

Chapter 77

Are You an Observer or a Supporter of War? The Changing Narrative of Front Line Reporting

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ABSTRACT

This chapter presents a framework for narratives of war news in consideration of Galtung's war and peace journalism theories. News narratives are discussed in the light of BBC's ethical principles of war journalism. Additionally, transformation of war journalism with the advances in communication technologies is analysed. The method of research is through review of literature and interviews in depth. Five war journalists were interviewed. These five Turkish journalists witnessed five different eras. Ergin Konuksever is the oldest war journalist in Turkey. He was reporting the news from Cyprus Peace Operation in 1974. İsmail Umut Arabacı is the first journalist to announce 'Operation Peace Spring' live from the border. Cem Tekel is the editor and war journalist who joined the operation. Coşkun Aral is an international Turkish photographer and war journalist. He won SIPA PRESS award in 1977 with his photograph of 1st May National Labor Day. Kerim Ulak is an A Haber editor and journalist who joined the operation. His news about the operation turned out to be fake.

INTRODUCTION

For the functioning of democratic societies, neutral and correct media are leading elements. The media that have duties such as informing and raising awareness of the society, should pay regard to the public interest while broadcasting the news. Especially considering that the needs of societies increase during

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uncertain times such as war, conflict and natural disaster, television still maintains its dominance in terms of its visual and audio characteristics.

In the research carried out by the Radio Television Supreme Council (RTÜK) on television viewing habits, it is seen that 86.7 percent of the participants watch television, and 13.3 percent do not watch television. It is stated that television is watched to get news as the age increases. As it is understood from this research, television, where visuality is at the forefront, has not lost its popularity among the audience in terms of news. New media, besides the television, plays an important role among the younger generation in terms of news, along with digitalization in communication.

In this study that the narrative structure of television news is examined, research is made over the television news broadcasted in the Peace Spring Operation, which was conducted in the east of the Euphrates on October 10, 2019, by explaining the basics of war journalism. Famous French semiologist Greimas' Actantial Model is detailed by researching the literature on news narration. Operation news was chosen randomly and it was explained how the narrative was established through the Actantial Model.

In another part of the study, in-depth interviews were conducted with Turkey's leading war reporters. The purpose of the interviews is to obtain up-to-date information both about the past war news and the Operation Peace Spring from the war reporters. Ergin Konuksever who served as a reporter in Cyprus Peace Operation in 1974, photographer and reporter Coşkun Aral who witnessed many conflicts at international level such as Afghanistan, Lebanon, Tchad; CNN Türk reporter Ismail Umut Arabacı who broadcasted Operation Peace Spring for the first time; Cem Tekel who worked as a reporter in Operation Peace Spring and NTV war reporter Mete Çubukçu have been interviewed in-depth with. Interviews with war reporters of different historical and political periods shed light on the events in the important war and conflict areas of those periods while also indicating that the narrative of news is changing.

SHORT HISTORY OF WAR JOURNALISM

“Information is a strategic factor in the foreign policy of states and it is considered as soft power” (Yalçınkaya, 2008, pp.29-56) Today, those who have information qualified as stronger and as a result, the media has become an important medium for the governments to be informed and it has to be retained. While televisions are transferring information to the public quickly and effectively, social media, whose functionality has increased recently, has increased this speed even more. In line with technological developments, field journalism has started to be very expansive, fast journalism. Conflict/war journalism is the area where field journalism is most effective for the public. However, such field journalism practices in critical regions cause much controversy about truly enlightening the public.

Mete Çubukçu, a war reporter who participated in the conflicts/wars in the Balkans and the Middle East since the 1990s, tells that the concept of equal journalism to the existing parties has recently been lost: “We should not report journalism as a national issue. Everyone started to report as if they were more biased. The journalist's job is to get closer to the truth, even under difficult conditions. The parties must be approached at a distance ”(Mete Çubukçu, private meeting, 2 December 2019).

While journalist Mete Çubukçu states that the most difficult parts of conflict reporting are nationalist feelings and emotional and ideological belongings, the criterion of objectivity that he emphasizes supports the policy of the BBC in England's Falkland War. One year after the Falkland War, which began on April 2, 1982, with Argentina's invasion of the Falkland and South Georgia Islands, Baroness Thatcher criticized the 'chilling use of the third person' in bulletins that referred to 'the British' rather

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