

Articles (Theme)

CONSTRUCTING THE PAST THROUGH THE PRESENT IN NEWS DISCOURSE: THE CASE OF SOMA¹

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Abstract

Human experience claim limitlessness due to the temporal extension beyond the lifetime. Our extension to the past, the present, and the future is crucial for establishing meaningful connections among temporality, memory and representation. At the same time, representation of time and construction of memory are challenged by the complexity of global time, which fails to correspond to linear causality and positivist methodology. Considering these complications, this article focuses on two primary tasks. First, it considers different ways to conceptualize the past as a dimension of time in the context of social studies of temporality. Second, it investigates the construction of the past in news discourse in Turkey. Exposing connections between the temporality of the past and the construction of meaning in a specific socio-cultural context, our analysis attempts to connect temporality, culture, and politics.

Key terms

Social time, temporality of news discourse, linear past, cyclical past, timeless past.

HABER SÖYLEMİNDE GEÇMİŞİ BUGÜNDEN KURMAK: SOMA ÖRNEĞİ

Özet

İnsan tecrübesi yaşam süresinin ötesine geçtiği ölçüde sınırsızlığa işaret eder. Geçmişe, bugüne ve geleceğe salınımımız zamansallık, bellek ve temsil arasında anlamlı bağlantılar kurabilmek açısından önemlidir. Öte

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yandan, doğrusal nedenselliğe ve pozitivist metodolojiye uygun bir şekilde işlemeyen küresel zamanın karmaşıklığı, zamanın temsilini ve belleğin kurulumunu izlemeyi zorlaştırır. Bu çalışmada, farklı zamansallıkların yarattığı karmaşanın çözümlenmesine yönelik bir adım mahiyetinde, geçmişin kurulumuna odaklanıyoruz. İlk olarak, zamansallığa toplumsal perspektiften yaklaşan analizlerde farklı geçmiş kavramsallaştırmalarını ele alıyoruz. Ardından, Türkiye’de gazete haberlerinde geçmişin inşasına bakıyoruz. Özgül bir sosyo-politik bağlamda geçmişin zamansallığı ve anlamın kurulması arasındaki bağıntılara odaklanarak zamansallık, kültür ve siyaset arasındaki bağlantıyı açığa çıkarmayı amaçlıyoruz.

Anahtar Terimler

Toplumsal zaman, haberdeki söylemin zamansallığı, doğrusal geçmiş, döngüsel geçmiş, zamansız geçmiş.

Introduction

The multi-faceted and ubiquitous nature of time results in a high degree of temporal complexity with regard to conceptualizing social time and its representation in discourse. As a way to bypass this complexity, Adam (1990, 1995, 1998, 2004a, 2004b), Baert (1992), Bergmann (1992), Elias (1992), Greenhouse (1996), Nowotny (1994), Urry (2000), and other social scholars propose cautious treatment of generalizations concerning time and an extensive and intensive empirical orientation of temporal research. Considering these complications, this article takes issue with the conceptualization and construction of the past in news discourse with a view to the concept of memory. In so doing, we offer a brief account of the socio-political implications of temporality on the basis of the theorization of linear, cyclical, and timeless pasts as geometrical models. In this account we especially emphasize the way modern times are conceptualized-cum-experienced (and vice-a-versa) through the connections among life, death and memory. At the same time, correspondences are drawn between the temporal models and their conceptualization in terms of cultural distinctions between the East and the West. The discursive level of analysis, corresponding to the methodological requirement of contextualizing temporal research, involves investigation of the construction of the past in news discourse. In order to follow intricate temporal distortions and to relate them to the geometrical models of time and their cultural and political implications, the news articles on the mine

explosion in Soma, Turkey, in May 2014 are selected with a view to the political stances of Turkish newspapers. Correspondingly, the objective of this article can be defined as the investigation of connections among the temporal, the political, and the cultural aspects of the construction of the past in the present, in a specific political and cultural context. In the course of this investigation, social implications of potential correspondences and inconsistencies between the conceptual and the discursive levels of analysis of the past are also considered. The main argument of the study is that in the current stage of modernity in Turkey, the discursive extensions of socio-political dynamics imply a state of flux in temporality pointing at the risk of the colonization of the present-past and past-present by the “fallen present”.² Yet at the same time, we also reserve the dialectics inherent in the mode of fallen present—i.e., the niches that the corresponding temporal pattern contains, which, in turn, bear possibilities for a counter pattern. We pursue this argument in three main parts. In the first part, we offer a brief account of theorizations on time. The second part of the article is reserved for data analysis, where we try to capture the basics of temporality as reflected in the (re)present(ation) and/or re-construction of the Soma mine explosion as an event by selected newspapers. In the third and concluding part we relate the basic findings of the analysis to the socio-political dimensions of temporality.

Conceptualization of the Past: Temporality, Culture and Politics

Certainly, theorizations of time, as theorization in general, involve a historico-social dimension that is in direct connection with the existing dominant political structuration. It is in this respect that modernity—capitalism as its most persistent ingredient—has hosted the linear conceptualization of time as the dominant grounds for understanding human beings’ relation to life and death, and thus the construction of memory (For a succinct account of the conceptualization of life and death in modernity, see Mellor and Shilling, 1993; A detailed elaboration on the construction of memory—and especially

collective memory—can be found in Orhon, forthcoming, 2015). Yet, the dominance of linear conceptualization of time does not mean the exclusion of alternative and/or counter-conceptualization from our understanding of the world in general, and of our socio-political contexts in particular. Thus, containing an infinite number of orientations—clock time, natural time, individual time, industrial time, religious time—time has continuously enjoyed a status of a ubiquitous entity. Considerations on memory crosscut these orientations through classifying the varieties of experience: thus, analytical separation between individual and social memory, and between social and public memory (Orhon, forthcoming, 2015). Here temporality gains significance in that it is through time that memory along its different facets works through the intertwining of the past-present-future.

In the late twentieth century, clock time as a common standard started to lose its social significance. This is related to the increase in the intensity and complexity of temporal relations in late modernity, which hampered their synchronization with clock time. The characteristics attributed to late modernity—the decisive role of finance capital in the new accumulation regime, the dismantling of homogenizing total identities into multiple identities in the *subject* at once, the fall of class politics and the rise of identity politics, the alleged dismantling of state's active presence in the socio-political order and the rise of non-state actors, transcending the borderlines of the nation-states, as effective agents of global, national and local politics—also foresee the dislocation of the linear conceptualization of time from its mandate. Rather, what became gradually prominent is the global time. “Simultaneity, instantaneity, uncertainty and implication” as key features of global time do not correspond to classical dichotomies of traditional and modern societies based on strict distinctions among the past, the present, and the future—i.e., “linear causality and a positivist methodology” (Adam, 1995, p. 124).

The conventional dichotomy, along with the historico-social conceptualization of the linear and non-linear time, has been present in cultural studies and anthropology. It is built on scriptural traditions in Christianity and Islam, peculiarities of written traditions in the West and oral traditions in the East, historical mode of thinking in the West and non-historical thinking in the East, and other intercultural distinctions. Briefly, Western societies are considered to be dominated by the logical and linear conceptualization of time. This model of time is based on clock and calendar and is totally chronological, historical, successive and causative. This temporal pattern is contrasted to a rather chaotic and disordered representation of time in the East—cyclical or spiral, non-chronological and based on events.

These conventional considerations of geometrical temporal models lead to extremely rigid abstracts in the conceptualization of time. The idea of total historicity and total cyclicity has been consistently criticized by contemporary sociologists of time. One of the reasons lies in the fact that the line, serving as a basis of the linear-cyclical distinction, dichotomizes temporal models from the perspective of the Western, clock-based, Newtonian conceptualization (Adam, 1995). Consequently, this approach proves to be insufficient for analyzing mythical and historical temporalities in a qualitative way. Adam (1995) also criticizes the idea of total cyclicity declaring that past and future extension, foresight and planning are fundamental to all rhythmically organized beings. For, theorizing cultures in cyclical time would deny those societies the human characteristic of the relationship to life and death (p. 37). Honkanen (2007) points out that cyclical time, which is generally defined as the natural and authentic time of the ritual, incorporates such essential properties of linear chronological time as causality and succession. Besides, the order of events in cyclical temporal models is stated to be more crucial and unchangeable than in linear ones due to a cycle's connection to nature (Honkanen, 2007, p. 8). The multidirectional development of cyclical time is maintained

by events happening one after another in natural order and repeating themselves after the point of closure. As a result, cyclicity presents an alternative to chronology, which is definitely not anti-linear.

Considering the multi-faceted complexity of socio-political and cultural aspects of temporality, news discourse is particularly resourceful for the investigation of temporal representation in a specific socio-cultural context. News offer unlimited opportunities for diverse temporal distortions due to the combination of both chronological objectivity and atemporal performativity. Diverse news values summarized by Allan (2010), Bell (1991), van Dijk (1985, 1988b), and other theoreticians present both a balanced and contradictory account of recency and relevance, facticity and unambiguity, unexpectedness and deviance. Despite the fact that news deal with real events happening at now-time, its temporality challenges a chronological order of events due to the focus on a particular event and its newness. In other words, the temporal ordering is based on the descriptions of the “now”(s) of the “event”(s), rather than a linear positioning of the past-present-future, immersing the past into the present, while dismissing with the future. Hence the two-folded nature of temporality of news discourses: Going far beyond chronology, nowness offers extensive opportunities for theorizing qualitative aspects of time. Naming journalists “professional story-tellers of our age” and claiming that they “don’t write articles, they write stories”, Bell (1991, p. 147) eliminates discursive differences between news as information and news as narration. A strict arrangement of events, typical for linear sequence, and their causal succession, distinctive for chronological representation, appear overturned in news discourse. Considering that “media accounts of social phenomena have repercussions for how societies relate to their own histories” (Greenberg, 2002, p. 185), the selective approach for “immediacy” in news coverage results in an automatic conveyance of the state of affairs as it is (Greenberg, 2002, p. 193). Although the preference for nowness

dislocates the social and historical context of the event at hand, the news—as the (re)presentation of a particular now—always relies on a given past without the need to explicitly. The past can sometimes appear with “a predictive power” and/or in a naturalized form (Edy, 1999, p. 79). Yet in all its versions it works as a call for the readers to *remember* collectively (Ibid.).

In order to explore this complicated multidimensional temporality of news discourse so that to further associate it with the construction of memory, a comprehensive methodological approach exploring structural and semantic elements of discourse is required. A broad interdisciplinary theory of critical discourse analysis developed by van Dijk (1985, 1988a, 1988b, 1991, 1993) focuses on intricate mechanisms of the construction of temporality in discourse. Exploring micro- and macro-structures of news discourse and their dynamic interrelations from linguistic, cognitive, social and cultural aspects provides a comprehensive process-oriented account of temporality of news. Combining this approach with the structuralist theory of Genette (1972) seems to be quite promising in terms of investigating elaborate temporal features. Genette’s method of discourse analysis departs from the opposition between narrative and the story which is recounted by it. Distortions of the chronology of the story in the temporal structure of narrative discourse lead to temporal “infidelities” (Genette, 1972, p. 29). Genette proposes to outline these infidelities in narrative discourse by considering such aspects of temporal practices as order, duration, and frequency. Comparison of the order of events in the story with their arrangement in narrative leads to defining various types of anachronies—anticipation and flashbacks—or discordances between the orderings of the story and narrative. Comparing the duration of narrated events to the story leads to defining discrepancies in the speed of events, which include scene, summary, ellipsis, and descriptive pause in their variations. Frequency is conceptualized on the basis of the repetition of the unfolding of the story in narrative

and is classified into *singulative* and *iterative* types. Together with van Dijk's semantic and structural approach, comprehensive investigation of structural temporal properties developed by Genette (1972) gives a broad opportunity to explore news discourse both in a dynamic and static way, exposing sophisticated connections among the temporal, the cultural, and the political aspects of the construction of the past in specific socio-cultural contexts.

Using geometrical forms is one of the most conventional ways to represent temporal models. Images of time embrace the rhythmical duration of the cycle, the dynamic development of the spiral, the timelessness of the circle, the absolute eternity of the point, and the irreversible historicity of the line (Adam, 2004, p. 21). Among the multiplicity of these models, the circle and the line, referring to heterogeneous ideas about time, offer the most common grounds for understanding and relating to time. Along with linear and cyclical models, there are also "timeless times". Due to a lack of concern with time and categorizing social life in purely qualitative terms, such temporal structures cannot be technically abstracted in geometrical frames. In order to consider qualitative properties of the past related to the construction of memory, one needs to reach a reconciliation among diverse conceptualizations of the past in the context of cyclical, linear, and timeless temporal models and investigate their political and cultural implications.

The Cyclical Past

Being organically embedded in natural and social processes, the cyclical past is inseparable from actions and processes filling it: "It happens when it happens: the doing of a thing and its timing are indivisible, the action is not jostled into the hour, but the hour becomes the action and the action becomes the hour..." (Griffiths, 2005, p. 54). Due to the fusion of the past, the present, and the future, the temporal dimension of the cycle can be defined as "a totality of time" (Critchlow, quoted in Adam, 1995, p. 136).

Atwood (1988) vividly illustrates this temporal model in her novel "Cat's Eye", comparing time to "a series of liquid transparencies, one laid on top of another: ... You don't look back along time but down through it, like water. Sometimes this comes to the surface, sometimes that, sometimes nothing. Nothing goes away" (p. 3).

Crucial characteristics of the cyclical past can be considered in the context of the Meadean approach to temporality. According to Mead (1929), the past is closely linked with the present and the future. Although the past precedes the present, it is represented as memory images which are transported to the present. The meaning of past images is dependent on the present perspective and is constantly reinterpreted from the standpoint of the present in the light of new knowledge. As a result of these transformations, the passage of time and its representation turns out to be highly asymmetrical: the same real past is represented in different ways by different people at the same point of time; the same past events are represented differently by the same people at different points of the present. Mead (1929) claims that the cause of this asymmetry is the existence of one more passage of time, involved in the distinction between the present and the past. The passage uniting the present and the past is included in the present and provides the continuity of experience: "In this continuity of experience there is distinction of happening. There is direction. There is dependence or conditioning" (p. 235). Consequently, the result of such a transporting of the past to the present is not merely a juxtaposition of events, but "a succession of contents" (Ibid.; for a similar account see Edy, 1999).

The geometry of the cycle provides a successive order of events that are inevitably moving in one direction. The directionality of the cycle is more complex than that of the line. Cyclical succession repeats itself by changing its course at the point of closure, or the turning point of the cycle. However, it is not only the repetition that matters, but also the existence of the center of the temporal circle. Citing Critchlow

(Adam, 1995), the center is “the controlling point,” projected into the third dimension and therefore located “symbolically outside time and space.” It is “simultaneously the non-directional point and the non-measurable moment” (p. 136). This temporal model can be illustrated by the process of playing games. Time of the game is not only symbolic and located outside reality, but also potentially suggestive of actions in real time. In the process of playing games people are engaged in imagining the present using various symbols. The potential present is so spectacular and thrilling that it can make game players forget the real past, present, and future (Nikolin, 2007). Consequently, cyclical temporality presents an intricate combination of vertical dimension of time—symbolic and potential—and horizontal temporal dimension—real and specific. In this way, the cyclical past is located not only behind the present but also beneath it. These integral characteristics of the constantly evolving cyclical past make its deliberate preservation completely redundant.

The recurrent cyclical past, embedded in the present and the future, can be interpreted in the context of Eastern cultures as a result of the prioritization of eternal values and a lack of emphasis on human self-sufficiency. This temporal pattern is consistently observed in traditional miniature art of China, India, Iran, Japan, and other Eastern cultures. Parataxis as a general principle of representation in traditional Eastern art is manifested as a lack of subordinating relations between visual elements in miniatures, uniqueness of elements and their equal values (Erzen, 2012, pp.41-42). Objects and human figures are engaged in a constant swirling movement, where it is impossible to discern the far and the close, the early and the late. Due to a lack of order and hierarchy related to spatial and temporal perspectives, such miniature paintings are open for interpretations. These features are related to the type of agency and other crucial characteristics of cyclical actions. According to Greenhouse (1996), agency associated with cyclical time is concentrated in clusters. Every cluster is completed by

the point of closure, which marks the end of one cycle and the beginning of another one. Closure is evaluated as a social principle, coinciding neither with natural cycles nor with individual perceptions. Diverse degrees and patterns of the distribution of agency vary according to the shape of the temporal cycle and the position of the action according to the closing point.

As a result, the cyclical past can be defined as “temporalized” due to asymmetrical connections between the past, the present, and the future. Due to the interaction among constantly reinterpreted past, emerging present, and predictable future, a persistently evolving duration connects memory, perception, and anticipation. In other words, memory, perception and anticipation are intertwined, and constantly replace one another. Actually, this intertwining is currently reflected in the post-industrial, network societies of the West, which according to Virilio go through “time of an endless perpetuation of present” (cited in Murphie, 2002, p. 124).

The Linear Past

In contrast to the enduring past in cyclical temporal models, the linear past is isolated from the present and the future. This past is not embedded in actions and processes; on the contrary, actions are embedded in the past. Every action is located at a particular point on a timeline. Griffiths (2005) describes linear time as “a dead thing, a disembodied ghost no longer embodied in nature; the moment struck dumb by the striking clock, the deadening character of routines, schedules and endlessly counted and accounted time” (p. 54). Trying to visualize this temporal model, we can think of a river we pass in a boat. The boat floats in a specific direction from the past to the future, leaving everything behind and having no chance to return to its previous location. Moreover, as the boat leaves no trace in the flowing water, the river continues to run in the same direction and with the same speed.

The linear past becomes a disappearing artefact due to its irreversibility, isolation from other temporal domains, and separation from actions and processes filling it. This model of the past corresponds to the conceptualization of history in Western culture. Conventionally described as a culture of memory and norms, it cultivates the concern that nothing should be forgotten (Schubert, 2000, p. 117). Originating in Christianity, the culture of museums, souvenirs, calendars, and clocks supports the view of the possibility of historical progress, transformation, and prosperity. In this context, linear chronological time is constantly and infinitely moving towards perfection, which is impossible to achieve.

According to Greenhouse (1996), in cultures with linear temporalities the distribution of agency is highly diffused. The history is created by the individual, conceptualized as the actor, who happens to be in a continual progressive movement from the past to the future. The characteristics of linear human actions confirm the disregard of the past and the priority of the future over other temporal domains. Constant movement towards future progress and perfection denies the past and leaves it behind as a lifeless memory. It might be argued that this is related to the infamous modern anxiety with uncertainty—which is actually inescapable in the future, but more acute in the past and the present. This anxiety is most manifest in the modern subject's inability to manage her/his experience with death. Thus, in modern temporality death lingers between the past and the future, creating a void in the past through enpresencing it. Memory is valued so long as it is functional to know and control the past; and death threatens memory (For a similar account see Huyssen, 2000).

The past in the context of linear temporality can be defined as “detemporalized” due to its relative independence and availability to be potentially used in the present or the future. The extracted past can be manipulated in various ways: exploited, controlled, colonized, or sold as a commodity (Adam, 2004a). In contrast to the

immediate past, which can be referred to as becoming, the objectified past is time as being, which is quantitative and absolute. In the context of the objectified past, time is abstracted from events filling it, in this way becoming empty, decontextualized, and atemporal. The chronological “events in time” pattern can be contrasted to the cyclical “time in events” pattern, in which the passage of time is highly contextualized and meaningful, observed in the immediate past. It can be argued that the two patterns seem to work together in the news coverage of the network society of late modern times: the cyclical pattern works through the emphasis on the nowness of the event at hand, while the chronological pattern is instrumentalized in selectively referring to the background to the event in order to appeal to the collective memory of the readers (See Greenberg, 2002; Edy, 1999).

In other words, the detemporalized past appears to be relatively independent from events and from other temporal domains. Due to its decontextuality, the linear past can be exploited as a resource in the present and the future. For this reason, deliberate preservation of the lifeless colonized past in the form of memories provides the possibility of control and manipulations of the past in other temporal domains. It is at this point that the (in)direct connection between the dominance of linear temporality in the modern era is revealed in the need for the construction of memories in accordance with the rise of nation-states with a claim to a more or less homogenous national identity, the consolidation of capitalism, requiring disciplined use of time—in terms of production and consumption—and the need to take the consent of the individual to political power through self-disciplinary practices.

The Timeless Past

Yet, late modern times are characterized with an additional conceptualization of the past, fitting well into the new methods of the modern man to come to terms with modern anxiety with uncertainty: “timeless past,” which cannot be represented in a

geometrical shape. One of the most essential characteristics of the timeless past is the lack of consistent causative connections with other temporal domains. Therefore, events taking place in the present appear unrelated to their background. In their turn, future events lose their meaningful connections with the present and the past. The domain of the past remains isolated from the present and the future as causative and successive relations between the temporal domains are interrupted. The agency related to “timeless” cultures is highly concentrated around specific points of transformation that are indicative of social significance. This process can be illustrated by the pulses of time in Navajo culture and shapeless continuity of time in ancient Indian philosophy (Griffiths, 2005, p. 57). And as implied above it appears as a hybrid form of temporality, inbetween chronological and cyclical patterns, which cannot be identified with either pattern but which trespasses the boundaries the two patterns set, in order to figure the agency in time and history. Although it presupposes lack of shape, “timelessness” is characterized by the highest concentration of agency generated as a single burst. Greenhouse (1996) defines the source of agency in this temporal model as the contrast between the social and the personal. This type of temporality involves multiple layers of histories that are insignificant in themselves, yet having critical importance in the present. Though the past and the present are chronologically and causatively unrelated, they act as forms, reflecting each other, and stressing a specific aspect of social reality.

The considerable weakening of the ties between the temporal domains leads to the blurring of the boundaries between the past and the present, the present and the future, and the past and the future. The situation, when “everyone has access anywhere with the potential to influence anyone” (Adam, 2004b, p. 4), is related to the temporality of information society. Fraser (1987) states that an ignorance of the past “deprives people of their sense of continuity” and dislocates them in history (p. 313). Murphie’s (2007) fallen present refers to this reading of irrelevance of history. “This present is

fallen away from itself, from historical purpose, and from future hope” (p. 126). It is shaped by the extreme acceleration of the speed and rhythms of “just-in-time production” (Ibid.). As a result of temporal reduction and compression, the present disappears as a process. The substitution of this process by sensationalism and the performance syndrome affects the past and the future in the same degree. The practices of the past, meeting with new networks, challenge history as a process and as a set of meaningful choices. The colonization of the future, which approaches the domain of the present and loses its importance, leads to its significant elimination. Evaluating this situation, Nowotny (1996) warns against the complete abolishment of the future as a category due to its predictability and replacement by the present. In fact, the same warning can be accurate regarding all temporal domains in the context of timeless temporality. Having lost their meaningful causative connections between each other and with actions and processes, the past, the present, and the future are disappearing as entities. As a consequence, the past resembles the fallen present, which is dynamically coupled with brain, body, world, and technologies. The characteristic of the fallen present as a series of “mismatched durations, relational disjunctions, and fragmentation”, introduced by Murphie (2007, p. 125) are not less crucial with regard to the “fallen past”.

In sum, the characteristics of the timeless past significantly differ from those of cyclical and linear pasts. Considering the absence of consistent causative and successive connections among the past, the present, and the future, timeless time can be conceptualized as a fragmented obscure entity that is impossible to measure and control. As a vital feature of “information society”, timeless temporality challenges the conceptualization of time in terms of geometrical models and necessitates different principles of categorization. Prevailing in Eastern cultural traditions, cyclical past, which is fused with the present and the future to form a continuously evolving

duration, does not need to be deliberately preserved. Conceptualized in the context of Western culture, linear past, isolated from the present and the future, needs to be preserved as a memory in order to be exploited as a resource. The timeless past trespasses the boundaries of other temporal domains; it seems impossible to be preserved or recorded. It exists neither as duration nor as a sequence. Due to its intangible and obscure nature, it is denied a status of an entity. Nevertheless, even though devoid of meaning and purpose, the timeless past is considered a vital element of the temporal delirium of network society (see Murphie, 2007). Or to put it differently, while the linear past might be considered an asset of the modernity as we have known since the late sixteenth century, cyclical one can be argued to belong to the pre-modern style of thinking, acting and living. Yet this rough categorization, reminiscent of and certainly with direct connections to the modern intellect that praises dichotomies—the East and the West, the modern and the traditional, advanced and backward, written culture and oral culture—is sharply contested by the timeless past of the late modern times.

In contrast to the discontinuous and obscure timeless past, the cyclical and linear pasts offer diverse considerations of living and dying. In cyclical conceptualization, life and death are considered to be one and the same in terms of temporality, thus leaving almost no grounds to understand the experience, and thus the construction of memory in-between the past and the present, and the present and the future. In other words, life and death in the cyclical eye, is both the present and the future, where the past flows through. Hereby, the cyclical conception of time privileges the natural order of the things vis-à-vis the subjectivity of human beings. The linear conceptualization, on the other hand, separates the two as polar opposites, permitting just a unidirectional relation—among the beginning, the development and the end—which is almost naturalized. At the same time, it identifies past with death, and as such reveals a

contradiction in terms by fixing death as the prospective end—the future, which is naturally reached. Apart from this naturalization, linear reading privileges subjectivity *vis-à-vis* the nature, thus portraying human beings in life as the ultimate masters of the world at large. In this respect, the two approaches fall short of providing an extensive reading of the life as a multi-directional process of living-dying or dying-living that does not necessarily privilege the subject or the nature, but which offers the grounds for an extensive reading of how time—and thus memory of human life—is constructed through experiences of living and considerations on dying. Timeless pattern of temporality, on the other hand, despite its negativities in terms of remembering through experience due to overemphasis on the nowness of performance also implicates the niches that enable the “action-oriented agent in present tense [as] its continuous series of deeds and movements” (Honkanen, 2007, p. 12) to link nows (...) to “fill” history with narrative,” (p. 5) and thus to recapture memory.

To conclude, three dominating patterns of the past, which can be defined as temporalized cyclical, detemporalized linear, and timeless, are represented by diverse types of agency and characterized by different types of actions. The seemingly unrelated characteristics of the past in different temporal models—its connections with actions and processes as well as relations between the past, the present, and the future—mirror each other in real temporal practices. Theorizing the past in the framework of the Meadean approach to temporality, in the context of industrial societies, and in network society fails to provide the grounds for a comprehensive analysis. The qualitative correspondences between diverse temporal models of the past and characteristics of actions are quite informative of how meanings are expressed and identities are formed.

Temporality of News Discourse: The Soma Case

The selected news articles are related to the tragic mine explosion that took place on May 13, 2014 in Soma, located in the western province of Manisa in Turkey. Causing death of 301 workers, this incident is considered the largest industrial disaster in the country's recent history. In order to follow the intricate temporal distortions and to relate them to the representation of meanings and memories in comparative perspective, 80% of the news articles, published during the first month after the explosion, are analyzed in selected newspapers. The newspapers are selected with a view to their political stances. The selected group is comprised of centrist,³ left wing, and right wing newspapers, published in Turkish. We also added a fourth category—social liberal—to our analysis in the pursuit of the analysis.⁴

In the analysis, three temporal domains are followed: the causes and other preceding events as a background of the mine explosion, the tragedy itself as the main event, and events following the incident as its follow-up. In this case, the mine explosion is conceptualized as the “first narrative” —“the temporal level of narrative with respect to which all types of anachrony [or temporal distortions] are defined as such” (Genette, 1972, p. 48). Although such a conventional distribution does not always correspond to morphological and syntactic structures of the news discourse, it seems crucial to follow this arrangement in order to preserve the correspondences between temporal structures and the socio-cultural context.

Newspapers of “the Center”: *Hürriyet, Milliyet, Sabah*

The analyzed publications of “the center”—*Hürriyet, Milliyet, and Sabah*—follow a complex temporal pattern, combining cyclicity, linearity, and timelessness. News articles fall into two categories: the first one contains information about the background of explosion, and the second one deals with the follow-up. The two chronologically

constructed patterns never intersect: news of the first type contains no proleptic, or anticipatory structures, and news of the second type lacks analeptic elements, or flashbacks.

For instance, articles presenting a chronological account of the causes of the mining tragedy identify the agents of the actions as unrelated to wider socio-political context. Thus, the connections among the governmental policies, the workings of the free-market, and the lack of sufficient safety measures for the operation of the mine is almost non-existent in the flow of the related news. For example, news on a skyscraper, constructed in İstanbul by the owner of the mine, Alp Gürkan, is highly illustrative of how the operation methods of privatization and their results unfold in the context of the chronological temporal model, which excludes the future and specified agents. Giving priority to production over work safety, the mine owner raised profits to invest them into the construction of the 47-storeyed sky-scraper in the center of İstanbul. The reported price of an apartment in that building—1.350.000 US dollars—is estimated to equal to the costs of five safe rooms in the mine. Considering that a safe room provides space for 200 people, it is not difficult to estimate that the cost of an apartment in the sky-scraper could save lives of 1000 people and prevent the explosion. The absurdity is highlighted by other facts. For instance, the cost of production of coal was reduced from 140 to 24 US dollars per ton due to the production methods of the private sector. Remarkably, the cost of an apartment in the sky-scraper is incompatible with the annual earnings of all workers at the Soma mining facility. These estimations, dealing with the developments preceding the mine explosion in Soma and their direct effects, create an extremely violent picture.

As a result, a successive causative chronological pattern forms a causal relation between the operation methods of the private sector and the explosion. However, this causal link is not formed with a socio-political and historical consideration of the

privatization process. In contrast, there is a tendency to “individualize” the representation of privatization, isolating it from state policies, and the larger political structuration. At the same time, the news articles do not relate the responsibility for the Soma incident to the wider privatization process—i.e., the government’s refusal to ratify The Safety and Health in Mines Convention of the International Labor Organization (ILO), rejecting the legislative proposal of the *Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi* (Republican People’s Party, CHP) concerning work safety in Soma in April 2014, inspection of mines by state controlling organs. Reasonably, these actions are expected to produce direct negative effects on the situation concerning work safety in Soma. However, in articles published in the newspapers of “the center” these matters are presented as quite unrelated to the tragedy in Soma.

Due to specifying the agents of the actions combined with the absence of connections between the background, the main event, and the follow-up, the explosion is presented either as chronologically conditioned incident, unrelated to state policies, and impossible to prevent, or as an unfortunate occurrence that can be fully compensated and prevented in the future. This duality can in turn be read with reference to the de-contextualization-cum-individualization of death as an individual matter (cf. Edy’s research (1999) on 1965 Watts uprisings in Los Angeles).

Newspapers from the left: *Evrensel* and *Sol*

News articles in *Evrensel* and *Sol* consistently follow a cyclical temporal structure, locating the mining tragedy in Soma inside the irreversible circle of life and death. The deadly explosion, acting as a point of closure, is embedded in the temporal cycle. Negligence over safety measures, irresponsibility, insufficiency of state controls over working conditions are presented as continuously recurrent and unpreventable issues leading to industrial accidents.

References to similar incidents in the past and present in Turkey point at continuity. For example, on the very next day following the Soma case a mine accident happened in Zonguldak, where a worker perished in a landslide. Notably, the time of the explosion in Soma coincides with another tragic anniversary: four years ago 30 mining workers lost their lives in a mining explosion in Zonguldak. Therefore, mine workers and their families at the same time paid tribute to the victims of both tragedies—in Zonguldak and in Soma. References to the two industrial incidents—one of them happening immediately after the Soma case, and the other taking place four years earlier—outline the geometrical shape of the cycle in an explicit and accurate way, indicating both succession and repetition of events.

Another point of emphasis in the news is on the relations between mine workers in Soma and the ruling party. Reportedly, workers of the Soma mining facility are forced to attend pre-election meetings organized by the ruling party and to give their votes for the respective candidates. Therefore, they contribute to the success of the ruling party and, as a consequence, to the further negligence over work safety issues. The ruling party is said to be especially concerned with the miners at the time of elections or funerals. In this respect, the sequence of elections, tragic incidents, and funerals corresponds to the vicious circle of life and death—the general temporal principle in the news coverage of the left-wing profile. Taken together, the emphasis both on the repetition in the coverage of Soma case—not as a unique incident—and on the repetition imbedded in the connection forged between electoral politics, mine explosion and funerals present a picture where the social and the natural are merged into a cycle. Here it might be apt to argue that the present in this cycle is *presented* as an extension of the past, while the latter is considered to have “predictive power”—i.e., to repeat itself (Edy, 1999, p. 79).

Religious Conservative Newspapers: *Yeni Şafak, Zaman*

Religious conservative newspapers *Yeni Şafak* and *Zaman* practice a linear chronological temporal model. In contrast to the pessimistic perspective of the left-wing newspapers, these publications sound promising and motivating regarding the prevention of the causes of mining explosions.

The idea concerning the preventability of mining incidents in Turkey is supported by the statistics cast their causes and respective death tolls from 2011 to the present. Moreover, a list of areas in Turkey with the highest rate of industrial incidents is available in the analyzed news articles. As a result, the background information related to mining incidents in Turkey from both diachronical and synchronical perspectives enforces the idea of possible control over the situation. All these means increase motivation and hope for a successful resolution of the problem. Being considerably independent from the present, this pattern of open future completely depends on human actions. The open character of the future is combined with causative succession of events in the past and in the present.

This temporal pattern is illustrated by the facts concerning an inspection in Soma in October 2014. The report of the inspection mentions seven safety issues, their causes, unfolding of accidents, and the following sanctions targeting the responsible parties. Mine accidents described in the document are presented so as to have occurred due to such technical reasons as fires, landslide, and explosions. The news contains recommendations for the prevention of such accidents: investigation of work safety issues, finding the responsible parties and bringing them to justice, and pursuing the required measures for pre-empting further accidents. Consequently, safety measures are expected to be taken to avoid further tragedies.

Carefully examining causative successive relations between the background, the main event, and the follow-up, the analyzed news articles suggest an optimistic

viewpoint on future developments concerning work safety. The open future offers a possibility to reform the negative past and to affect the tragic present. The explosion in Soma is described as not only unacceptable, but also preventable, which provides a potential for positive developments in the open future.

The Social Liberal Newspaper: *Radikal*

The controversial temporal pattern, combining characteristics of timelessness and cyclicity, is observed in most topics of the social liberal newspaper *Radikal*.⁵ The combination of timeless and cyclical temporal models in the social liberal newspaper is generated by the coexistence of two opposites. On the one hand, the mine explosion is represented as an unfortunate tragedy with weak causative connections to the past or the future. On the other hand, underlying the coverage of the Soma case is not only the presumption about the recurrence of events, but also an emphasis on causative connections between the past, the present, and the future. As characteristics of these elements seem quite incompatible, the coverage of the Soma case in *Radikal* is generally based on contrasts between unpredictability and consistency.

This controversial pattern is followed in the descriptions on the unfolding of the tragedy. On the one hand, references to a sudden explosion, panic, pointless speculations about possible reasons correspond to a timeless pattern. On the other hand, there are indications of neglect and irresponsibility leading to the tragedy and affecting the high death toll. For instance, due to the lack of maintenance, gas masks could not be effectively used at the time of the explosion. In an interview, a mine worker stated that his gas mask had never been inspected during the six years that he had worked at the mining facility in Soma. As a result, a contradictory temporal pattern—both chaotic and regular—evolves out of the unpredictable development of the tragic situation combined with its negative background.

The recurrence of industrial accidents, the possibility to detect their causes, and unpredictability of the mine explosion in Soma are presented by a confusing combination of diverse temporal models. Therefore, the tragic event appears to be potentially preventable. At the same time, being ignored by state officials and the public, the explosion is present as unpredictable and recurrent. Here, it is possible to relate this duality in the present(ation) to the negativities and positivities of the times of timeless temporality: On the one hand, one has to keep up with immediacy, with the speed of techno-information, with the ever-flowing nowness that dismisses not only with the past and the future but for that matter also with the present, and finally one has to live with the memory being coded into archives—thus with the dissolution of experience, individual and/or collective (Murphie, 2002). On the other hand, when the “political subjects” capacity to “fill” history with narrative is concerned, one tempts to note the niche that exists even in and through the pervasiveness of the will to immediacy in news discourse: the “total performance syndrome” that bears a mechanical mark in Murphie’s account might take an existential turn. As Honkanen (2007) puts: “Now-time also is vital for the subject’s ontological constitution. The concept of now-time enables us to comprehend ourselves as being part of temporal movement. ... We become visible by placing ourselves in various temporal presents” (p. 5).

Concluding Remarks

Analyzing the meaning of the present—and thus the past and the future—through news discourse is loaded with hindrances. First, the present in news coverage is limited to the “here and now” format in that it risks the human capacity to historicize the events. Second, in an era pervaded by network culture(s), the problem of coping with the risk of “total performance syndrome,” which dislocates the *political* from subjectivity, is ever more pervasive. Third, as the journalists themselves do not live in

vacuums that strip them off from their politico-historical subjecthoods it risks the colonization of separate news into a seemingly homogenous present frame. And finally, when the fact that news coverage cannot be spared from the dominant socio-political configuration of a certain context, the journalists' narrations carry the potential of presenting a version of the event(s) at hand as the only correct one. Bearing the risks in mind, starting from Greenberg's (2002) point that "social problems become "visible" to mass publics (...) only when they are socially defined within "knowledge or knowledge-processing" institutions such as the mass media" (p. 182), in this article we take issue with the representations of the past in news discourse. In so doing, we rely on a critical analysis of the temporal structures of news articles related to the mine explosion in Soma, Turkey, in May 2014 through the publications of "the center", of the left, of the conservative, and finally social liberal newspapers. Remarkably, each group of newspapers is characterized by a particular temporal structure of news discourse, which is not present in other groups. In the context of our analysis, special attention is paid to diverse types of temporal distortions related to the background of the "event" – the temporal layer preceding the first level of narrative. As a result, a diversity of temporal patterns corresponds to a wide range of interpretations of the Soma case:

- The responsibility for the event is denied: it is either chronologically conditioned by non-state/non-governmental agents and unpreventable, or unfortunate and compensated in the future when related to the state ("the center");

- The incident is unpreventable—under the existing circumstances—and thus, cyclically recurrent (left-wing socialist profile);

- The incident is unacceptable and potentially preventable in the future (religious conservative profile);

- The incident is potentially preventable, but ignored and therefore recurrent (social liberal profile).

It should be underlined that no consistent connections are observed among the representation of the past, the socio-political profile of the newspapers, and the conventional dichotomies of time that can be traced in cultural studies and anthropology. For example, a cyclical pattern, prevailing in Eastern societies and related to eternal values and lack of belief in human self-sufficiency, conflicts with the left-wing profile of newspapers. Similarly, the newspapers of the religious conservative profile follow linear temporal model, which dominates in Western societies that favor historical progress, transformation, and success. This mismatched combination of the cultural and the political is due to the peculiarities of agency, which is either abstract-and-general, or involving opposition parties and other non-governmental agents.

The mismatch between the temporal models, manipulated in the news and the political stances of the newspapers at hand can be understood with a view to the current socio-political dynamics in Turkey. Briefly, Turkey has been going through a socio-political structuration since the 1980s, which has accelerated in the 2000s. The turn of the 2000s in this restructuration process was characterized by an overwhelming cultural transformation, targeting the popular memory. In this respect, the past of the Republican regime in Turkey was covertly and gradually reformulated—in the education materials, in the media outlets, in the discourses and policy preferences of the governing cadres—so as to dissolve the decades-long dichotomization between *laïcité* and religion. The periodic economic crisis that accompanied this transformation also fuelled the flux in the conceptualization of the substance of the past-present-future nexus. And thus, the influx of the temporal models in a single political narrative on a mine explosion.

Temporal structures, representing the past in its relation to the present and the future, manifest deep connections between time, meaning, and agency. The representation of the past is realized at the intersection of the temporal, the cultural, and

the political. However, in our study, correspondences between cyclical, linear, and timeless models of the past and conventional cultural dichotomies between the East and the West are not transferred to socio-political contexts in a consistent way. As the consideration of time, culture, and politics are conditioned by specific socio-cultural settings, the characteristics of these components are often mismatched with one another due to the peculiarities of agency and meaning. All in all, this mismatch hints both at the turn in the experience with modernity, which has trespassed the East-West dichotomy and the reflection of the socio-political crisis in Turkey in news discourse at the temporal level. Here we should underline that the mismatch is not restricted to Turkey's contextual dynamics but it should be read in terms of late modern times, where the cyclical and chronological patterns appear simultaneously in the news coverage: the former works through the emphasis on the nowness of the event at hand, while the latter is functional in a selective reading of the background to event. Thus the temporal crisis can be considered in terms of the fallen present of late modern societies. A dialectical reading of the fallen present tempts one to conclude with the possibility of a counter temporal pattern, based on subject's potential for performativity filling in the blanks in the now(s) of the event(s) through history that evolves in her/his political present/presence (Honkanen, 2007).

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² Murphie (2007, p. 122-145) defines the present in the neoliberal times of late modernity—post-industrial network society—as one of “fallen” one where “nowness”-cum-performance is almost sacralized. His emphasis can read in terms of the inability to narrate the past—read as memory—but to accumulate it as an act in the present with no guarantees for the future.

³ Here we use “center” with a view to the political dynamics in Turkey, which took shape in the post-1980 era. The term connotes a certain understanding of the political, and a more or less consistent pattern of policy making. Briefly, it refers to the claim toward a moderate stance—meaning neither “extreme right” nor “extreme left”—de-ideologized conception of political activity, and a preference for free-market economics. On the part of the individual political preferences, it refers to moderate nationalism, moderate religiosity, and a preference for free-market economy (See Özman and Coşar, 2007; see also Vergin, quoted in Sever, 2002).

⁴ Here we added social liberal as a category for the recent shifts and relocations in Turkey’s political centre rendered the established conceptualization of the centre politics insufficient to host social liberal political identity.

⁵ Considering that timeless time, i.e. the temporality of nowness, has so far been understood as an asset of post-industrial, network societies, and that the past-present-future tripod is enmassed in the nows-cum-performance within the technological space of network society, as of June 2014 *Radikal* went totally online.