Broadcasting A Festivity Without Offending The Other

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Abstract

This paper deals with how Turkish commercial channels serve wholeheartedly the demands of political and military officials on issues involving national sentiments. *Nevruz Bayramı,* (a folk festivity) which was initiated before the arrest of PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan in 1999 as a symbol to both reinforce Kurdish identity and challenge Turkish national unity, was originally anathema to Turkish authorities. Now the media have thrown their weight behind the official campaign to transform the concept of Nevruz, providing full coverage to the newly-evolved Nevruz, a pseudo-event staged for public consumption. This paper hopes to shed some light on the media-state partnership in creating the new concept of *Nevruz,* now a government symbol of nationality, examining the reasons the media so thoroughly cooperated with authorities in constructing a new reality around Nevruz, how they in so doing served their own interests and preserved their economic monopoly

Key words: Turkish commercial TV, nationalism, Turkish politicians and military, Kurds, Nevru

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Introduction

German unification and the abolition of the East German State, calls for a united Arab nation from different Islamic countries (still valid in some Arab communities), the breakup of Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union, intense outbreaks of anger and assaults against the invading forces during the second Gulf War along with other current events in Palestine, Iraq and Afghanistan all reflect the rebirth of nationalistic spirit throughout the world. Broadcasting is the most important instrument of communication in disseminating nationalist sentiments to the public. Studies show that nationalism become prominent even on Western European broadcasting channels. Halloran (1992) reflects on this nationalist awakening among the member states of the EC during the 1990's thus:

In the last year or so several scholars have written about the media situation (not just the general situation) in Western Europe as being characterized by nationalism, regionalism, decentralization, specialization and fragmentation. They have argued that Pro-Europeans have underestimated the complexity and strength of national cultures and the reflection and reinforcement of these by the media (p.6).

A vivid confirmation of Halloran's views was seen by the failure of the European television channel, Europe TV, which died one year after it was born (1986-1987). Nationalism predominantly impeded the presentation of programs objectively because the journalists on the news team tended to retain their national viewpoints and techniques in broadcasting (Maggiore, 1990, p.71). The European Union has crucial problems related to the integration of national states under the principles and objectives of the Union. Programs involving the protection of minority rights and fighting against racism do not fit the petty nationalism of the member countries. In this context, media coverage of the minorities and new immigrants is another challenge for each member state (Husband, 1993).

Evidence available (almost totally from Western sources) indicates that minority groups "tend to be portrayed by the mass media as a strange and unpredictable threat to social order, and as heavily engaged in emotive and largely deviant forms of conflict" (Grenier, 1994, p.313). Antonio Gramsci's notion helps illuminate the current negative depiction of racial minorities in seemingly liberal societies by local media (Mistry, 1999).

The purpose of starting this paper with arguments, though limited, on the reawakening of nationalism and the portrayal of minority groups and nationalist spirit in media messages at the birthplace of democracy, Western Europe, is to indicate that Turkey is not an exception in the context of revival of nationalism, although perhaps unique in portraying Kurds. This occurs despite global efforts to homogenize national states, economies, politics and cultures. In approaching nationalist discourse on both public and commercial channels, we want to limit our argument by focusing on four main points: (1) the function of media intellectuals, who presumably play an authoritative role in shaping opinion; (2) Turkish commercial television; (3) Turkish news and social construction of reality; and (4) the coverage of *Nevruz* in prime time newscasts. We claim here that the commercial channels, in focusing heavily on nationalism, direct public opinion toward national unity. Reporting on the *Nevruz* pseudo-event, which was intentionally staged by the government to promote national unity, distinctly testifies to commercial television's vigorous support of official nationalistic ideology.

Media Intellectuals

Intellectuals are broadly defined as a class possessing monopolistic control over the production of knowledge and, therefore, the symbolic power to culturally legitimize and define what counts as either true, right or beautiful; they are regarded as information workers, representatives of a critical, emancipatory tradition appealing to universal values whose specialized function within the division of labor is the manipulation of symbolic forms (Garnham, 1995, p.360).

Post-enlightenment, modernist and post-modernist approaches to the question of intellectuals focus on different aspects of social reality and, therefore, define the function and mission of media intellectuals differently. The classic post-enlightenment view identifies an intellectual as an individual who is "endowed with a faculty for representing, embodying, or articulating a message, viewpoint, attitude, philosophy or opinion to, as well as for the public."

This role cannot be played without a sense of being someone whose place it is publicly to raise embarrassing questions, to confront orthodoxy and dogma (rather than to produce them), to be someone who cannot easily be co-opted by governments or corporations, and whose raison d'étre is to represent all those people and issues that are routinely swept under the rug. The intellectual does so on the basis of universal principles: that all human beings are entitled to expect decent standards of behavior concerning freedom and justice from worldly powers or nations, and that deliberate or inadvertent violations of these standards need to be testified and fought against courageously (As quoted in Garnham,1995, p. 363).

The view has been challenged in recent years. Post – modernist skepticism has been questioning the very existence of universal truths to which intellectuals might appeal. The role of intellectual contribution in developing modernity has been discussed by contemporary scholars following the line of Weber, D.Lerner, W. Schramm, H.D. Laswell, E.M.Rogers, and S.N. Eisenstadt, who, for example, attach a progressive role to intellectuals in establishing the modern social order. An alternative negative view of intellectuals in the context of modernity focuses on their role as ideologists of power. For Bourdieu and Bauman, for instance, they are "propagating and defending orthodoxy, bargaining with its monopolistic control over the means of communication for a share in the fruits of power" (as cited in Garnham, p.367).

Seeing intellectuals as ideologists of power propagating orthodoxy is a contradiction in itself. If intellectuals as a social group pursuing their own interests propagate orthodoxy, where does heterodoxy, or the critical tradition come from? The argument to find a way out of the dilemma is that intellectuals, in their struggle to secure monopolies of distinction with the holders of economic and political power, develop a climate of critical discourse. The problem at this point is whether this culture of critical power is tied to progressive, political, cultural and social projects. Representatives of the alternative school, such as Conor Cruise O'Brien, Zygmunt Bauman or Foucault, as reported by Garnham, see intellectuals, far from being the unmaskers of ideology, as operatives for regimes of truth. For Bauman (as cited in Garnham), intellectuals in Western Europe, from the 17th century onwards, became confederates with a new form of power. They became what he calls "legislators". Their role, he argues, "consists of making authoritative statements which arbitrate controversies of opinions and which select those opinions which, having been selected, become correct and binding" (p. 369).

The historical emancipatory function of intellectuals has been powerfully challenged by post-modernism and this challenge has been reinforced by the collapse of the Socialist Bloc. New Class theory stresses the rise of professional intellectuals and of a barrage of bureaucratic and economic rationalization. There are different interpretations of the intellectuals in the context of New Class theory. One interpretation has a positive view of intellectuals as information workers and possessors of new, crucial economic power, stemming from the centrality of knowledge exploitation in the production of capital, and as carriers of new, less hierarchial cultural attitudes and life styles. The New Left version of

New Class theory focuses on the repressive power of welfare state bureaucracies and their allies in the trade unions and political parties. This interpretation has influenced cultural studies tremendously.   For New Left proponents, "the enemy has not been capitalism, but welfare state bureaucracies; not economic exploitation, but the culture of dependency and the hegemony of the caring professions."(p.371).   Garnham concludes his remarks on media intellectuals as follows:

> *In conclusion, I would wish to argue that media intellectuals are split between two identities -- that of the professional and that of the amateur intellectual. On the one hand, they are the cadres of an expanding industrial sector, responsible for both the direct production of surplus accumulating commodities and for servicing, through advertising and marketing, other sectors of the economy. Their work merges with that of the growing body of other information professionals servicing the information demands of corporations and governments ... On the other hand, in mediating between knowledge creation and the public and between the private and the public, they are involved in creating and circulating public meanings to the public they in part create through their chosen modes of address. They are, therefore, ineluctably responsible as intellectual representatives in some sense for both knowledge and public opinion. It is from the exercise of their power to make these links that their identity and legitimacy as media intellectuals in the end derive (p.383).*

In the context of the above arguments, we can conclude that the present position and mission of media intellectuals derives not from their cooperative role in the industrial sector; but from their power as mediators between the private and the public in creating and circulating public meanings.   This assumption leads us to the question of to what extent media intellectuals submit to the demands of the industrial sector and bureaucracy of the state. Our assumption is that media intellectuals in decision-making positions inevitably tend toward playing mediator roles between the <u>state and the private individual</u> on the one hand and between the state and the public on the other. This analysis of the television coverage of the *Nevruz festivity* supports to a certain degree the validity of this approach.

Turkish Commercial Television

The new climate in Turkey created by the mushrooming of private and commercial television channels is argued by Şahin and Aksoy (1993):

The new media was instrumental in bringing to the fore the defining tensions of Turkish identity, such as ethnic origin, religion, language, and group aspirations. Global factors operating outside the constraints of the official ideology helped turn Turkey into a shooting gallery of taboos by bringing the Kurdish problem, Kemalism, secularism, religious sects, gender roles, sex, etc. into the realm of public discussion. Official 'untouchables' like the leaders of the pro-Soviet Communist party and of the Kurdish rebellion, fundamentalist preachers, transvestites, homosexuals, radical feminists, and former secret service agents were paraded through news magazines and talk shows. Banned or heavily censored films of previous years were broadcast uncensored. (p.34)

Two main questions relating to the assumption of Şahin and Aksoy might be asked: First; to what extent is commercial television, which is said to have opened the way to the dissolution of official dogmas and of the traditional antidemocratic and monolithic content of state TV, free and democratic? Second, if democracy entails choosing from alternatives, to what extent are media intellectuals blocked by the economic system from supplying free, independent and alternative information to the public? After private business illegally overthrew the state monopoly on broadcasting, the new commercial channels have filled their air time with cheap cost foreign programming (mostly U.S.) and tended to broadcast only a few domestic productions reflecting mostly the lowest popular tastes in order to maximize viewership in a vigorous rating battle. However, consensus created by free-market logic has shown itself not only in the content of the media, but in the language of party leaders as well. As the findings of a study put it: " … homogeneously changing expectations of society according to a new world free-market-oriented broadcasting system have been homogenizing the priorities of the political parties, and accordingly, converging their political messages toward the center comprising universally argued concepts such as democracy, freedom, modernization, human rights, etc." (Tekinalp, 1996, p.161). Fashionable democratic messages of the politicians involving more human rights, freedom of expression and a social welfare state have not been in keeping with their petty nationalist and populist *de facto* decisions.

As PKK terrorism and economic inflation escalated, political parties clung to nationalism and religion more firmly to hold the masses under control and thus preserve their positions. The democratic climate of Turkey at the beginning of the 1990s was not suitable to the parading of official untouchables in such an uncontrolled manner across the television screens as Şahin and Aksoy argued.

Turkish commercial television, however, after surviving the heavy intoxication period caused by an uncontrolled and self-indulgent sense of freedom, bowed to the reactions of particular communities such as nationalist bureaucrats, high ranking military officers and religious communities. Just one humiliating word unintentionally uttered by a game show presenter on one of the TV channels could stir up the Alevi community (a religious sect in Islam) to rebellion. A program involving an interview with the leader of the Kurdish rebellion movement could be banned by higher authorities in the state, or a participant in a debate show who slightly criticized Kemal Atatürk, the founder of the Turkish Republic, could be nationally protested by faxes and telephone calls to the television channel. The new commercial channels, in the course of time, have adapted themselves well to the demands of the public and their political and financial supporters.

As studies show, capitalist ideology and developing broadcasting technologies control the whole system. The more technical communication becomes, the more difficult it is to maintain and control mass communication (Hawkins, 1992, p.19). Media policies are under the control of global markets and may no longer restrict themselves to national economic, political and socio-cultural policies in this climate. Even public broadcasting channels, let alone commercial ones, call the ideals written into the broadcasting code into question (Blumler, 1993, pp. 403-424).

Shifting struggles and alliances among interest groups and concerns for political favors affect the content of commercial television in Turkey. In other words, in an uncontrolled free market economic system such as that in Turkey, property creation and accumulation is highly politicized. This situation has become more apparent and pervasive in Turkey since 1980. Undoubtedly, politicization of property rights for the broadcasting establishment has crucial effects on the political, economic and cultural climate of countries with governments systematically favoring some radio stations or TV channels or individuals over others in permitting economic activities

Television News and Social Construction of Reality

Adoni and Mane, as stated by Van den Bulck (1993, p.11), distinguish a third reality apart from objective and subjective social reality. They call this symbolic social reality, defined as "any form of symbolic expression of objective reality such as in art, literature, or media content." The concept of symbolic social reality refers to "any symbolic representation of objective reality; that is, any presentation by means of a sign-system which gives the impression of offering an image of objective reality." Television in particular offers many different symbolic realities. In other words, when television reflects other symbolic realities, symbolic reality becomes meta-symbolic reality. Van Den Bulck (1993), who draws upon Altheide and Snow, Tuchman and Cohen, argues the subject as follows:

When, however, television reports on party doctrines, politicians' images and so forth, it is reporting on (or mediating an image of) political symbolic reality: the interpretation of objective reality as constructed and presented by a political actor. Just as television cannot show objective reality unbiased, or, at least, unmediated, it cannot represent a symbolic reality without changing it, if only because of the requirements of the media format … Even a simple political speech usually cannot be broadcast unabridged, … so even the most objective newscaster would be forced to limit the coverage of a speech to the 'main points', which may not be the main points in the eyes of the political actor delivering the speech (p.11).

However, V. den Buck goes on to argue, politicians became conscious of the meta-symbolic effect of television long ago, and, therefore, television's meta-symbolic function has two potential results: Not only does it influence viewers' subjective definition of reality, but the symbolic reality represented by television may eventually be influenced as well. This, he calls, using the term of D.N. Boorstin, a *pseudo-event,* "an event staged especially for the media, an event which would not have taken place had the media not been present." It is an event created by relevant political actors:

The political process, according to this model, can no longer be seen as a process independent from the media, whereby policies are made, then presented, then

reported, then influencing subjective perceptions of political reality. Instead, policies are made, defended, formulated and presented with the impending reporting by the media already in mind and often with the reporting by the media as their sole purpose. The media in this sense have become part of the life-world of political actors and politics to the extent that it is part of the life-world of the average citizen, is mediated politics (p. 12).

An example of the employment of a *pseudo-event* is illustrated in a study carried out in South Korea. The Roh regime, which was accused of being authoritarian and highly inclined toward promoting the interests of specific centers of power, received far less open resistance from the people as compared to the preceding authoritarian regimes by taking measures of *pseudo reforms* and reflecting them through the mass media (Kim and Lee, 1992, p. 27). Becker (1995, p.629), defining the role of the media, focuses on its power in constituting public events as rituals. *Ritualized events*, in his terms, are "characterized by being out of the ordinary, bounded and set apart from routines of daily life." In other words, social values are expressed through symbolic forms, and so media creates "meta-narratives" from ordinary events. The media reframes particular public events as instances of ritualized cultural performance.

At this point the "model power" concept of the Norwegian sociologist Stein Braten (as quoted by Johnson and Mathiesen, 1992) has to be argued. He writes that "model strong" actors, those who have rich ideas and concepts regarding a given phenomenon gain "model power", and control over those who are "model weak"; in other words, the "model weak" tend to assimilate the views of the "model strong" without really being conscious that they are experiencing realithat they are experiencing realitson and Mathiesen (p. 12) apply this reasoning to the situation experienced during the First Gulf War: those who constantly occupied the focus of media coverage and defined the situation in the Gulf Region acquired "model power": This power is not based on the content of what they said, but on the presence and authority -- the charisma, one might say." This reasoning might be applied to Turkish television, in which the "model power" concept covers all national authorities, their supporters or sympathizers together with tele-power individuals. This orchestra of ideology managers performs the most sentimental nationalist music day and night for the "model weak" on television.

It has been demonstrated in a study how an event "far away in Nicaragua may result in ripe political discourse of something entirely different from political contraventions in the USA (Tveiten, 1992, p.3). The use of a *pseudo-event* as mentioned before (an occurrence or event, which is specifically staged for the media such as a press conference, ribbon-cutting ceremony, ceremonial speech, banquet or demonstration) are the most popular tools employed to control the news. Messages can be distorted by reporters, editors and producers in several ways.

Wasburn (1995), in his study on democracy and media ownership puts focus on the power of the media to inhibit opposition to social order. The following approach supports the assumption of this paper:

The real power of the media lies, not in their imagined role providing neutral information for the formation of public opinion, nor in continued investigative journalism to 'keep the government honest', nor in conscious manipulation for sinister interests. The power of the media lies mainly in the opposite direction - in inhibiting opposition to the social order, in constraining criticism, in maintaining and repairing social consensus and generally insuring that information unsettling to a climate of confidence, optimism, materialism, and consumerism is kept to the minimum

… Party politics, electoral battles, and debates about unemployment, immigration, or high taxes, are all presented as part of 'the way things are': details to be settled democratically within the system, and not matters which might challenge the very rationale of the system itself. And we, as citizens, for the most part, accept all of this (Qualter as quoted in Wasburn, p. 667).

Simon Cottle (1995, pp. 287-288) brings a new dimension to the hegemonic nature of media news by focusing on the formation of the news format, which is circumscribed and shaped by wider commercial, political and professional logic. He concludes that news formats - whether news briefs, news reports, editorials, interviews, studio discussions, or backgrounders - which follow different rules and conventions of composition and subject treatment, "undoubtedly perform a profound role in the mediating of public contestation." A news format, like a live interview or studio discussion, for instance, can "support a professionally projected stance of authoritative analysis and rational engaged discussion so

that in another type of news program, they can be put to work in the service of a populist ambition which seeks to court audience interest and viewing commitment through the drama and emotion of a staged "set to'." This power of the media is best reflected in prime time news programs.

Studies in the last two decades have researched how news messages are constructed ideologically and serve dominant social interests (Chomsky, 1993; Schlesinger, 1994). Prime time news occupies a very important place in the program schedules of TV companies. As Hellman and Sauri (1994, p.62) put it, audience peak is readily at hand.   This reason alone is enough for TV channels to make this time slot the main arena for competition. Reporting on *Nevruz*, in this context, provided a very special laboratory for a study on how television, in cooperation with civil and military officials, creates a nationalist meta-narrative out of a festivity.

Coverage of Nevruz in Prime Time Newscasts

According to an ancient Persian calendar, *Nevruz* is the first day of spring and the new year (March 22). Its religious meaning comes from ancient times when people worshiped the sun and fire as the great powers of the earth. After the adoption of Islam, Iranians preserved this ancient tradition and celebrated *Nevruz* by making fires and jumping over and dancing around them in traditional folk clothes. In the course of time this tradition of *Nevruz* spread across various Islamic communities in Asia, the Balkans and Anatolia including to Turks. Up until March, 1996, when TV channels put specific focus on the meta-symbolic meaning of *Nevruz*, an ordinary man in Turkey believed that it was a Kurdish *Bayram* (festival) celebrated on March 22 with the coming of spring. S/he also believed that the celebration of N*evruz* was a challenge to national unity as related to the Kurdish rebellion.   The state, reinforcing this view, either restricted or forbid *Nevruz* celebrations all over Turkey for years.

The PKK (Partiya Karkaven Kurdistan), using the official antipathy to *Nevruz* for the sake of its own separatist ideology, urged both the armed and civilian sympathizers of the PKK to revolt on March 22.   Thus, *Nevruz* became a symbol of Kurdish identity among Turkish people by a strict and misdirected official ideology. In the course of events relating to the Kurdish revolt in the southeast, the coalition government felt compelled to soften the strict ideological stance against *Nevruz* and gave the first signs of encouraging its celebration all over Turkey without intervention. In 1996 officials abruptly did a turnabout, claiming that

N*evruz* was a Turkish *Bayram* as well, taking its root from central Asian Turks. Prior to the *Nevruz* celebrations, this view was openly and vigorously promoted through the media, which behaved as more royalist than the king in reflecting the new state ideology.

Methodology

This study proceeded from a quantitative content analysis of the news broadcasts on Turkish commercial channels in the period surrounding the *Nevruz* celebrations (18-22 March). "Quantitative content analysis was developed in part to provide academics with the means to police the symbolic arenas of a special case. The method tends to skate over complex and varied processes of meaning-making within texts" (Deacon et al, 1999, p.116).

News broadcasts on the commercial channels analyzed had many features in common in both form and substance. They all started prime time newscasts by announcing the main headlines in the first two to five minutes, and they all used moving or static pictures, musical themes, off-screen announcements and comments from field reporters and studio guests from time to time. They all aired evening news around dinner time in succession: ATV and Kanal 6 at 7pm, STAR and Kanal D at 7:30 and SHOW TV at 8. They all gave greatest prominence to national topics.

Rationale of the analysis

Since the technique and style they used in broadcasting news was beyond our scope of study, it was aimed to reveal if they reported national topics favorably or unfavorably by putting the main focus on the coverage of *Nevruz*. Thus, we wanted to confirm our main theory that the commercial channels, to preserve their positions, increasingly become partners of the government and more bound to the nationalistic state ideology by constructing reality on the line of the ruling elite.

In this analysis we predicted that if they reported national topics in favor of the ruling elite, they would put more focus on presenting *Nevruz* as a Turkish Bayram in line with government policy. If the channel reported national affairs unfavorably - in other words, presented the ruling coalition as unsuccessful in national affairs - it would put less focus on the new meaning of *Nevruz* celebrations.

The sample of the analysis

The sample was based on prime time newscasts of the five commercial channels with the highest audience size during March 18-22, 1996. The study was carried out over these five consecutive days from March 18 to 22, 1996, which were deemed significant, as they included two important topics regarding the nation at large. One was *Nevruz Bayramı* and the other was PKK terrorism in West Germany, both of which were considered of vital importance for the nation as they directly affected domestic affairs.

Because it was assumed that the core of news to be sought was broadcast during the first half hour of news time, the first half hour of evening news was recorded and analyzed. the main headlines and the off-screen announcements about the upcoming topics in the course of newscasts were not taken into account, the actual time analyzed was less than half an hour for each channel.   We made recordings of ATV and STAR news on March 18, 19 and 22; Kanal D on March 20 and 21; Kanal 6 on March 20 and 21 and Show TV on March 20 and 21. As the recording was made by the author of this paper and some broadcasts overlapped, the research population was necessarily separated into non-overlapping strata. We should be candid that practical constraint was the main factor limiting our sampling. We know that there is always the risk that samples may contain structural biases that might distort the representative qualities. However, in our case, the population tested was small and we assumed that any time chosen between March 18 and 22 would allow us to test our main assumption since almost all the television channels put similar emphasis each day between March 18 and 22 on *Nevruz.*

The same three days (March 18, 19 and 22) for the analysis of the news of two opposing television channels, ATV and STAR, were chosen to compare their attitude toward the government, and related to it, their approach to the *Nevruz* festivity staged as a pseudo- event by the government. Almost all the channels analyzed started to broadcast news about Nevruz between March 18 and 22 with almost the same degree of enthusiasm.   Thus, it was assumed that any day chosen for investigation could help us determine equally well the cooperative attitude of the channel towards the government.

Coding procedure

To coordinate the data to be analyzed and make comparisons between the channels of opposite tendencies (ATV and STAR), we chose to make inquiries about *topics narrating solely Nevruz, topics involving Nevruz, favorable national topics, unfavorable national topics and peripheral topics.* The reason for categorizing the news content in this format was to seek answers to the following questions: To what extent did each channel put focus on *Nevruz*? To what degree did each channel present the economic, political and cultural situation in Turkey favorably or unfavorably to the existing government?

By answering these questions, we assumed that we could find the level of media-government alliance in disseminating nationalist messages to the public. To measure the extent to which certain frames appear in stories that would cluster in such a way as to reveal the attitude of the channels about Nevruz and the government, we developed the previously mentioned five categories for news topics. For each category the coder had to answer yes or no and calculate the duration of time in seconds allotted to the particular segment. *Topics narrating solely Nevruz* included news about Nevruz celebrations all over the country and comments by experts and newsreaders about the meaning of *Nevruz*. *Topics involving Nevruz* were mostly PKK involvement in Germany and the meetings of the National Safety Council, in which *Nevruz* was an important topic in relation to national security. *Favorable national topics* included news segments portraying the ruling authorities and their supporters as positive, pleasant, efficient and productive, and their opponents just the opposite either by ignoring or criticizing them. All the news segments other than those about *Nevruz* promoted the present status quo without criticism and Turkey's justification against her enemies were evaluated within this group. *Unfavorable national topics* covered news segments criticizing the ruling parties and politicians, bringing to the fore social grievances such as shanty towns and other environmental problems, education, health, the social security system, human rights, democracy, etc. Finally, *peripheral topics* included some features like traffic accidents, murder, science, foreign news, credits, and other national news narrated without any comment in the course of newscasts. The reason for including the peripheral topics into the research was simply to calculate the amount of time spared for news in half an hour's time which did not directly involve *Nevruz*. All the non-illustrated segments (mainly featuring instead the newscaster or a guest in the studio) and moving picture segments (archive films or recorded moving pictures from the scene) were included in the substance evaluated.

The classification of prime time news into favorable or unfavorable news coverage was undoubtedly difficult because we had to focus on evaluating the overall meaning of every independent news segment as positive or negative. In the study, instead of numbers, we concentrated on the duration of time (in seconds) devoted to the categorized news content and we applied to the views of academicians for each news topics until we reached an agreement in placing them in one of the five categories. We also questioned the general stance of the channels against the government asking if they were close to, moderately close to, independent or against the government. This resulted in one hundred per cent agreement about the position of the channels among the cooperating academicians.

Textual analysis

The second stage of the analysis was to pick up significant announcements and remarks which reflected *Nevruz* as a Turkish Bayram. To accomplish this, we chose two channels (ATV and Kanal 6), which portrayed the government positively, and traced nationalist messages in Nevruz news. Content analysis is an extremely direct method. It gives answers to the questions we posed. However, looking at aggregated meaning making across texts, the method tends to skate over complex and varied processes of meaning-making within texts. In other words, the method is not suited to studying deep questions about textual and discursive forms (Deacon et al. 1999, p.117). In our case the selected announcements and remarks shared many characteristics in common stating or implying messages such as a powerful state, Turkish identity and ethnic superiority (table 7). Since the evaluation of even a word could change the total meaning of the news story, we applied to a fourth or sometimes a fifth academician to come to a decision on the meaning of selected passages.

Coding Reliability

In coding prime time news, there are two main sources of unreliability. Intercoder reliability measures the coding standardization between independent coders. The second source of unreliability concerns the relation between the duration of time devoted to *Nevruz* stories that present Nevruz as a Turkish Bayram and the devotion of the channel to the government.

To measure intercoder reliability, the entire sample of television news was coded, and each coder assessed the sample independently. Percentage agreement between the coders was calculated for each coding category. This was high for the presence or absence of favorable or unfavorable national topics and Nevruz stories and peripheral topics (average

95%). Reliability was also satisfactory for the duration of time devoted to each story (90%). To arbitrate any discrepancies, a third coder examined and made a judgment regarding them.

To assess the adequacy of the relation between the duration of time devoted to Nevruz stories that presented Nevruz as a Turkish Bayram and the channel's affinity to the government, we randomly selected ten persons from the department of radio and television and asked them how they assessed the relationship of the channel to the government. A full hundred per cent of the respondents evaluated the channels' general positions vis-a-vis the government exactly the same.

Findings

As is seen in Tables 1, 2 and 3, STAR devoted the least air time to the coverage of *Nevruz* and the most air time to unfavorable national topics, while ATV reacted in just the opposite way. Correlative analysis revealed that all the channels except STAR devoted the first half an hour of their newscasts to national topics putting focus primarily on favorable ones. Tables 1, 2, 4 and 6 reveal general tendencies of the commercial channels in dealing with national topics. ATV and STAR were deliberately evaluated on the same dates to highlight the distinct difference of their positions towards the government. ATV, having been financially rewarded by Tansu Çiller, the Prime Minister of the previous coalition government, always took positions on her side and vigorously supported her during the elections. STAR, on the other hand, as a profit-oriented organization, could not benefit from the financial favors of the government and, as a consequence, was in constant economic and legal opposition with the government. The owner of the channel showed his antipathy towards her by attacking her personality, wealth and policies fiercely in every news program before and during the elections even at the expense of the channel's frequent closure.

The results displayed that STAR was the most critical channel regarding the political, economic and social climate of Turkey, for which Çiller and her party were blamed. However, this criticism of the social order should not make us assume that STAR did not make prolific use of nationalist messages in its news programs; on the contrary, it showed a high level of concern in military involvements disregarding the Government's hand in them. As is clearly seen in table 5, this attitude of STAR, we might assume, explains why it was not

much interested in giving coverage to *Nevruz,* which was declared an official Bayram by the government.

Beyond figures put forth to test the validity of our assumption, our study also involved extracting some specific discourse indicating each channel's agreement with the government's *Nevruz* policy.

ATV, for example, went so far as to be the spokesman of the Government by vigorously announcing on March 18, 19 and 22 the official program and activities related to *Nevruz.* The following announcements were made in succession in the evening newscasts on March 18 by the newsreader, Ali Kırca, who undoubtedly colors the news by playing with words and making lengthy transitions and subjective sentimental comments. Some of his remarks put focus on the meaning and importance of the new *Nevruz* policy of the government: The *State has claimed Nevruz; The Atatürk Institute of Language and History has taken Nevruz into its program*; T*he Prime Minister (M. Yılmaz) will celebrate Nevruz in Iğdır*; The *Directorate of Religious Affairs (Diyanet) has announced that Nevruz is a Turkish Bayram; The national lottery is conducting a special drawing for Nevruz on March 19; Conferences are to be held on Nevruz; Posters are being prepared for Nevruz; Tansu Çiller has announced that Nevruz will be an official Bayram; Kurdish TV will be established; Yellow, red and green (*colors of Kurdish identity*) have been Turkish colors from the Göktürks* (Central Asian ancestors of Turks) *onward.*

Almost identical announcements were made by ATV on March 19 and 22 with similar enthusiasm. On March 22, the day *Nevruz* was celebrated, ATV, like all other channels, broadcast moving pictures of army officers celebrating *Nevruz.* The Governor, the Mayor of Iğdır and common folk danced hand in hand around a *Nevruz* fire accompanied by live Turkish folk music.

All the channels, except STAR, seemingly competed with each other to make prolific use of *Nevruz* events in their newscasts. KANAL 6, for instance, which devoted the longest duration of time to *Nevruz* stories, made the following announcements on March 21: T*he President has started the Nevruz games*; The *national race for Nevruz has started*; *Terorists have lost!; UN observers are surprised to see people performing their traditional*

dances so happily and freely. The police, army and people together danced the halay (a folk dance, popular among both Turks and Kurds); The Prime Minister celebrated Nevruz in Iğdır with great enthusiasm; Nevruz celebrations are many and merry; etc The key words in the *Nevruz* coverage of the five commercial channels can be summarized in a few phrases: "State authorities", "national unity", "brotherhood", "peace", "*Nevruz* fire" and "Turkish Bayram".

The new State ideology on *Nevruz* was criticized in a brief commentary on March 20 by Güneri Cıvaoğlu, the commentator of Kanal D. He asked whether we were exaggerating the matter. SHOW TV, similarly leveled a criticism in an off-screen announcement during the news program on March 21 made a very significant comparison between the State's involvement in religion and *Nevruz.* The commentator accused the State of interfering in religion by opening great numbers of İmam Hatip Lisesi's (schools based on Islamic education) with the intention of subjecting religion to state control, thereby creating a fundamentalist religious explosion. It was implied by an extension of the same logic that taking *Nevruz* under State control and accepting it as a Turkish Bayram would cause both ethnic awakening and clash. However, these intellectual criticisms were a few drops in the flood of praise and did not attract much attention.

As Table 2 reveals, every channel gave more coverage to favorable national topics. During March 18-22, another common topic besides the PKK was the traffic accident Aydın Menderes had, which was narrated in detail by all channels in almost a competitive spirit. His father, Adnan Menderes, the first Prime Minister of a multi-party Turkey and the forerunner of free market logic in Turkey, had been executed after a military coup on May 27, 1960. This execution had elevated him to a status of national hero among the central rightist parties. His son, Aydın Menderes, though he was the MP of a religious party (Welfare Party), which was largely ignored by the other parties and the media, had emerged as the representative of deep-rooted nationalist feelings. Thus, his health was at the top of the agenda on all newscasts.

We have to include President Demirel's visit to Cairo to solve the water problem between Turkey and Syria among the significant favorable news stories. He was at the service of the nation, though ill and tired! Coverage of the Islamic terrorist movement *Hamas*, Iranian relations, and in this context, the confession of the murderer of the journalist Çetin Emeç implicating Iran in the murder all presented the Turkish State as well-informed

and powerful. Turkey's side in the crisis over Kardak (a mini island claimed by both Turkey and Greece) Çiller's charm and fashionable dressing (she was treated like a pop star so that the number of her admirers were increasing every day!) are all examples of favorable state-handling.   Examination of news substance clearly demonstrated that all the channels successfully leveled public opinion towards a nationalist context.

The fourth group entitled *unfavorable national topics* included the following stories: an injured *Ghazi* (Moslem veteran of war) failed by the State and a national wrestling champion living on the edge of poverty (both cases addressed nationalist feelings); the need to reform the Social security system (implying privatization); the government's indifference to human suffering during the flood in Izmir; social grievances like shanty towns, traffic, alcohol and gambling; environmental problems; the case of torture by the police of young students in Manisa (especially featured by STAR and SHOW); the death of a young man ignored by the emergency service of a hospital (SHOW); a 17-yearold thief shot by the police in the back (Kanal 6).   As is seen in table 2, STAR and ATV stand at the two ends of the spectrum in giving prominence to unfavorable national topics. However, we must make it clear that these criticisms were involved with 'what's and 'who's rather than 'why's and 'how's

Conclusion

The central argument in this paper is to show, although Turkey is not an exception in cultivating public opinion behind official ideology, the extent commercial television cooperates with authorities in disseminating state ideology to the public.

To give support to our main assumption that the media is toeing the nationalist line with the 'model power' instruments they own, we made reference first to the role of media intellectuals in the construction of social reality.   Garnham's thesis that media intellectuals are split between professional and amateur identities sheds some light on the professional side of Turkish media intellectuals. In the case we studied they were responsible for creating a nationalist meta-narrative out of a traditional folk festival.   As Garnham puts it, the present position and mission of media intellectuals derives not from their cooperative role in the industrial sector, but from their power as mediators between the private and the public in creating and circulating public meanings to the public. This assumption led us to question to

what extent media intellectuals yielded to the demands of the industrial sector and the bureaucracy of the state. Our assumption was that media intellectuals in decision-making positions invariably tend toward playing the mediator role between the state and private enterprise, on the one hand, and between the state and the public, on the other hand. The analysis of *Nevruz* coverage on Turkish television, though limited, sheds some light on the validity of this approach. As we have stated before, up to 1996 the objective reality about *Nevruz* was somewhat different from the symbolic reality presented by the media in March, 1996.

The relation of State and capital with each other is frequently discussed in communication studies. "State and Capital can run the entire process alone or jointly, giving rise to different political and economic systems, depending on how they relate to each other" (Galtung, 1999, p.21). In light of findings in the study, we must add a new assumption to the old one. Though the study was a limited analysis of a case and presented a number of questions; it was possible for example, to single out within the set of findings, the position of ATV and STAR. We have stated before that their relation with the government differed as favorable or unfavorable, which was reflected in their coverage of *Nevruz*. At this point we might ask which factors in the construction of social reality determined the priority in the given case study. We found that STAR not only spared very limited air time to the narration of *Nevruz* as it was staged by the government and state officials on the media, but also made no specific comments on the new meaning of *Nevruz*. ATV, on the other hand, having previously formed close relations with the government (in both economic and political senses), played its part successfully in toeing the government's line and reconstructing a new nationalist meaning out of the folk festival. The other channels; Kanal D, Kanal 6 and Show TV, having no significant problems with the government, broadcast *Nevruz* celebrations in parallel with the new policy by putting emphasis on nationalist feelings.

Though it is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the effect of economic factors manipulating the media in constructing social reality; in the light of the limited findings we put forth, we are firmly convinced that financial pressures on the media are so imperative they affect and fashion policies even on the most crucial nationalist themes. By giving less coverage or making no comment on the new meaning of *Nevruz,* STAR implied an enmity against government because the *Nevruz* celebration was merely a new strategy of the government to restore Turkish identity over Kurdish identity.

The present analysis relied on quantitative content analysis of five commercial channels. In this regard,   considerable evidence, however limited, provided at least reason to make some assumptions about the power of media in constructing social reality. We assume that our findings provide some light towards understanding the social construction of reality approach, the new mission of media intellectuals, and the determinants in news selection and presentation. Galtung (1999), in his article arguing the interaction among State, Capital, and Civil Society concludes that a healthy society depends on a balanced interaction among the three. "The media can do much to stimulate that dialogue by making information publicly available and by giving representatives of the three pillars space and time to state their views." (p.11). In our case, it is clear that when precise nationalist themes are concerned, State and Capital close the way to transparent dialogue in the media.

In the years up to 1999, not surprisingly, television channels continued to narrate *Nevruz* within the same nationalist context. This attitude of the channels abruptly and dramatically changed after Abdullah Öcalan, founder and leader of Partiya Karkaven Kurdistan (PKK), was caught and arrested on February 15, 1999, in Nairobi, Kenya.   For the last four years (2000-2004) television channels have been covering *Nevruz* as an ordinary national festivity without taking pains to disseminate vigorous nationalist messages to the public.

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Table 1

Duration of Time (in seconds) Devoted toTopics by Five Commercial Channels on March 18-22,1996

	ATV	STAR	Kanal D	Kanal 6	SHOW
Date	**18,19, 22**	**18, 19, 22**	**20, 21**	**20, 21**	**19,21**
Topics narrating solely *Nevruz*					
	1207(402.5)*	212(70.6)*	515(257.5)	1530(765)*	537(268.5)*
Topics including *Nevruz*					
	588(196)*	none	74(37)*	237(118.5)*	631(315.5)*
Favorable national topics					
	2154(718)*	2166(722)*	1313(656.5)*	485(242.5)	977(458.5)*
Unfavorable national topics					
	292(97.5)*	2418(806)*	1410(705)*	855(427.5)*	798(399)*
Peripheral topics					
	660(220)*	262(87.5)*	237(118.5)*	350(175)*	402(201)*
Total duration of time					
	4901 (1633.6)*	5058 (1686)*	3549 (1774.5)*	3457 (1728)*	3345 1672.5)*

* Average duration of time in seconds per day

Table 2

Average Duration of Time per Day (in seconds) Devoted to Total Favorable National Topics, Plus Nevruz

ATV	1316.3
Kanal 6	1126
Show TV	1042.5
Kanal D	951
STAR	792.6

Table 3

Average Duration of Time per Day Devoted to the Coverage of Nevruz

	In seconds	In %
KANAL 6	765	42.2
ATV	402.3	24.6
SHOW	268.5	16
KANAL D	257.5	14.5
STAR	70.6	4.1

Table 4

Total Duration of Time (in%) Devoted to News Topics per Day

(ATV, STAR, KANAL, SHOW TV)

Topics narrating solely *Nevruz*	33.3
Topics including *Nevruz*	12.5
Favourable national topics	52.8
Unfavuorable national topics	45.9
Peripheral topics	30

Table 5

Total Duration of Time (in%) Devoted to News Topics per Day

(ATV, STAR)

	ATV	STAR
Topics narrating solely Nevruz	24.6	4.1
Topics including Nevruz	11.9	0
Favourable national topics	43.9	42.8
Unfavuorable national topics	5.9	47.8
Peripheral topics	13.4	5.1

Table 6

Duration of Time (in%) Devoted to Topics per Day

(Kanal D, Kanal 6, Show TV)

	Kanal D	Kanal 6	Show TV
Topics narrating merely *Nevruz*	14.5	44.5	16
Topics includig *Nevruz*	2	6.8	18.8
Favourable national topics	36.9	14	27.4
Unfavuorable national topics	39.7	24	23.8
Peripheral topics	6.6	10.1	12

Table 7

Presentation of Nevruz

ATV Anouncements

- *State has laid hands on Nevruz (poweful state)*
- *Atatürk Institution of Language and History has taken Nevruz into its program (Turkish identity)*
- *The Prime Minister will celebrate Nevruz in Iğdır (Turkish identity)*
- *Director of Religious Affairs announced that Nevruz is a Turkish Bayram (Turkish – Islam Identity)*
- *National Lottery is making a drawing for Nevruz (Turkish identity)*
- *Conferences are to be held on*

Nevruz (Turkish identity)

- *Posters are being prepared for Nevruz (Turkish identity))*
- *Nevruz will be an official Bayram (Turkish identity)*
- *Kurdish TV will be established (democratic Turkey)*
- *Yellow, red and green are Turkish colours from Göktürks on (Turkish identity)*

KANAL 6 Announcements

- *The President started the Nevruz Games (Turkish identity)*
- *National Nevruz Race started (Turkish identity)*
- *Terorists lost! (powerful Turkey)*
- *UN observers are surprised to see people performing their traditional dances so freely and happily(democratic Turkey)*
- The Police, army and people together performed halay (Turkish identity)
- The prime Minister celebrated Nevruz with great enthusiasm (Turkish identity)
- Very many happy Nevruz celebrations (Turkish identity)