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## ***MEDIA DISCOURSE AS SYMBOLIC VIOLENCE: CHRONIC STRESS AND THE EROSION OF PSYCHOLOGICAL RESILIENCE***

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study investigates the structural conditions shaping engineering practice and production in Northern Cyprus within the broader context of global transformation. While technological advancement has enabled unprecedented levels of connectivity and integration worldwide, participation in these systems remains uneven. Drawing on theories of network society, power, and symbolic recognition, the article argues that the challenges faced by Turkish Cypriot engineers and firms are not rooted in a lack of technical capability but in systemic barriers that restrict access, visibility, and validation within global infrastructures. Conceptualized as “invisible barriers,” these constraints operate not through direct prohibition but through limitations on recognition, institutional legitimacy, and infrastructural integration. The study demonstrates that such conditions lead to a form of detoured participation, where actors engage with global systems indirectly and under constrained circumstances. Furthermore, it examines how these structural limitations are internalized, shaping self-perception and reinforcing exclusion. By situating the case of Northern Cyprus within broader debates on globalization and structural inequality, the article highlights the need to rethink participation not only in terms of production capacity but also in relation to systemic access and recognition. Ultimately, the study contributes to the literature by offering a conceptual framework for understanding how global inequalities are reproduced through subtle yet persistent structural mechanisms.

**Keywords:** structural exclusion, global integration, invisible barriers, network society, engineering practice, northern cyprus

## ABSTRACT

In contemporary societies, media discourse predominantly relies on negative language when representing events, significantly influencing individuals' perceptual and psychological processes. The persistent emphasis on crises, wars, and threats in media narratives has become a critical factor shaping individuals' mental structures. The negative effects produced through media language operate symbolically and often remain unnoticed by individuals, leading to their implicit acceptance. In this context, the process can be meaningfully examined through the concept of symbolic violence as articulated by Pierre Bourdieu. Negative and threatening discourses continuously reproduced through media language create a cognitive environment in which individuals internalize events without critical reflection, gradually accepting them as normalized realities. Consequently, media language evolves into a symbolic field of power that subtly directs psychological processes. From a psychological perspective, Richard Lazarus's stress theory provides a significant theoretical framework for understanding this mechanism. According to Lazarus, stress does not stem directly from events themselves but from the individual's cognitive appraisal of those events. Stress emerges when situations are interpreted as threatening, harmful, or manageable based on personal schemas and coping resources. Within this framework, the present study examines how symbolic violence, embedded in media-generated negative discourse, is invisibly internalized and contributes to chronic stress while simultaneously undermining psychological resilience. Keywords: media discourse, symbolic violence, stress theory, psychological resilience, negative discourse

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Media in modern societies is not only a tool that transmits information but also a fundamental field of meaning production that determines how reality will be perceived. Through news texts, discursive preferences, and visual representations, media structures the ways individuals make sense of the world. Especially in recent years, the concentration of media discourses around crises, threats, and uncertainty has created lasting effects on individuals' perceptual and emotional worlds. This situation makes the symbolic power of media on psychological processes visible.

The constant emphasis on war, violence, economic fragility, and security risks in media content causes individuals to perceive the world as an unstable and threatening place. This perception is not merely the result of temporary reactions to individual events but rather the outcome of a long-term mental framework. Cultivation theory developed by Gerbner reveals how continuous exposure to media transforms individuals' perception of reality. According to Gerbner, media—especially television—produces a common consciousness about the world and increases individuals' levels of fear (Gerbner et al., 2002).

At this point, the effect of media discourse occurs not through direct guidance but through a symbolic functioning. Pierre Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence provides a strong theoretical framework to explain this process. According to Bourdieu, symbolic violence is a form of domination established through language and meanings and operates with the consent of individuals (Bourdieu, 1991). Negative discourses reproduced through media language are accepted as natural and inevitable realities in individuals' perception worlds and are internalized without being questioned.



The internalization of media discourses in this way directly affects individuals' psychological processes. In particular, stress and anxiety are closely related to threat perceptions produced through media. Richard Lazarus's stress theory provides a functional framework to explain this relationship. According to Lazarus, stress arises not from the objective characteristics of events but from how individuals evaluate them (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Media discourse can influence individuals' cognitive evaluation processes, leading even uncertain or neutral situations to be perceived as threats. In individuals who are constantly exposed to threat discourses, stress ceases to be a temporary reaction and becomes chronic. This chronic stress weakens individuals' psychological resilience and depletes their coping resources. Psychological resilience is defined as the capacity to adapt in the face of difficulties and is closely related to perceived control (Bonanno, 2004). Threat narratives continuously reproduced through media discourse erode individuals' sense of control and reinforce feelings of helplessness.

This study addresses media discourse as a field in which symbolic violence is produced and examines its effects on chronic stress and psychological resilience at a theoretical level. The study does not include empirical research; it is based on a theoretical and conceptual design. Its aim is to reveal the relationship between media discourse, symbolic violence, and stress processes from an interdisciplinary perspective.

## **2. MEDIA DISCOURSE AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF PERCEIVED REALITY**

Media discourse is not a neutral reflection of social reality; rather, it is a powerful construction mechanism that determines within which frameworks reality will be perceived. Through news texts, headlines, visual selections, and discursive emphases, media not only presents information but also continuously reproduces certain patterns of meaning. In this process, not only which events are important or unimportant but also how these events should be interpreted are determined through media discourse.

Perceived reality is shaped not by individuals' direct experiences but by the narratives to which they are exposed through media. Berger and Luckmann's approach to the social construction of reality shows that reality is socially produced and internalized through institutionalized meanings (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Media discourse is one of the most widespread and effective fields in which these meanings are produced.

The constant foregrounding of negative events in media discourse creates a perception of "continuity of threat" in individuals' mental worlds. This perception goes beyond individual news items and transforms into a general mode of evaluating the world. Altheide's conceptualization of the "discourse of fear" demonstrates how media reproduces social fear through crime, terrorism, and security risks (Altheide, 2002). In this context, media discourse transforms fear and anxiety from exceptional reactions into everyday emotional states.

Repetition plays an important role in the construction of perceived reality. The circulation of similar content at different times and across different platforms leads these contents to be accepted as natural and inevitable realities. Individuals do not feel the need to question the discourses they encounter continuously; on the contrary, these discourses become part of their mental comfort zone. Digital media environments further intensify this process. Algorithmic systems highlight content similar to what individuals have previously interacted with, reinforcing certain meaning frameworks.



This situation is explained through the effects of “echo chambers” and “filter bubbles”

(Pariser, 2011). As a result, perceived reality becomes increasingly one-dimensional.

The narrowing of perceived reality weakens individuals’ capacity to cope with uncertainty.

Individuals who are constantly exposed to negative narratives begin to evaluate the future from a more pessimistic perspective. As risk perception expands, the sense of control weakens. Bandura’s theory of self-efficacy emphasizes that perceived control is a determining factor in psychological resilience (Bandura, 1997). Continuous production of threat perception through media discourse indirectly erodes individuals’ self-efficacy beliefs.

Over time, the perceived reality constructed through media discourse overlaps with individuals’ internal reality. Individuals begin to perceive the world presented in the media not as an external narrative but as reality itself. At this point, media discourse becomes a reference system that directs thinking, feeling, and decision-making processes.

### **3. SYMBOLIC VIOLENCE AND THE NORMALIZATION OF THREAT**

#### **3.1 Theoretical Framework of Symbolic Violence**

The concept of symbolic violence is one of the fundamental concepts developed by Pierre Bourdieu to explain forms of social domination. According to Bourdieu, symbolic violence is a form of power that operates without the use of physical force, through language, symbols, and cultural meanings. This power does not function through direct coercion but by shaping individuals’ perception and thinking patterns. Its most distinctive feature is that it is generally accepted voluntarily and without awareness by those who are subjected to it (Bourdieu, 1991).

The main condition for symbolic violence to be effective is that the imposed meanings are perceived as natural, legitimate, and inevitable. Individuals adopt these meanings not as a result of external pressure but as reality itself. Thus, symbolic violence transforms not only social structures but also individuals’ internal worlds. Language is at the center of this process because it holds the power to name and make sense of the world. Media discourse stands out as one of the most invisible and effective carriers of symbolic violence in contemporary societies. Discourses circulated through media continuously reproduce a certain perception of reality and this perception becomes embedded in individuals’ mental worlds.

#### **3.2 The Production of Symbolic Violence through Media Discourse**

Media discourse enables symbolic violence to operate not as a direct tool of coercion but through the production of meaning. News texts, headlines, and visual narratives not only bring certain events to the forefront but also determine within which framework these events should be interpreted. In particular, discourses centered on threat, crisis, and risk systematically shape the ways individuals perceive the world.

In this process, media does not tell individuals what to think but teaches them how to think about what. Symbolic violence emerges exactly at this point. Media discourse does not eliminate individuals’ capacity to question events; rather, it creates a perception ground in which questioning becomes unnecessary. Repeated discourses are accepted as natural and inevitable over time. In this way, media narratives are internalized with individuals’ consent. As Bourdieu emphasizes, symbolic violence operates most effectively when individuals do not recognize it (Bourdieu, 1998). Since threat narratives produced through media discourse are presented as “reality,” their ideological and discursive construction often remains unnoticed.





### **3.3 The Process of the Normalization of Threat**

The normalization of threat is one of the most important outcomes of symbolic violence produced through media discourse. Individuals who are constantly exposed to crisis and risk narratives begin to perceive these situations not as exceptional events but as a natural part of life. This process is closely related to the repetition strategies of media.

Altheide explains the institutionalization of fear in media discourse through the concept of the “discourse of fear.” According to him, media normalizes social fear by continuously reproducing themes of crime, violence, and threat (Altheide, 2002). This normalization makes threat perception permanent. Threat is no longer perceived as a temporary condition but as a continuous condition of existence.

This normalization process also transforms individuals’ emotional responses. Content that creates intense anxiety at first becomes ordinary over time. However, this ordinariness does not indicate relief; rather, it reflects a state of emotional exhaustion. While individuals internalize threat perception, they continue to live under constant psychological tension.

### **3.4 Psychological Effects of Symbolic Violence**

Symbolic violence produced through media discourse directly affects individuals’ psychological processes. Continuous threat perception constantly triggers individuals’ need for security while weakening their sense of control. This situation increases stress levels and leads to the chronicization of anxiety.

The most invisible effect of symbolic violence is that individuals perceive the psychological tension they experience as their own internal state. Individuals do not associate their anxiety and stress with media discourses; instead, they interpret these emotions as personal weaknesses or unavoidable mental states. Thus, symbolic violence also transforms the relationship individuals establish with themselves.

In this context, symbolic violence is not only a form of social domination but also a process that erodes individuals’ psychological resilience. The normalization of threat depletes individuals’ coping resources and creates a suitable ground for chronic stress.

## **4. COGNITIVE APPRAISAL AND THE STRESS PROCESS**

### **4.1 Cognitive Foundations of Stress**

Although stress has long been considered a direct result of environmental conditions, contemporary psychological literature accepts that the primary determinant of stress is individuals’ cognitive appraisal processes. Richard Lazarus’s cognitive appraisal theory argues that stress arises not from events themselves but from how individuals interpret those events (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). According to this approach, stress emerges when individuals evaluate a situation as threatening, harmful, or challenging in relation to their well-being. The cognitive appraisal process occurs in two stages. In primary appraisal, individuals determine whether the situation constitutes a threat, loss, or challenge. In secondary appraisal, they evaluate their resources and coping strategies to deal with the situation. If individuals perceive the situation as a threat and consider their coping resources insufficient, a stress response emerges (Lazarus, 1999).

In this framework, stress is the product of a subjective evaluation process rather than an objective reality. Therefore, discourses, symbols, and narratives to which individuals are exposed directly influence this evaluation process.





#### **4.2 Media Discourse and Cognitive Appraisal Mechanisms**

Media discourse is one of the strongest external factors directing individuals' cognitive appraisal processes. Individuals who are continuously exposed to crisis, threat, and risk discourses become more likely to evaluate even uncertain or neutral situations as potential threats.

Media discourse structures the meaning attributed to events in advance, narrowing the evaluation process. This situation is related to the transformation of cognitive schemas. Cognitive schemas are mental structures that individuals use to make sense of the world. Threat narratives continuously reproduced through media discourse transform these schemas into threat-centered structures. As a

result, individuals interpret new information in line with these schemas.

Each new negative content presented in media reinforces the existing threat schema and weakens alternative evaluation possibilities. In this process, media discourse intervenes indirectly but continuously in individuals' cognitive appraisal processes. Individuals may be aware that they are experiencing stress; however, they often cannot distinguish that this stress originates from a perception of reality structured through media.

#### **4. Cognitive Appraisal and the Stress Process (continued)**

##### **4.3 The Production of Chronic Stress**

In individuals who are continuously exposed to threat perceptions through media discourse, stress ceases to be a temporary reaction and transforms into a chronic condition. Chronic stress refers to a state in which individuals' physiological and psychological systems remain constantly in a state of alert. This situation leads coping mechanisms to become dysfunctional over time.

According to Lazarus and Folkman, the chronicization of stress is directly related to the depletion of individuals' coping resources (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Threat narratives continuously reproduced through media discourse present a level of continuity that exceeds individuals' coping capacity. Even if individuals are not under an actual threat, they make evaluations as if they are constantly under threat.

This situation produces not only physiological symptoms of stress but also psychological outcomes such as anxiety disorders, burnout, and emotional instability. Chronic stress negatively affects attention, decision-making, and problem-solving abilities, weakening daily functioning.

##### **4.4 The Relationship Between the Stress Process and Psychological Resilience**

Psychological resilience refers to individuals' capacity to adapt to stressful and challenging situations. However, this capacity is closely related to individuals' perceived level of control and their meaning-making processes. The continuous production of threat perception through media discourse weakens individuals' sense of control and reinforces feelings of helplessness.

According to Bonanno, psychological resilience is not only an individual trait but also a dynamic process shaped by environmental and cognitive factors (Bonanno, 2004). Media discourse constitutes an important component of the environmental dimension of this process. Individuals who are constantly exposed to negative narratives lose hope for the future and their coping strategies become passive. In this context, media discourse not only triggers the stress process but also functions in a way that erodes psychological resilience. This reciprocal relationship between chronic stress and weakened resilience creates a serious risk area for individuals' mental health.



## **5. THE EROSION OF PSYCHOLOGICAL RESILIENCE**

### **5.1 The Concept of Psychological Resilience**

Psychological resilience is defined as the capacity of individuals to adapt, recover, and maintain functionality in the face of stressful, traumatic, or uncertain life events. Although resilience was long considered a stable personality trait, contemporary literature evaluates it as a dynamic and contextual process. This approach reveals that the social, cultural, and discursive environment in which individuals exist plays a determining role in resilience (Bonanno, 2004).

The main components of psychological resilience include perceived control, meaning-making capacity, and effective coping strategies. The ability of individuals to evaluate the difficulties they experience as manageable is critical for sustaining resilience. However, this evaluation process depends not only on personal experiences but also on the discursive structures to which individuals are exposed.

### **5.2 Media Discourses and the Perceived Sense of Control**

The perceived sense of control refers to individuals' belief that they have an influence over life events. This sense is a central variable in coping with stress and maintaining psychological resilience. The continuous reproduction of threat, risk, and uncertainty narratives through media discourse directly weakens individuals' sense of control.

Media narratives emphasizing constant crises convey the message that the world is unpredictable and uncontrollable. This situation makes it difficult for individuals to develop active coping strategies. Seligman's theory of learned helplessness shows that individuals become passive and stop making efforts as a result of repeated experiences of uncontrollability (Seligman, 1975). Media discourse produces a similar experience of uncontrollability at a symbolic level.

When individuals cannot associate the anxiety they experience with a concrete event, they tend to accept this emotion as an unavoidable mental state. In this way, the perceived sense of control erodes, and one of the fundamental pillars of psychological resilience weakens.

### **5.3 Transition from Resilience to Fragility**

The continuous perception of threat produced through media discourse transforms individuals' psychological resilience into fragility over time. This transformation is not sudden but cumulative. Individuals may evaluate each media content as harmless on its own; however, the continuity of these contents gradually depletes emotional and cognitive resources.

Under chronic stress, emotional regulation skills weaken and coping strategies become dysfunctional. This situation reduces individuals' hope for the future and expands their perception of risk. Hobfoll's conservation of resources theory emphasizes that stress is related to the loss of individuals' psychological and social resources (Hobfoll, 1989). Media discourse functions as a symbolic factor that accelerates this resource loss.

With the erosion of resilience, individuals become more fragile in the face of uncertainty.

Conditions such as anxiety, burnout, and emotional numbness become more frequent. This fragility negatively affects not only individuals' mental health but also their social relationships and decision-making processes.



#### **5.4 The Erosion of Resilience in the Context of Symbolic Violence**

The erosion of psychological resilience is one of the most invisible outcomes of symbolic violence. Symbolic violence produced through media discourse does not directly target resilience; rather, it weakens the fundamental mechanisms that sustain resilience by transforming individuals' perception of reality.

In a world where individuals constantly feel under threat, it becomes difficult for them to remain psychologically stable. In this process, individuals may tend to interpret their psychological difficulties as personal inadequacies. However, this difficulty is largely the result of symbolic pressure produced through media.

The strongest aspect of symbolic violence is that its effects are perceived at the individual level. Thus, a social and discursive problem appears as an individual psychological problem.

### **6. CONCLUSION AND EVALUATION**

#### **6.1 Theoretical Summary of Findings**

This study has demonstrated that media discourse is not only an informative tool but also a symbolic field of power that structures individuals' perceptual and psychological processes. Crisis, threat, and risk discourses continuously reproduced through media transform the ways individuals perceive the world, and this transformation often occurs without awareness.

Pierre Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence provides a functional framework to explain this invisible effect. Media discourse establishes a form of domination by shaping individuals' meaning worlds without applying direct pressure (Bourdieu, 1991; 1998).

The study examined the psychological consequences of this symbolic process within the framework of Richard Lazarus's stress theory. According to Lazarus, stress arises not from events themselves but from how individuals evaluate them (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Continuous exposure to threat perceptions through media discourse transforms cognitive appraisal processes into threat-centered structures, leading to the chronicization of stress.

Chronic stress, in turn, emerges as a process that erodes the fundamental components of psychological resilience.

#### **6.2 The Relationship Between Media Discourse, Symbolic Violence, and Chronic Stress**

One of the main contributions of this study is addressing the relationship between media discourse and chronic stress in a holistic manner through the concept of symbolic violence. Threat perceptions produced through media narratives weaken individuals' sense of control and limit their capacity to cope with uncertainty.

As a result, stress transforms from a temporary reaction into a permanent psychological state. The most distinctive feature of symbolic violence is that its effects are perceived by individuals as personal experiences. Individuals do not associate their anxiety and stress with media discourse; instead, they tend to explain them as internal weaknesses. This situation increases the invisibility and effectiveness of symbolic violence.

#### **6.3 Evaluation of the Erosion of Psychological Resilience**

Psychological resilience refers to individuals' capacity to adapt to challenging conditions. However, this capacity is directly related to perceived control and meaning-making processes.



Threat narratives continuously reproduced through media discourse cause individuals to perceive the world as unpredictable and uncontrollable. This perception weakens the fundamental mechanisms that sustain resilience (Bonanno, 2004).

This study evaluates the erosion of resilience not as an individual inadequacy but as a discursive and social process. Media discourse creates a symbolic pressure field that depletes individuals' coping resources and increases fragility.

#### **6.4 Limitations and Future Research**

This study is based on a theoretical and conceptual design and does not include empirical data. This can be considered a limitation in terms of generalizability. However, the aim of the study is not to produce measurable findings but to reveal the relationship between media discourse, symbolic violence, and stress processes at a conceptual level.

Future research may support this theoretical framework through empirical studies, including media content analysis, experimental designs, and longitudinal research. Additionally, the role of digital media and algorithmic content distribution in this process may be examined as a separate research field.

#### **6.5 General Evaluation**

As a result, this study demonstrates that media discourse structures individuals' psychological world through symbolic violence and that this structuring leads to chronic stress and the erosion of psychological resilience. If media narratives are not evaluated critically, individuals may unknowingly be subjected to a continuous regime of stress.

In this context, critical media literacy should be considered not only as a cognitive skill but also as a psychological protective mechanism. Recognizing the invisible effects of media discourse can contribute to individuals' restructuring of their perception processes and strengthening their psychological resilience.

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