

American Myth Through the Perspective of Turkish Newspapers; After September 11

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Abstract

Depending on the general definitions of myth, the overall aspects of American myth have been studied through post-structural approach with respect to the headlines of 6 national Turkish newspapers issued between September 12 – 29, 2001.

Özet

Söylen kavramının genel tanımlarından yola çıkarak Amerikan söyleninin görünüşü 12-29 Eylül tarihleri arasında yayımlanan 6 ulusal Türk gazetesinin birinci sayfa manşetleri taranarak yapıtötesi yaklaşımla incelenmiştir.

Keywords *American Myth, Myth and News, Myth and Newspaper, Symbol and Myth, Myth and Turkish News, Globalization and Amerikan Myth..*

Introduction and Literature Review

In this research the collapse of the American myth in the context of mythical analysis concerning the September 11 attacks to the World Trade Center, the symbol of the wealth and technology of America as well as Pentagon, the temple of the war God of America has been studied. Being the voice of society and the mirror reflecting the thoughts, media cannot be isolated from myths. Therefore, in the September 11 attack, we have witnessed the recreation of mythology. This attack indicates the end of the great American myth. Thus, it also represents the fall of Pentagon as the brain of the US and the Twin Towers as the symbols of wealth. This comment has been formed through the analysis of the headlines of 6 Turkish newspapers between September 12 – 29, 2001. Thus, our objective in this study is questioning the American myth.

Considering different definitions of myth, Coupe's definition appears to be quite noticeable. Coupe suggests that myth is always in the process of being recreated. He points out a close connection among myth, language, narrative, history and imagination. Therefore, classic literature, contemporary film or popular song can only be understood after the mythic dimension is realised. Myths and dreams come from the same place.

They come from the realizations of some kind that have them to find expression in symbolic form. The future myth is going to be about the planet and what it will have to deal with will be exactly what all myths have dealt with. Thus, myth can be regarded as a public dream and events are repeated in forms myths [2]. Moreover, Freud states that psycho-analysis indicates the unconscious of people, on the other hand, mythology enlightens the unconscious of society due to the fact that myths offer a lens

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which can be used to see human identity in its social and cultural context-they can lock us up in stock reactions, bigotry and fear, but they are not immutable and by unpicking them, the stories can lead to others. Myths convey values and expectations which are always evolving in the process of being formed, but –and this is fortunate- never sets so hard. They cannot be changed again.

Furthermore, Mircea Eliade [3] credited myth with several functions. Myth serves to explain the origin of the world- the world as a whole and all phenomena in it. Myth serves to justify phenomena by tracing them back to a primordial origin. Within the same context, Coupe suggests that myth is typically a traditional sacred story of anonymous authorship and archetypal or universal significance which is recounted in a certain community and is often linked with a ritual that it tells of the deeds of super human beings such as gods, demi gods, heroes, spirits or ghosts; that it is set outside historical time in primal or ultimate time or in the supernatural world or many deal with comings and goings between the supernatural world and the world of human history by manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity.

Likewise, Campbell asserted that myth basically serves four functions; the first is the mystical function, the second is the cosmological dimension: the dimension with which science is concerned –showing you what the shape of the universe is, but showing it in such a way that mystery again comes through. The third function is the sociological one- supporting and validating a certain social order. The fourth function of myth, and this is the one that everyone must try today to relate to and that is the pedagogical function, of how to live a human life time under any circumstances. Myths can teach you that. Moyers suggests that the old story, so long known and transmitted through the generations is not functioning, and we have not yet learnt a new one [4].

Myths tell us how to confront, bear and interpret suffering. For Campbell, mythology is not a lie. Mythology is poetry; it is metaphorical and penultimate truth. Penultimate because the ultimate cannot be put into words. It is beyond the words, beyond the images.

Mythology pitches the mind beyond that point, to what can be known but not told. So this is the penultimate truth. It is important to live life with the experience, and therefore the knowledge, of its mystery and your own mystery. This gives life a new radiance and new harmony. Thinking the mythological terms helps to recognize the positive values in what appear to be the negative moments and aspects of your life [5].

Method

Sample (Corpus)

In the selection of sample, several national newspapers having different positions from right to the left wing have been determined so that all political views and ideologies can be reflected. Therefore, the newspapers; *Yeni Şafak*, *Türkiye*, *Sabah*, *Hürriyet* and *Milliyet* have been chosen as the sample of this research study. On the other hand, the newspapers with very low circulation rate, distributed to the readers only through subscription or those known as extremists (and that is why having a low circulation rate) have been excluded. *Yeni Şafak*, *Türkiye*, *Sabah*, *Hürriyet*, *Milliyet* and *Cumhuriyet* were scanned right the event, that is, September 12 until November 10. The scanned parts were the front pages and the headlines related to the event on September 11. With such an approach the field was limited and reviewing only the

newspapers issued between September 12 and November 10, 2001, practiced a secondary limitation. Such a limitation resulted from the fact that starting from September 29, the news related to the war began to lessen and the headlines having comments tended to decrease.

Content Analysis

457 headlines on the front pages of 6 newspapers published between September 12 and September 29, 2001 are related to the event on September 11. Right after that event, which obviously took place at a very unexpected moment for the world, all newspapers on September 12 and 13 reflected it by stressing the *appalling* aspect as well as the concept of the *end of an era and the beginning of a new one*. Considered as a kind of the beginning of a new era, the headlines reflecting September 11, 2001 and the following days have been selected in order to analyze the signification carried by this distinctive feature (trait pertinent) as well as the analysis of this signification.

The method used in this study is rather based on the analysis of the headlines having syntactic features from formal point of view with a structuralism approach. Although the structuralism approach does not completely match the theory and method of a particular structuralism school, determination of the terms taking place in the structuralism terminology of Ferdinand de Saussure [6] as the key terms and Umberto Eco's [7] approach involving the necessity of taking the text itself in the process of signification and analysis of text have been considered as the starting points. According to this approach, a body of triple intentions are taken into consideration in the perception of text: author's intention, reader's intention and the intention of the text. By excluding the author's, journalist or correspondent's intention as well as the reader's intention, directly the intention of the text itself, here the intention of the headline, has been considered as the primary and most important intention. Such an approach seems to be the one adopting the reality expressed by M. Riffaterre [8]. As we also derive from M. Riffaterre, analyzing the intention of the text is the requisite method (*sine qua non*) to comprehend the text due to the fact that the author and reader's intention cannot be determined objectively. Furthermore, analysis of the meaning of what is written and said is the method of structuralism. Thus, the structural analysis of each headline that forms the "building stone" of the whole structure has been practiced. In analysis of the structures, the functions of monemes and lexemes in the whole structure have initially been determined, and then synonymous and antonymous units of monemes and lexemes have been recorded with their reflections in syntagms. The method practiced to determine the synonyms and antonyms of these monemes and lexemes in a system was based on the methodological studies presented in *Structuralism Semantics* by A.J. Greimas, [9] which is considered to be the most important element in semiotic speculation.

As mentioned above, all these structuralisms and semioticiens are taken into consideration with regard to analysis. This analytical method has an eclectic aspect as well. A sort of classification obtained as a result of opposition and identicalness determinations will enable 457 microstructures to form a single macro structure. These microstructures, macro structures and superstructure shape the result of the analysis. This result depends on an empirical and deductive approach rather than a hypothetical and deductive one.

457 headlines that appeared on the front pages 6 newspapers between September 12 - 29, 2001 can be categorized in 6 main themes or topics with the above mentioned method: War, politics, religion, economics, American myth and the topics related to humanity (general, common topics).

1. War theme: There are 185 headlines related to this topic. The reason why there have been so many topics in media right after the event on September 11 seems quite obvious. The monemes, lexemes or syntagms included by the war theme manifest themselves in several variables.

1.1. The elements denoting that the war will begin or has already begun

- War News of the President of the USA
- Ultimatum
- US Soldiers' Campaign to Afghanistan
- Attack to Afghanistan

Examples from headlines:

- President of the US Bush: We will punish (*Cumhuriyet*, September 13)
- President Bush: This is a war (*Milliyet*, September 13)
- Ultimatum: Give (us) Ladin in Three days or else the war will break out (*Milliyet*, September 16)
- US Soldiers are at the border (*Milliyet*, September 28)
- First hot contact

1.2. Plummeting of the planes to the Twin Towers on September 11 was considered as a declaration of war and the newspapers presented it as an attack that may cause the third world war.

- Third world war
- The war of the 21st century

Examples from headlines:

- The first war of the (21st) century (*Yeni Şafak*, September 15)
- Like the third world war (*Hürriyet*, September 12)
- The third world war has begun (*Cumhuriyet*, September 13)
- Second Pearl Harbour raid to USA (*Hürriyet*, September 12)
- New war of the new world

1.3. The technical and technological aspects related to the war, the equipment that is likely to be employed and probable war techniques:

- War techniques: Cyber War / Nuclear War / Chemical War
- War equipment: Aircraft, Rocket, Napalm, and Chemical Weapon

Examples from headlines:

- Cyber terror is on the agenda (*Cumhuriyet*, September 13)
- Aircraft, Rocket, Fuel, Napalm (*Milliyet*, September 13)
- The greatest threat is the cyber terror (*Cumhuriyet*, September 14)

- Here is the war plan of the USA: "Strike and Sweep" (*Milliyet*, September 16)
- Fear of a nuclear war (*Türkiye*, September 17)
- Ladin has chemical weapons (*Yeni Şafak*, September 18)
- USA: We are not ready for a biological war (*Milliyet*, September 19)
- Afghanistan abound in land-mines (*Sabah*, September 26)
- Siege of rockets (*Türkiye*, September 29)

As it can be derived from these examples, cyber terror / war, nuclear war, chemical war, conventional war news are given together.

The oppositions such as, cyber terror (war) / nuclear war / chemical war / conventional war are followed by another opposition. That is the opposition between reality and unreality. It can be expressed that the realization such an opposition with a sort probability and imagination that it carries is the description of more reasonable events.

The syntagms which include reality, such as "aircraft, rocket, fuel, napalm," "chemical weapon," "land-mines abound everywhere," "siege of rockets" display a realistic aspect along with the nature of (defining and verifying) affirmative verbs. However, it was the non-real syntagms that created such an impression and the monemes in this context are "fear," "not being ready," and "threat." Even though these monemes convey "probability," they fit better to the definition of "non-real" with regard to the other monemes.

1.4. the syntagms related to the end of the war are usually around the supposition that Afghanistan will lose the war. On the other hand, it has also been proposed that considering the former overseas experiences of the USA as well as the war between Russia and Afghanistan, USA will not manage to beat Afghanistan.

The opposition appears in syntagms that convey such opinions

- USA will win the war
- USA will not win the war

Examples from headlines:

- Panic in Afghanistan (*Yeni Şafak*, September 14)
- Kabil is being evacuated (*Türkiye*, September 17)
- Escape from death: Nobody in Afghanistan (*Milliyet*, September 17)
- Step by step to slaughter (*Türkiye*, September 21)
- Clamp (siege) from the air and the sea (*Cumhuriyet*, September 21)

Despite the syntagms consisting of the situation in Afghanistan after and before the war, evacuation of Kabil, war preparations of USA and her actions at the beginning of the war as well as the assumption that Afghanistan is doomed to be defeated even at the beginning of the war, there are those which claim just the opposite such determinations.

The examples for the syntagms asserting that USA will lose the war as follows:

- It will be worse than Vietnam (*Yeni Şafak*, September 16)
- Afghanistan: the people who never lose a war (*Yeni Şafak*, September 16)
- Worse than Vietnam: those who get into Afghanistan cannot get out (*Milliyet*, September 19)
- The war without winners: Korea (*Cumhuriyet*, September 22)
- A horse is equal to a tank there (*Sabah*, September 29)

2. Political themes: Political topics have been determined in 114 headlines. The findings in politics have been categories under three sub-titles, namely the political attitude of the USA, the other countries and Turkey.

2.1. The political attitude of the USA is presented through the syntagms and monemes that cover the political view right after the event.

For instance;

- Bush: We won't do the same (*Yeni Şafak*, September 13)
- From Bush to Pakistan: Either they or we (*Hürriyet*, September 14)

2.2. The syntagms or monemes determining the political attitude of the other countries are rather related to the perspective of the NATO countries of the support that USA demanded from Pakistan.

For instance,

- No evidence was presented to NATO (*Cumhuriyet*, September 27)
- NATO is ready for war (*Milliyet*, September 13)

2.3. the syntagms and monemes indicating that political attitude of Turkey in this event is to side with the USA are quite clear.

For instance,

- Ecevit : The most tragic event of history...we are with the USA (*Türkiye*, September 13)
- Full support from Turkey (*Sabah*, September 15)
- One conditioned evidence of Ankara (*Cumhuriyet*, September 16)
- Derviş : Unconditional support (*Yeni Şafak*, September 18)
- Sezer : Repeated (confirmed) the support (*Cumhuriyet*, September 22)

The attitude of Turkey in paradigms is given with the cycle of Turkey > Ankara > Sezer > Derviş. In other words, the policy of the state is presented by moving from general to specific (i.e. certainly the same in each specific case).

3. Religious theme : Faith naturally takes place in this theme. 48 headlines presenting religious themes can be categorized in three sequences among themselves with regard to; common faith / Christian faith / Muslim faith or common religious view / Christian view / Muslim view along with Muslim / Christian opposition and even beyond that "war."

3.1. Common religious faith is related to "doomsday." The doomsday (apocalypse) moneme sequence appeared as a comparison -even more correctly- as a metaphoric element in the headlines. There are also headlines, which do not convey any discrimination among different religions. Besides, as a common element for those two religions, "God" also takes place in the headlines.

- Doomsday (*Sabah*, September 12)
- All hell broke loose (*Milliyet*, September 12)
- Terror has no religion (*Milliyet*, September 12)
- Why didn't God prevent it (*Milliyet*, September 16)

3.2. The sequences reflecting the views of Christians or Muslims consequently lead to the depiction of their contradictory positions.

- US Muslims are anxious (*Yeni Şafak*, September 12)
- Call for temperance: Bush; We cannot consider all Muslims guilty (*Yeni Şafak*, September 16)
- Blair : Call them terrorists not Muslims (*Yeni Şafak*, September 14)
- Organization on the internet for Muslim canonical order (*Cumhuriyet*, September 17)
- The decree of the Afghan learned men comforted the world (*Hürriyet*, September 17)
- It is stressed that after September 11 the Muslims are condemned in the West and particularly in the USA. In addition, the declarations of The President of the USA, Bush and the Prime Minister of Britain, Blair to prevent the attacks against Muslims have been noticed. On the other hand, the headlines seemed to have preferred the “West” – “Muslim” opposition instead of “Christian” – “Muslim” opposition.

3.3. Christian / Muslim opposition appears more clearly in “Crusade” / “Jihad” (Holy War against non-Muslims) opposition

- Like a Crusade (*Cumhuriyet*, September 18)
- Taliban: It is time for Jihad for Muslims (*Milliyet*, September 18)
- Fisk: The fear of Jihad culture (*Cumhuriyet*, September 18)
- Crusade promise from Bush (*Milliyet*, September 20)
- Ladin: Fight against Crusaders! (*Cumhuriyet*, September 24)
- A call for war against Islam from fascist Berlusconi: The West must settle accounts with Islam (*Yeni Şafak*, September 28)

The call for Jihad coming from Afghanistan and Ladin was a reaction against the calls of Bush and later Berlusconi for Crusade. It is the re-emergence of a very old holy and religious event. In fact, crusades includes not only religious but also political, economic and cultural aspects. In the same way, Jihad also consists of political, economic and cultural aspects even though religious and holy aspects appear to outweigh them. This time; however, the advantages displayed by the poor side obviously seem attractive despite the wealth of the other side.

4. Economy theme: 10 headlines are about economy. In spite of the fact that the stock market and foreign currency was still in the agenda during this period, only 10 out of 457 headlines taken from the front pages of 6 newspapers were about economy. Economy theme generally seems to be related to the world, the USA, Turkey and particular persons.

4.1. Generally speaking, the sequences including the US economy reflect the economic shock right after September 11.

For instance,

- The attack struck the economic market (*Cumhuriyet*, September 12)

In this context, the monemes are usually those related to the war, as shown in the example with the monemes of “attack” and “struck.”

Here another determination should be pointed out; the USA, a wealthy and powerful country was struck in economic sense as well.

4.2. Right after the attack, Turkish economy was also influenced. Expected economic aid was postponed and CIA could not manage to conduct an investigation against illegal profiteering. It is quite obvious that such a determination or whether a piece of news is true or not might be debatable. What are taken into consideration are just the headlines in this research study. Therefore, lack of information might occur.

- An investigation by CIA for illegal profiteering (*Türkiye*, September 19)
- Indecisiveness of the West to provide support (*Cumhuriyet*, September 20)

4.3. The economy themes about Bush, Ladin, the Taliban, include business co-operation of the Bush family with Ladin, wealth of the Ladin family, prohibitions against heroine which is the main source of income of the Taliban and therefore destruction of the economy of the Taliban.

- Bush did business with the Ladins (*Yeni Şafak*, September 25)
- Ladin's money trafficking (*Hürriyet*, September 26)
- Heroine vein of Taliban will be cut off (*Hürriyet*, September 26)
- First target is heroine (*Milliyet*, September 28)

In the last two examples the terms and monemes related to the war become clear in sequential correlation: "heroine vein will be cut off," "target."

5. Symbolic themes: 33 headlines stress the "symbolic themes". "Symbolic theme" refers to American myth and even beyond that to the American dream. Until September 11, both the people in the USA as well as the other nations used to consider the USA as untouchable, nonvulnerable, powerful in military forces, defence, foreign policy and economy. The symbol of its power in defence and foreign policy was Pentagon and symbols of its economic power were the twin towers. The following examples might be given for these symbols:

- Kamikaze to the heart of the world (*Milliyet*, September 12)
- Pentagon collapsed too (*Türkiye*, September 12)
- Great Shock: the symbols perished (*Yeni Şafak*, September 12)
- Planes sank into the towers (*Yeni Şafak*, September 12)
- The real target was the White House (*Türkiye*, September 13)
- Super power legend is over (*Yeni Şafak*, September 13)
- The twins were like the Babylonian Tower (*Milliyet*, September 14)
- Mole in the White House: they deciphered (it) and mocked (them) (*Hürriyet*, September 14)
- The dream is over (*Türkiye*, September 16)
- That dominion has been so far by now (*Milliyet*, September 22)

New York was considered to be heart of the world. Pentagon was thought to be invincible. The mole in the White House deciphered the secret... As seen in the examples above, "Super Power Legend" was over in a day

6. General themes related to humanity: There has been 67 headlines in this category. The most frequently repeated aspect of this theme indicates the fact that the world will change after September 11.

- The world will not be the same again (*Sabah*, September 12)
- The world is in shock (*Türkiye*, September 12)
- The world order will radically change (*Yeni Şafak*, September 13)
- The world is in panic (*Cumhuriyet*, September 13)
- Global threat (*Cumhuriyet*, September 22)
- The new (world) order should be questioned (*Cumhuriyet*, September 22)
- The gossamer of terror captivated the world (*Cumhuriyet*, September 26)

The USA is considered with the monemes of both "world" and "global.". The concept of terror spreading all over the world seems to have completed its cycle with the terrorist attack in the USA, which is a reaction against American identity, balances and foreign policy. American myth has greatly changed after September 11. Being an American has gained importance. There seems to be tendency towards gathering around a particular concept.

We have to note that both world wars broke out as a consequence of terrorist attacks. However the terrorist attack on September 11 is the worst of all ever happened. Besides, since the world has already turned to a global village, [10] the economic concussion the USA experienced has started the initial motion in the long line of domino tiles. War and economy have tremendously shook the balances in politics. Even those who would always considered themselves away from all threats have suddenly been exposed to all kinds of terrorism and war. And it has inevitably been regarded as an apocalyptical incident. Another point that has been observed is the existence of Jihad, which had been prepared long before in some countries, such as Libya and Iran. In fact there had always been a concealed threat. All of a sudden, one side declared Jihad and the initial motion was the brutal attack to the World Trade Center. Right after the event, first the USA, then Italy did not hesitate to declare a Crusade although they denied it later.

It is an undeniable fact that globalization stemmed from the USA rather than Europe. Because the concept of globalization has always seemed to be identified with the USA. Globalization, which has, in fact, been questioned for a while, has begun to be criticized even more seriously now. American dream or myth seems to have been collapsed. The symbol of the USA is on the way of deconstruction. By getting involved in the war, the peaceful eagle attempts to redetermine the direction of peace not only in its country but also in the world.

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