POPULAR CULTURE AND INTERNATIONAL POLITICS: AN ALTERNATIVE WAY TO ANALYSE TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY

POPÜLER KÜLTÜR VE ULUSLARARASI POLİTİKA: TÜRK DIŞ POLİTİKASININ ANALİZİNDE ALTERNATİF BİR YOL

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ABSTRACT

Popular culture studies have been mushroomed in the discipline of IR in the last decades. The field of popular culture and its relationship with International Relations (IR) discipline are studied in Turkish IR scholars but some parts are overlooked although it provides fruitful resources for IR. There are different ways to research popular culture in IR and this article aims to suggest one way to better study it in the context of Turkish Foreign Policy (TFP). The article uses some elements of Social Constructivism in IR suggested by Jutta Weldes to understand how popular culture can be a site for consent creation for foreign policies. These elements, the dual processes of articulation of the meaning and interpellation to the subject identities and intertextual meaning created by the combination of real political issues and popular fictions help us to understand why popular culture constitutes an important field when analysing foreign policies. In this context, a popular television series, *Valley of the Wolves: Ambush* and how it may create consent for foreign policies is examined. By explaining

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all these, this article aims to contribute to Turkish popular culture and Turkish IR studies.

ÖZ

Özellikle Soğuk Savaşın sona ermesinden sonra Uluslararası İlişkiler disiplininde popüler kültür araştırmaları yapılmaya başlanmıştır. Popüler kültür alanı ve Uluslararası İlişkiler disipliniyle ilişkisi, Uluslararası İlişkiler disiplinine verimli kaynaklar sağlamasına rağmen, Türk akademisyenler tarafından çok az çalışılmış ve dış politika ile ilişkisi ise çok az çalışılmamıştır. Uluslararası İlişkiler disiplininde popüler kültürü araştırmanın farklı yolları vardır ve bu makale bu alanı Türk Dış Politikası bağlamında daha iyi çalışmanın bir yolunu önermeyi amaçlamaktadır. Makale, popüler kültürün nasıl dış politika için bir alan haline geldiğini anlamak için Jutta Weldes tarafından önerilen Uluslararası İlişkiler'deki Sosyal İnşacılık yaklaşımının bazı unsurlarını kullanmaktadır. Gerçek hayatta karşılaşılan siyasi konuların ve popüler kurguların bir araya gelmesiyle yaratılan metinlerarasıcı anlam ile anlamın eklemlenmesi ve özne kimliklerine çekilmesini öneren ikili süreç, dış politikaları analiz ederken popüler kültürün neden önemli bir alan oluşturduğunu anlamamıza yardımcı olmaktadır. Bu bağlamda makale, popüler bir televizyon dizisi olan Kurtlar Vadisi: Pusu'yu ve onun dış politika konusunda nasıl rıza üretebileceğini incelemiştir. Tüm bunları detaylı bir şekilde açıklayarak, bu makale Türk popüler kültür çalışmaları ve Türk Uluslararası İlişkiler çalışmalarına katkıda bulunmayı amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Sosyal İnşacılık, Popüler Kültür, Dış Politika, Metinlerarasıcılık, Uluslararası İlişkiler.

INTRODUCTION

The end of the Cold War opened new fields for the IR discipline. The major IR theories of neorealism and neoliberalism could not predict the end of the Cold War, and new theories were emerging as a result of challenges to these major theories. Constructivism was one of these new theories. Culture, which is a

constituent element of constructivism, started to be evaluated within IR and at the beginning of the new millennium popular culture found a place in IR.

A growing number of IR scholars focused on sub-fields of popular culture and attempted to integrate it with the IR discipline. Jutta Weldes (1999a, 2003) focused on the science fiction television series *Star Trek* and its connections to world politics, and stated that *Star Trek* had parallel features with US foreign policy discourse and that this discourse was reproduced in this television series. Cynthia Weber (1999, 2001) showed that popular Hollywood films can be a useful tool for explaining IR theories. Nicholas Evan Sarantakes (2005) also investigated *Star Trek* and revealed how the Cold War environment shaped the content of the series. Dittmer (2005) illustrated the political relevance of *Captain America* comics in the post-9/11 era from a geopolitical perspective. Nexon and Neumann (2006) and Kiersey and Neumann (2013) analysed the realms of *Harry Potter* and *Battlestar Galactica* and explained their relevance to world politics. Kyle Grayson, Matt Davies and Simon Philpott (2009) offered a research agenda for studying popular culture in IR. Klaus Dodds (2008) found intersections between film, geopolitics and IR by focusing on Hollywood, the Bush administration and the post-9/11 era. Ted Hopf (2002) included the discourses in popular Russian novels in his sample when he explained the relationship between Russian identity and Russian foreign policy. Robert Young (2015) looked at the reproduction of narratives of warfare and counterterrorism in popular video games.

All of these scholars were attempting to integrate popular culture into IR. There is also a Popular Culture and World Politics (PCWP) book-series published by Routledge that includes books such as *Documenting World Politics, The International Politics of Fashion*, *Political Torture in Popular Culture* and *The Politics of HBO's The Wire*. In this article, I also intend to contribute to IR by offering a way to study popular culture within IR (more specifically foreign policy) and to enhance popular culture studies within Turkish IR studies. Although there was some interest in popular culture within the Turkish Academia, this field still lacks alternative approaches. For instance, Yanık (2009) and Anaz and Purcell (2010) looked at the popular movie, *Valley of the Wolves: Iraq* and analysed it from the perspective of geopolitics. Kaynak (2015) examined Turkish television series such as *Noor*, *Forbidden Love* and *Magnificent Century* as a soft power and public diplomacy instruments. Yörük and Vatikiotis (2013); Anaz and Özcan (2016) also investigated popular Turkish television series as a part of soft power concept. There are also other studies related to Turkish popular culture and politics but not to IR such as Stokes (1992), Bayrakdar (2009), Carney (2018), Diken (2018), Özçetin (2019) and Çevik (2019). Yet, none of these studies were not related to Turkish foreign policy analysis (FPA) studies which is a sub-field of IR discipline. Therefore, this article aims to integrate two subfields of IR, popular culture and

world politics (PCWP) and FPA within Turkish context and seeks to answer this question: how can a popular Turkish television series create consent for a foreign policy? For this purpose, this article, firstly, discusses different approaches to popular culture within the field of IR. Secondly, the article suggests the processes of articulation and interpellation and emphasises the importance of intertextual meaning when studying popular culture products, in this case, popular television series. Thirdly, as a part of case study Turkish security imaginary and a representation belong to this imaginary will be examined and a popular culture product, *Valley of the Wolves: Ambush (VOW: Ambush)* will be analysed as production, articulation and interpellation to understand its possible role in consent creation for foreign policies.

1. POPULAR CULTURE AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Popular culture is a domain which both affects politics and is affected by politics. It infiltrates social and political life and representations of social and political life infiltrate the domain of popular culture. The former can be seen when a Chinese diplomat accuses Japan of becoming the villain in the *Harry Potter* series (Xiaoming, 2014) or when the US President Trump uses a popular phrase from *Game of Thrones* when he threatens Iran on Twitter by saying 'Sanctions are coming' (Tackett, 2019) or more recently, when the leader of one of the opposition party uses the very same phrase (NTV, 2019); for the latter, a television series such as *The West Wing,* or more recently *House of Cards*, which contain fictional representations of the White House can be given as examples. Such representations play a crucial role in constituting the social and political worlds because most of our knowledge does not derive from direct experience: we make generalisations or form stereotypes about other people and the social and political worlds and learn things from the testimony of our parents, teachers and scientific, religious and political authorities (Neumann and Nexon, 2006: 6). These representations are also applicable to our knowledge of international politics in which representations constitute a crucial point. Neumann and Nexon (2006) suggested that there are two kinds of representation. First-order representations which directly represent political events, such as television and print journalism or a politician's speech, constitute the first kind of representation. Popular culture is second-order representation which represents narratives in politics indirectly, through a layer of fiction. Then, a Turkish television series which is analysed later for the purpose to link the TFP to popular culture can therefore be regarded as the second kind of representation.

Popular culture is a field in which political representations can be found and can create meaning for us. A television series as a part of popular entertainment and a vehicle for second-order political representations should be investigated fully for a better understanding of IR since it can include symbols, analogies, knowledge

and meanings of international politics. It can reproduce power relations, help to construct the reality of world politics, and even generate consent for foreign policies. According to Weldes (2003: 6), culture is a set of practices:

> These practices, including representations, language, and customs, are "concerned with the production and the exchange of meanings – the 'giving and taking of meaning' – between members of a society or group". Understood in this way, culture encompasses the multiplicity of discourses or "codes of intelligibility" through which meanings are constructed and practices produced. This multiplicity, in turn, implies that meanings can be contested. Culture is thus composed of potentially contested codes and representations; it designates a field on which battles over meaning are fought. In Stuart Hall's words, culture encompasses "the contradictory forms of 'common sense' which have taken root in and helped to shape popular life". Popular culture properly comprises one substantial element in this field of contestable and contradictory common sense meanings.

We can make the assumption that popular culture contains both favourable and challenging ideas about power relations. Weldes (2003: 6-7) said that "While prevailing cultural and discursive practices constrain and oppress people, they simultaneously provide resources to fight against those constraints". For instance, in Turkey, whilst television series such as *VOW: Ambush*, *Resurrection: Ertugrul* or *Payitaht Abdülhamid* represent the current hegemonic power, some examples such as *Leyla ile Mecnun* do not. The former uses a similar discourse to that of the current hegemon, whereas the latter is mocking this discourse. According to Weldes, examining these texts to determine whether they support or undermine extant power relations helps us to highlight the workings of power (Weldes, 2003: 7). Although, counter-hegemonic readings can be done in Turkish popular culture products, this article is going to focus on hegemonic practices since it aims to understand TFP.

Weldes (2003: 7) also asserted that "popular culture helps to define and represent, or to construct, world politics for state officials", therefore official representations depend upon the culture of a society. But more importantly, she contended that the plausibility of the state actors "depends upon the ways in which publics understand international politics and the location and role of their own and other states in it" (Weldes, 1999: 119; Weldes, 2003). Part of the plausibility comes from a structural combination of both daily experiences of people and official representations, and "this explicitly implicates popular culture in providing a background of meanings that help to constitute public images of world politics and foreign policy" (Weldes, 2003: 7). As a result, Weldes (1999a: 119) claimed that "Popular culture thus helps to construct reality of international politics for officials and non-officials alike and, to the extent that it reproduces the content

and structure of the dominant foreign policy discourse, it helps to produce consent for foreign policy and state action". In other words, popular culture products such as a television series and the speeches of the politicians, creates an intertextuality and this can lead to production of consent. Elspeth Van Veeren (2009: 364) explained that a television series "can be considered an important and useful example in the production of intertextual meaning … By both (re)constituting and drawing on the same (re)presentations of 'reality', the intertextuality of popular culture and world politics helps to make the world intelligible". Van Veeren also explained in the same article in which she focused on the series *24* that the intertextuality between popular culture and official discourses makes it impossible to distinguish fiction from reality. Similarly, this can be applied to Turkish TV series which have IR content, and the case this article will examine later, *VOW: Ambush*.

At this point, Nexon and Neumann's (2006: 11-20) four ways to research popular culture in IR, which they call *popular culture and politics*, *popular culture as mirror*, *popular culture as data*, and *popular culture as constitutive*, should be mentioned. The first approach, *popular culture and politics*, treats popular culture as causes and effects of political events of the kind depicted. For instance, if a television series affects an event in another country, that should be evaluated by this approach. The Greek Golden Dawn Party's protests in Greece after the popularity of the Turkish television series is an example of this approach. *Popular culture as mirror* approaches popular culture as a tool to show themes and processes and to make analogies between world politics and IR. It is useful when teaching IR theories, as in Daniel Drezner's (2014) *Theories of International Politics and Zombies*. *Popular culture as data* "draws on insights from hermeneutics, forms of content analysis, and ethnography, in which cultural texts and images are seen as storage places for meaning in particular society" (Nexon and Neumann, 2006: 13). Using this approach, popular culture can be treated as evidence for norms, beliefs, ideas or identities in a particular state since it can reflect cultural themes and ongoing political processes better than elite discourse. With this approach, popular culture is treated as a second-order representation which can reveal crucial facts about national identities. The final approach is *popular culture as constitutive*, which lifts the distinction between first- and second-order representations because this approach attempts to understand how popular culture shapes first-order representations such as in the way in which it reflects a politician's speech or a column in a newspaper. This approach also deals with determining, informing, enabling and naturalising ways which can be constituent effects in international politics.

In this current study, I suggest the *popular culture as data* and *popular culture as constitutive* approaches since there can be a relationship between a television series

and Turkey's domestic and state identities. As a second-order representation, the television series related to the TFP can be investigated. In constructivism, state identities can determine the foreign policies of a particular state and these identities are constituted not only as a result of interactions with other states but also by domestic identities which are affected by culture. State identities are not static; they can be altered according to relations with other states or when domestic identities are affected by new political actors, or when a hegemonic power emerges. A new hegemonic power alters the narratives, norms, ideas and discourses in the political and social spheres to secure its hegemony and popular culture reflects this as well. These television series can be treated as *data* from which to examine the extant hegemony in Turkey since they reproduce political discourse and the narratives of state officials. The popular culture as constitutive approach can be used as well because of the intertextual meaning created by popular television shows such as *Valley of the Wolves* and other political texts. This intertextual meaning abolishes the line between reality and fiction. Also, when the reception of television shows is investigated it is seen that the series reproduces the speeches of politicians and sometimes these politicians and the media reproduce discourses and representations in television series in real life. It can therefore be claimed that this intertextuality lifts first- and second-order representations and makes what the representations in the political level commonsensical.

Here the dual processes of articulation of the meaning and interpellation to the subject identities become crucial because representations of international politics become commonsensical as a result of them. Social constructions appear as natural and become common sense when they have defined the relation of meaning to reality as one of representation. Thus, they become common sense if they neutrally represent the real. Common sense therefore "entails the reification or naturalization of constructed representations of the world, thereby obscuring their constructed nature and their ideological effects" (Weldes, 1999b: 226). Through the processes of articulation and interpellation, the naturalness of representations is created. This may be the explanation for why more people in Turkey do not oppose the foreign policy of supporting the opposition groups in Syria such as the Free Syrian Army. The articulated representations within the security imaginary and the interpellation of state identity in the TFP may make individuals, at least partly, give their consent for these policies. A television series which reproduces that identity may have a role in this process as part of a second-order representational role. Hopf (2002: 35) claimed that "popular fictional works are an especially important source of identity and its discursive practices". Therefore, the discourses of state officials and the television series in the frame of identity construction for foreign policies can be examined to show how Turkish governments, the media and the television series reproduce those discourses, representations and identities as a result of intertextual meaning. In the next

section, I will explain the processes of articulation of the meaning and interpellation to subject identities.

2. ARTICULATION OF THE MEANING AND INTERPELLATION OF THE SUBJECT IDENTITIES

So far in this article, I explained the approaches to popular culture in IR and ways to study it in the context of consent creation for foreign policies. In this section, I will explain the processes of the articulation of the meaning and interpellation of identity to show how they can constitute a national interest for states and constitute a starting point to study popular culture in IR. These processes are crucial because if the national interests of a state are altered, it means that the representations and discursive practices of state officials can have a role in the legitimacy of foreign policies. First, therefore, I shall explain what articulation of the meaning is. According to Lawrence Grossberg (1992: 54), articulation is "the production of identity on top of differences, of unities out of fragments, of structures across practices. Articulation links this practice to that effect, this text to that meaning, this meaning to that reality, this experience to those politics. And these links are themselves articulated into larger structures, etc.". These practices include linguistic resources or cultural materials of their time period, and meanings are produced through these processes. Stuart Hall (1985: 113, note 2) described articulation as:

> A connection or link which is not necessarily given in all cases, as a law or a fact of life, but which requires particular conditions of existence to appear at all, which has to be positively sustained by specific processes, which is not 'eternal' but has constantly to be renewed, which can under some circumstances disappear or be overthrown, leading to the old linkages being dissolved and new connections-re-articulations-being forged.

With these processes or structures, different terms, concepts and ideas are linked to each other and they come to connote one another because they are connected with each other by discursive chains (Hall, 1985: 104). These processes are pertinent in a particular society since meanings can change from one society to another. Some linguistic elements have meanings for Turkey whilst they have no meanings for other cultures. For instance, the word *capulcu* was used by Erdoğan during the *Gezi Parki* events to describe the young people who attended the events. Although the word means simply 'marauders', shortly after Erdoğan had used it with other words such as 'separatists', 'tongs' (as tools of foreign powers) or 'terrorists', *capulcular* began to invoke those meanings and connotations that the protestors of *Gezi Park* were controlled by powers outside Turkey who want to divide Turkey (Idiz, 2013). By doing this, Erdoğan was articulating the Gezi protestors with external powers who 'make evil plans' over Turkey: "With their successful repeated articulation, these linguistic elements come to seem as

though they are inherently or necessarily connected, and the meanings they produce come to seem natural, come to seem an accurate description of reality" (Weldes, 1999b: 98-99). However, it is important to say that articulation does not always lead to one specific meaning. Although *capulcu* connoted the meanings that the JDP wanted in specific groups, among other groups it has different meanings, such as people who 'act in a peaceful and humorous manner to remind governments why they exist' (Harding, 2013). It should therefore be emphasised that there are two important consequences of articulations: they must be repeated vigorously and the meanings which they create can be broken and contested with other meanings.

Weldes discussed the degree of freedom which exists in the construction of articulations, and thus the meanings of international relations. She wrote that

> There is no simple or abstract answer to this question; rather, it is an empirical issue that requires a response grounded in extensive empirical analyses. Such analyses would demand an elaborate investigation of, among other things, the range of interpretive possibilities permitted by the security imaginary within a particular situation at a particular historical juncture and the constraints placed on possible articulations by extant power relations. (Weldes, 1999b: 102)

Then, this approach can be elaborated with specific situations such as relations with Syria or Israel, and Turkey's security imaginary in the light of the transformation of TFP. Constructed articulations for these specific relations and how they are used in the speeches of state officials can be analysed. When these articulations are reproduced in the television series, they would be repeated not only by television news channels but also by popular culture products.

The second process which will be discussed is the interpellation of subject identities. After meanings are articulated for foreign policies or the security imaginary to construct national interests, the interpellation of subject identities constitutes the second process. Althusser (1971: 174) described interpellation as that "ideology 'acts' or 'functions' in such a way that it 'recruits' subjects among the individuals (it recruits them all), or 'transforms' the individuals into subjects (it transforms them all) by that very precise operation which I have called interpellation or hailing". It refers to a dual process in which subject identities are created and individuals are hailed into or interpellated by those subject identities (Althusser, 1971: 174-175).

Specific subject positions or identities are created when social relations are depicted; there are different descriptions of world politics and individuals position themselves according to these descriptions: "Each subject position or identity carries with it particular ways of functioning in the world, is located within specific

power relations, and is characterized by particular interests" (Weldes, 1999b: 104). A state creates many subject identities including that state itself and other states, and in the central subject position or identity, there is that state itself. For instance, in Turkey's security imaginary, Turkey is in the central position and the existence of Turkey is created as a subject by the security imaginary of the Turkish state: "Out of an abstraction designating a territory, a population, and a set of governing principles and apparatuses is created an anthropomorphization, the fiction of an apparently acting subject with motives and interests" (Weldes, 1999b: 104). This fictional Turkey has a specific identity and that identity has specific interests. As a result of the interpellation of this identity, Turkey positions itself as the central object of discussions of TFP and national interests and becomes the central object of the security imaginary which is responsible for the security of Turkey.

Weldes claimed that these subject positions or identities are provided by state elites according to individuals' self-understandings and experiences. Individuals who construct national interests are hailed by specific representations of state identities because those representations are also a part of their experience. Weldes (1999b: 105) explained this as follows:

> Imaginaries and the representations they enable describe to individuals in a recognizable way the manner in which they live their lives; they construct and entail subject positions or identities from which both perceptions of the world and perceptions of the self make sense. As a result, the representations appear to be common sense, to reflect 'the way the world really is'. As a result, individuals can speak from the identities – the subject positions – entailed in the imaginary. That is, subjects 'recognize themselves in the discourse' and as a result they can 'speak it spontaneously as its author'. It comes naturally because it accords with their (already constructed) self-understandings.

In interpellation, therefore, people accept or adopt an identity, in this case related to foreign policy, which is articulated by state officials. Individuals are hailed into or interpellated by specific identities through reiteration of the imaginations of selves and others. They give their consent to, or actively embrace, representations when they make sense of the identities. Within the frame of cultural references and common vocabulary, state officials attempt to speak in a language which resonates with their people (Klotz and Lynch, 2007: 80).

When we think about interpellation in the case of Turkey, it can be given as an example that there are identities which come from the time of the foundation of the Republic. People are interpellated by these identities, such as Turkishness or anti-imperialism, and give consent for these identities when, for example, there is an issue about Turkmen (Turcomans or Iraqi Turks) in Northern Iraq or when state officials raise arguments about external powers which aim to divide Turkey, as they attempted with the Sevr Treaty in 1920. Moreover, more recently, attempts

have been made to create new identities such as neo-Ottomanism, and state officials have used discursive practices to make references to Turkish history, mostly Ottoman history, in order to interpellate this identity which had come with the foundation of the Republic to legitimate their foreign policies.

However, last thing should be mentioned to link all these processes together, intertextuality. Lene Hansen (2006: 49) explained that the meanings of a text is not fully given by the text itself, in fact other readings and interpretations give it meaning, and this is called intertextuality:

> "It [intertextuality] highlights that texts are situated within and against other texts, that they draw upon them in constructing their identities and policies, that they appropriate as well as revise the past, and that they build authority by reading and citing that of others. It points analytically, politically, and empirically to seeing official foreign policy texts—statements, speeches, and interviews—not as entities standing separately from wider societal discourses but as entities located within a larger textual web; a web that both includes and goes beyond other policy texts, into journalism, academic writing, popular non-fiction, and, potentially, even fiction".

Then, not only other foreign policy texts but also popular culture texts can be included to the intertextual reading of foreign policies, in this case the TFP. Weldes (2006: 180) stated that

> The concept of intertextuality is useful here. This notion draws our attention to the fact that texts, whether official or popular, high or low, are never read in isolation. Instead, "any one text is necessarily read in relationship to others and . . . a range of textual knowledges is brought to bear upon it" (Fiske 2011, 108)… Intertextuality allows us to illustrate and explain the often striking similarities in the way world politics are officially narrated, the way academics represent world politics, and the way stories are told in popular media. Intertextual knowledges— a culture's popular "image bank"—"pre-orient" readers, guiding them to make meanings in some ways rather than others (Fiske 2011, 108).

As mentioned before, Van Veeren (2009: 364) claims that television series "can be considered an important and useful example in the production of intertextual meaning …. By both (re)constituting and drawing on the same (re)presentations of 'reality', the intertextuality of popular culture and world politics helps to make the world intelligible". This leads to the claim that if a Turkish television series reproduces the same foreign policy discourse on the same representations in the TFP, it helps to make the TFP intelligible for the viewers. Moreover, intertextuality between the discourses in a popular television show and official discourse of the politicians makes it impossible to distinguish reality from

fiction and as a result, this makes that television show a crucial data to analyse the TFP. As a result, articulated meanings in the sphere of the TFP, can be reproduced by the popular culture products and this creates an intertextual meaning which may support interpellation process for these specific foreign policies and produce consent. That makes popular culture products a part of foreign policy analysis.

3. *VALLEY OF THE WOLVES: AMBUSH* AND TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY

In this section, I will analyse one of the most popular Turkish series, *Valley of the Wolves* and how it may have ability to create consent for specific foreign policies of Turkey. This television series reproduces the same security imaginary of the JDP politicians. According to Weldes, a security imaginary is "a structure of well-established meanings and social relations out of which representations of the world of international relations are created" (Weldes, 1999b: 10). She stated that these representations are constructed by the state officials who are responsible for foreign policy decision-making. When the discourses, meanings and representations used by the JDP politicians are investigated, it can be seen that these representations related to the TFP can be seen in the series as well. In this section, I will explain one of these representations in the TFP of the Davutoğlu Era and how *VOW: Ambush* reproduces it and helps to create intertextuality.

During the term of Ahmet Davutoğlu in foreign office between 2009-2014, Turkey sought to increase its activity in former Ottoman spaces such as the Balkans, the Caucasia and the Middle East with the ambition of becoming a regional soft power. This new pro-active foreign policy in the neighbouring regions where Turkey has common historical and cultural ties discussed in Turkish academia as whether or not the policy was Neo-Ottomanist (see for example Aras, 2009; Çandar, 2009; Keyman, 2009; Kardaş, 2010; Sözen, 2010; Taşpınar, 2011; Yanık, 2011). This article will not discuss whether the state identity was Neo-Ottomanist or not at that time, yet, it will explain one of the representations in the security imaginary: the representation of the defender of the oppressed in the Middle East.

This representation legitimised the TFP's increasing activity in the Middle East. In the discourse of the JDP cadres, it can be seen that Turkey has always taken sides with the weaker and the oppressed (*mazlum*). This feature of the state identity makes Turkey right in her policies on the authoritarian regimes in the Middle East. When the speeches of the JDP leaders are investigated, it can be seen that these policies are constructed as if Turkey is supporting her oppressed brothers against their oppressors (*zalim*). This oppressor/oppressed approach has been used many times. For instance, Davutoğlu said in 2014: "We never asked the Syrian refugees 'are you Sunni or Shia or Nusayri [Alawi]? Are you Arab, Turkish or

Kurdish?' we did not ask. When they came to our border, it was a divine duty to protect them and as long as we are on this land, with these responsibilities, on these weak shoulders, Allah is our witness that we never abandon the *oppressed* to the *oppressor*" (Davutoğlu, 2014a). In another speech, he said: "We have always been on the same side as the *oppressed* and against the *oppressor*, and we will continue to do that. No matter how hard a time they give us, no matter what conspiracies they make, Syrian Turkmens, Syrian Arabs, Syrian Kurds, Syrian Muslims, Syrian Christians, Syrian Sunnis, Nusayris, all Syrians should know that we will continue to be on their side with all our capabilities" (Davutoğlu, 2014b).

There are other examples of this oppressed/oppressor discourse. In a speech in 2013, then PM Erdoğan said:

> We will always be in the same side as the *oppressed*. You have seen Baniyas [Syria], you have seen how children were massacred. Every day, tens of women are massacred and raped in Syria. The ones who say 'Syrian refugees should go back', I wonder how they can look their neighbour in the face … We are not a racist nation, we are not selfish. What makes us a great nation is being on the same side with the *oppressed* in the hard times (NTV, 2013).

This discourse was used also in policies on Turkish-Israeli relations; Erdoğan said that

> We have always felt the sorrow of Palestinians and we are a nation that has never stayed silent about injustices and inhuman conduct against them. The situation of Palestine, for us, has always been a symbol of the agony of all *oppressed* communities. Each piece of bad news coming from Palestine has torn our hearts out, every piece of good news relieves us (CNN Turk, 2012).

It is clear that the discourse of oppressed/oppressor is relevant in many foreign issues within the frame of the TFP. It is important to say that this discourse is used with historical references from Turkish history. This leads this feature to articulate with the new identity in the TFP which put importance to common historical ties with former Ottoman lands. For example, Erdoğan said that

> Turkey is a great country, which is something which some people are unable to comprehend. With its history, ancestry and civilisation, Turkey is a great country which will never be silenced… For a thousand years, we have never allowed one brother to massacre another, one Muslim to massacre another, and we have never allowed sectarian conflicts to happen. We have always been a negotiator and have taken sides with the *oppressed*. We have always been understood to promote peace, to reconcile brothers … You see that the Seljuk sultans were against the oppression and on the same side with the *oppressed*. Look at

> the Ottoman world state. You see a comprehension which is integrative, unifying, siding with the union of forces and partnerships created by fate; not pillaging, exploiting, blood shedding. You see fleets sent to deal with oppression in the Indian peninsula and Aceh, Indonesia … (Milliyet, 2013).

According to Erdoğan, we, the Seljuk Turks, the Ottomans and now Turkey under the JDP rule, as Muslim Turks have always promoted peace in these regions and even in the far Islam lands such as India and Indonesia. However, he did not mention anything about the Christians or the Jews as 'others' or any non-Turkish and non-Muslim subjects of the Ottoman Empire as 'selves'. This approach articulates Turkishness to Islam and shows that the state identity gives Turks a duty to help their oppressed neighbours in the Middle East.

In another speech, Erdoğan talked at Gallipoli commemoration and used the same discourse:

> They tell us why we are so interested in Palestine. Because here, in Çanakkale, there are martyrs from Jerusalem. They ask us why we are so interested in Syria. [The answer is] because there are martyrs from Damascus, Aleppo in Canakkale. Go to Syria, there are martyrs who were *Mehmetcik* (Turkish soldiers). If they helped us 98 years ago, we will be on the same side with them in their hard times … We have always been on the same side as the *oppressed*, and we will. Because, the Battle of Gallipoli commands us to do so (T24, 2013).

Again, here, Erdoğan was seeking to articulate the Battle of Gallipoli, which has an historical importance for Turkish nationalists and gives them an Islamic mission as well as a nationalist one. Events in Turkish history are articulated with this oppressed/oppressor discourse for both nationalist and Islamist people in Turkey. His narrative about the important events in Turkish history articulates their meaning to Islamic features and creates a naturalising effect for individuals. This feature becomes intelligible for the people who share Islamist and nationalist identities.

These speeches of Erdoğan and Davutoğlu constitute the first-order representations for individuals in Turkey. While these discourses were in circulation in Turkish media, individuals who also watch *VOW: Ambush* were subjected to these discourses as well since the series reproduced the very same discourse and representation. This created intertextual meaning for the consumers of the series and as discussed above intertextuality of a popular culture and politics can make the TFP intelligible. Then, *VOW: Ambush* will be analysed in the following section and its importance in consent creation will be investigated under three headlines: production, articulation and interpellation.

The Production

VoW: Ambush is one of the longest-running productions in Turkish television history. It started as *Valley of the Wolves* in 2003 and has continued to become one of the most watched television series since then, and this popularity of *VoW* and its content make it a perfect case for this research. *VoW: Ambush* holds the record for the most watched TV series on the internet with more than four million people per episode (Radikal, 2016). *VoW* has an ability to reach an enormous number of people and this distinguishes it from the other television series in the same genre, political action thrillers. The first four seasons were aired under this name until 2006 and in 2007 the series restarted as *VoW: Ambush* and continued until 2016.

The first *VoW* consisted of four seasons and 97 episodes. Each season continued to tell the same story: Polat Alemdar, the main character, infiltrates the Turkish Mafia structure under a mission for the Turkish 'deep state' organisation. The main goal of the mission is that he should become the leader of the Mafia structure by eliminating other Mafia leaders and as result will be able to rescue Turkey from these harmful organisations. In these seasons, he accomplished his mission by dealing with Mafia leaders who were supported by internal and external 'dark forces' led by American/Jewish organisations and even a secret organisation called the 'Templars'.

The first four seasons had a nationalist characteristic and fed by popular conspiracy theories relating to the Turkish Mafia throughout the 1990s and the early 2000s. Whereas there was continuity in the plot across the first four seasons of the original *VoW*, the same cannot be said for *VoW: Ambush* where the plot has been shaped in line with contemporary political and social developments. The first season of *VoW: Ambush* started in 2007. There were ten seasons and 300 episodes. In the first four seasons of *VoW: Ambush*, Alemdar waged a war against the Gladio structure within the Turkish 'deep state' and businessmen who had relationships with a consortium consisting of 'deep states' in Russia, the US, China and the EU. Alemdar and his team fought against these groups which were the remnants of 'old' Turkey and which carried out assassinations of politicians and other businessmen. In the fifth and sixth seasons, Alemdar and his team dealt with a Kurdish terrorist organisation (representing the PKK in Turkey) which was supported by 'dark' external forces such as Mossad, the CIA and Al-Mukhabarat.

Whereas the first six seasons of *VoW: Ambush* focused mostly on domestic developments in Turkey, the seventh and eighth seasons covered a story related to international politics. In these two seasons, Alemdar deals with international issues such as the Syrian crisis. He carries out operations in Egypt and Syria. Moreover, whilst he was the leader of the secret organisation, the KGT (Organisation of Public Security) in the first six seasons, he becomes the leader of

the regional KGT which is responsible for the security of the neighbouring regions, such as the Balkans, the Caucasus and the Middle East.

Articulation

VoW: Ambush created antagonism between Turkey and the external and internal powers that are a threat to Turkey. In the series, the 'others' are shown as evil. For instance, there are foreign villains carrying out inhuman activities such as Jewish organ traffickers, American child kidnappers and Syrian torturers. These characters do not just constitute a threat to the main characters but also to civilians in Turkey and other countries in the region. They are therefore represented as a part of general oppression in the Middle East. In episode 171, Alemdar undertakes an operation in order to kill a member of Al-Mukhabarat who has tortured members of the Free Syrian Army, killed civilians and kidnapped children in Syria. This operation lasted for four episodes and creates opposition between Bashar Al-Assad and Turkey: it depicted Assad as the oppressor and Alemdar (or Turkey) as the saviour of the oppressed in Syria. During this operation, in episode 171 (1:30:05-1:31:00), for instance, Alemdar and his team see a group of people, including women and children, walking barefoot and in very poor condition. We are led to understand that those people are very miserable and 'oppressed', as stated in previous episodes. From how they look, it can be understood why Alemdar and his team felt pity for them. In another scene, Assad's picture is shown hanging in the office of the Al-Mukhabarat officer. In one scene in episode 171, a member of the Al-Mukhabarat tortures a Syrian prisoner and eventually cuts his tongue off. Blood splashes across the wall right across Assad's face. By these scenes, the series articulated the Al-Mukhabarat and Assad as evil and responsible for the oppression of the Syrian people and showed that this was the reason why Alemdar has a mission in Syria. This gave a duty for Alemdar and his team.

Another articulation related to the defender of the oppressed representation is the organisation called Black Flag. This organisation has both Turkish and Islamic features and is represented as part of defender of the oppressed in the Middle East representation. Alemdar's right-hand man explains the meaning of Black Flag. He states that it was the battle flag of the prophet Mohammed. It was one of the first flags of the Turks. The Black Flag signifies being on the same side as the oppressed until the oppression ends (episode 210, 48:57). First, he explained that Black Flag has a religious meaning. Then, he articulated it with nationalist features by saying that it is part of Turkish history. Finally, these Turkish and Islamic features articulate into the defender of the oppressed representation with the Black Flag. Kara, the leader of this team, explained the main aim of the Black Flag organisation to the team members during their training: "Friends, Black Flag was founded to be on the same side as the oppressed and to face oppressors

anywhere" (episode 221, 22:51) and "Black Flag was founded to protect the rights of all oppressed people in the world and to save them from the hands of the oppressors" (episode 222, 31:14).

Interpellation

In the series, Alemdar and his friends are on the same side as the oppressed peoples in neighbouring regions, as explained above. According to them, Turkey and the Ottoman Empire before Turkey have always been on the same side as the oppressed. The Black Flag team which was formed on Alemdar's orders and operates under the leadership of Kara is very important for showing this solidarity between the Turks and the regional peoples. Alemdar and Kara are important characters for the interpellation process. Alemdar is the most popular character in *VoW*; there is a special bond between the audience and this character, people imitate him and there are many news stories related to this in the Turkish media.

In 2013, Necati Sasmaz, the actor who plays Alemdar, released a video for the 'oppressed' people of Egypt. In the video, he said "I appreciate your resistance for freedom and democracy. I believe that you will continue to protest patiently to demand real freedom and democracy …" (Hürriyet Daily News, 2013). Here, it can be said that Necati Sasmaz (or Polat Alemdar) was on the same side as the oppressed people in Egypt and was actively against the oppressor, Abdel Fettah el-Sisi. In the video, it is also important to note that Sasmaz was speaking on set in front of a wall in Alemdar's office. This might have an influence on the real/fiction division and increase the effect of *VoW: Ambush*. With this video, not only the people in Egypt but also Turkish viewers who identified themselves with Alemdar could understand that Alemdar (or Necati Sasmaz) was on the same side as the 'oppressed' Muslim Brotherhood and against the 'oppressor' el-Sisi. This identification with Alemdar could also 'hail' them to the position of Alemdar (or Necati Sasmaz) in the situation in Egypt and in other situations which create an oppressed/oppressor dichotomy.

A prominent columnist, Ertugrul Özkök of the daily Hürriyet (2014), argued that Alemdar was representing the 'oppressed' just as Recep Tayyip Erdoğan does and contributed to creating this intertextuality between the series, the production team and the Turkish media. He drew attention to a picture of Necati Sasmaz, Andy Garcia (who had come to Istanbul to play a role in *VoW: Ambush*) and himself. In this picture, all three men are wearing suits; whilst Andy Garcia and Ertugrul Özkök have a handkerchief in the top pocket of the suit, Necati Sasmaz does not. Özkök stated that he had never seen a handkerchief carried this way in a suit worn by Erdoğan. According to him, both Erdoğan and Sasmaz are therefore representing the oppressed people. After this analysis of the photograph, he claimed that "… there is no other feeling in this community which brings gain

as oppression does" (Hürriyet, 2014). So Özkök thought that Erdoğan and Alemdar represent oppressed people and the viewers of the series who identify themselves with Alemdar might also may identify themselves with Erdoğan.

It is also important to state that viewers can identify themselves with the Black Flag organisation because of its oppressed/oppressor dichotomy, its aim and its foundation by two favourite characters, Alemdar and Kara. After this organisation was first introduced in the series, two pro-JDP newspapers, Star and Yeni Safak, covered it as news. In both newspapers, the religious feature of the organisation was emphasised and its meaning was described (Star, 2014; Yeni Şafak, 2014). Although in those news stories there were no references to the representation of the defender of the oppressed in the Middle East by using the oppressed/oppressor discourse, it can be said that there were references to the Islamist articulation in the series. In the news items, it was stated that "after 1400 years, the black flag known as the flag used by our Prophet is unfurled once more in *VoW* … This flag has been kept in the Topkapı Palace with the other Holy Relics since the sixteenth century". It can therefore also be said that these news items were mixing up reality and fiction by portraying a development in the series as if it were real and by backing it up with facts from real life, and as a result they narrowed the line between reality and fiction.

Furthermore, it is understood that the organisation of Black Flag was widely accepted by viewers. After this fictional organisation was introduced in the series in 2014, an increased frequency of searches for the words 'siyah sancak' ('Black Flag') was seen in the Google search engine.

Figure.1: Interest over time in the term 'Siyah Sancak' (Black Flag) (Google Trends Search (2012-2016)
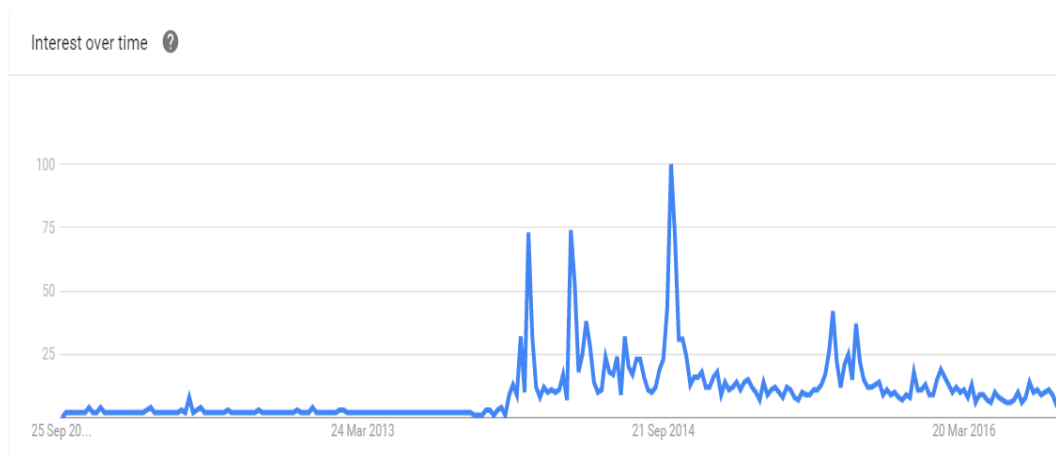
Figure.2: Monthly Searches in Google, Aug 2014-Jul 2016
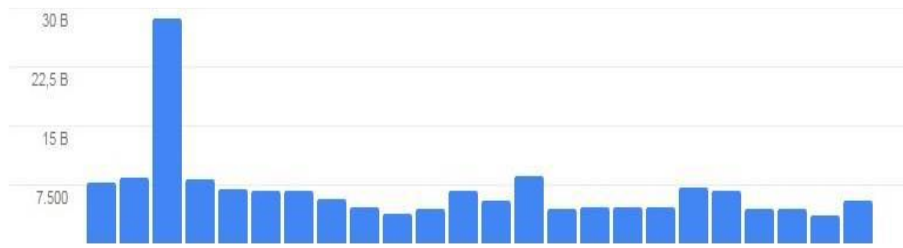
Also, there is a pro-JDP Facebook page with the same name, and it has more than 230,000 followers (Siyah Sancak, 2019). When this page is investigated, it can be seen that it shares pictures and videos of Erdoğan and JDP politicians. So, it can be said that although the page uses the name 'Black Flag', it is not actually about Black Flag, it mostly shares pro-JDP posts with its followers more recently. In addition to all this, there are three books related to Black Flag all written by the same author, Ali Kuzu. The first one, simply entitled Black Flag, was published in 2014 and the others, *Black Flag: Pandora's Box* and *Black Flag Occupation Plan of Turkey: Code Name 96 Hours*, were published in 2016. It can therefore be claimed that this concept become very popular in Turkey after it was first introduced in *VoW: Ambush*.

Moreover, in 2015, the Twitter account and website of one of the members of the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), Sirri Sureyya Onder were hacked by a Turkish hack team calling themselves 'Black Flag', who released this statement:

> This account was taken by Black Flag. There is no reason for treason, there would be a price eventually. The homeland cannot be divided virtually and also cannot be saved virtually. We also do not have a thought like this. The Turkish Republic promises to live in this land in a brotherly way. Yet, what did you do? You chose to live in a dastardly way. Then, the under of the soil is fair for you. The first wave is Sirri Sureyya, who is going to be next? For every martyr report, we shall air your dirty laundry. Wait and see (Haberiyakala, 2015).

Then, it can be seen that the Black Flag concept in the series was accepted by viewers in Turkey and became very popular. As Weldes and Van Veeren stated, reiteration of the discourse is also very important in the interpellation process. Viewers who identify themselves with the characters are also exposed to the discourses and not just the images.

As stated above, the oppressed/oppressor dichotomy is used in many dialogues. This discourse is also a reproduction of the JDP elites' discourse, so it is important to say again that the audience is exposed to the same discursive practices; they are listening to the JDP politicians using the oppressed/oppressor

discourse during the day and in the evening they are watching Alemdar and his friends, the characters with whom they have aligned themselves, using the same discursive structures, and *vice versa*. For instance, while viewers watched episodes from 22 November to 13 December 2012 and in that same first week, Erdoğan used this discourse at the opening of the Kutahya Zafer Airport on 25 November 2012:

> …If we had backed the bloody-handed regime in Syria, they would have asked us 'what is your business in Syria?…They are uncomfortable that we are taking sides with the oppressed, the rightful, because they have always taken sides with the oppressors throughout their history (Hürriyet, 2012).

In addition to episodes 171-174 which showed Alemdar's Syrian operation, this discourse is reproduced in many other episodes. For instance, it is possible to see the same discourse in episodes 164, 165, 167, 171, 172, 174, 196, 197, 205, 212, 215, 216, 221 and 222 of Seasons 7 and 8. Again, when episodes of 221 and 22 were aired on 10 and 17 April 2014, in the same month, Erdoğan was using this discourse ubiquitously. On 29 April, for instance, he read a poem in a party meeting (these meetings are aired live on state television and mainstream television channels) written by the nationalist poet Mehmet Akif Ersoy. In the poem that Erdoğan read, there were lines such as "I cannot applaud oppression, I can never love the oppressor … If someone assaults my ancestors, I will even strangle him … I am an enemy of the oppressor but I love the oppressed …" (Akşam, 2014). So again, it is seen that *VoW: Ambush* reproduced the same discourse in the same time period, and by doing that it became part of the interpellation process.

It can therefore be said that this representation was created by the discursive practices of the JDP politicians and was reproduced and reiterated in *VoW: Ambush*. The JDP elites created a position in which Turkey was more active in the Middle East because Turkey was a regional power which had historical ties with the region and therefore had to do something for the oppressed people in the Middle East. The ubiquitous usage of the oppressed/oppressor discourse helped the elites of the JDP to interpellate people to this position. *VoW: Ambush* not only reiterated this discourse but also consolidated it visually and as a result reproduced the representation of the defender of the oppressed in the Middle East. Therefore, *VoW: Ambush* became part of this interpellation process and may have the ability to create consent for the TFP.

4. CONCLUSION

This article aimed to contribute to the TFP studies with an alternative way for foreign policy analysis by inviting popular culture. There are a growing number

of studies that looking at popular culture and world politics in the foreign academia. However, there is lack of study in the Turkish IR studies in terms of popular culture and the TFP although there were some examples in other fields such as geopolitics. By filling this gap, this article targeted to show how popular culture can be a good site for the TFP studies.

The article contributed to the relationship between popular culture and foreign policy and claims that popular culture can be an alternative site to study foreign policy analysis because popular culture products, in this case, a popular television series can reproduce the official foreign policy discourses and create an intertextual meaning which helps to create consent for foreign policies. It shows that not only the first-order representations are important but also second-order representations can be crucial for the TFP studies. For instance, in the case of the TFP, Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs makes a statement in relation to Turkey's policy towards Syria. This statement is reproduced by news on television in a direct, non-fictional way. However, if this statement and the meanings and representations in this statement are reproduced by a television series, it creates an intertextual meaning which can be more intelligible for the consumers (or fans) of this show. This show, also, helps us to understand commonsensical ideas, meanings and identities related to foreign policy in Turkish society. Popular culture products, *VOW: Ambush* in this research, create intertextual meaning with other representations, ideas or discourses and lifts the line between first- and second-order representations. Thus, popular culture can be treated as constitutive and as data as Nexon and Neumann suggested, and also it can be a resourceful field for academics who study foreign policy analysis.

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