However, the political actors in power during this period could not put these decisions into practice because they were afraid of the negative effects of the January 24th Decisions on society. However, after the September 12, 1980 coup d'état, these decisions were rapidly put into practice and the political, economic and social structure in Turkey was subjected to a major transformation. In this context, the first objective was to reduce the effectiveness of the state in the economic sphere and it was emphasized that SEEs should be privatized in a timely manner. Accordingly, from this period onwards, a major campaign was launched to sell public enterprises in Turkey to domestic and foreign capital. The most important component of this state-led campaign was the media. After 1980, the media was one of the most rapidly transformed sectors in Turkey. The media sector is the area in which the economic, political, social and technological transformation that started in Turkey during this period is most evident. As a result of this transformation after 1980, the media in Turkey has become industrialized, conglomerated and a large sector. Of course, these developments in the media were also reflected in the discourse of media organizations. After 1980, privatization policies were presented in Turkish media outlets as an "inevitable fate" of economic growth with extraordinary benefits for the national economy. Moreover, this narrative of inevitability regarding privatization policies was easily established and kept in circulation through the meaning production of the major media organizations of the period. (Dursun Ç. , 2014, p. 301) In this context, this study examines the way in which an issue such as privatization, which creates tension in the socio-political sphere, is covered in newspaper news and its presentation in these news based on critical communication theories. This study aims to make visible the invisible links between social structure and meanings through privatization news. From this point of view, the main subject of this study is to reveal the strategies of production of meanings created in the newspaper news on the privatization of Türk Telekom. As a matter of fact, the point of departure for the analysis of this issue was found within critical media theories. critical media theories carry the

possibilities of accessing a holistic perspective between communication, media and meaning. critical media approaches examine the content in the media according to the ownership and ownership structure of the media outlet, the relations between political powers and the media outlet, and the dynamics of the capitalist economy, which is the main element determining these relations. In this context, it is possible to say that the main purpose of critical media approaches, which have their roots in Marxist theory, is to draw attention to the nature of the media, in which the dominant forces in society and the ideology that dominates these forces are presented as a social reality. (Dursun Ç., 2014, p. 303) Therefore, the news analyzed in this study, which was written with a similar approach, was analyzed within the framework of critical media approaches.

These post-1980 developments have also greatly affected the news content on privatization. Especially after 1990, when the media sector left the state control, the content of privatization news in the media organs changed completely. In fact, privatization practices in the Turkish media, which is owned by large capital groups, have started to be presented as a measure of economic growth and efficiency and improvement of public services. Of course, the most important reason for this situation is that the individuals and institutions that own the media organs are customers or parties in these privatization practices. Moreover, as we have already mentioned, a careful examination of privatizations in Turkey reveals that in the vast majority of these privatizations, companies operating in the media were the buyers. As a matter of fact, this situation has led to the production of privatization news in the media according to the ideology and economic interests of large capital groups and to the ignoring of the rights of citizens and laborers. (Şen & Ayşar, 2012, p. 56)

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