

POWER RELATIONS IN TOTALITARIAN REGIMES: A FOUCAULDIAN PERSPECTIVE¹

Res. Asst. (Ph.D.) Ahmet KURNAZ*

Assoc. Prof. (Ph.D.) Mustafa KARA**

ABSTRACT

The root and nature of power have been the subject of political discussions for centuries. We aim to evaluate the power relations in totalitarian regimes from the Foucauldian perspective by using a phenomenological research design and examining the works of three authors who have experienced a totalitarian regime. The works named Kallocain, the Captive Mind and In God's Underground are investigated under "discipline, subject and knowledge" concepts within Foucault's power relations scheme. Data is analyzed using computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software MAXQDA. Our findings show that the construction of self and deception are essential ways of resisting and reversing confining power in totalitarian regimes. Besides, power in totalitarian regimes aims to seize the minds as well as the bodies, but the created penal economy is not prosperous at the desired level. Finally, although the truth systems developed by the intellectuals of these regimes impose new duties on the subjects, the main factor determining the direction of power relations is the comprehensiveness of reality.

Keywords: Power Relations, Totalitarian Regimes, Fascism, Communism, Foucault.

JEL Codes: A14, Z00, Z10.

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* Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University, Faculty of Political Science, Political Science and Public Administration Department, ahmetkurnaz@hotmail.com.

** Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University Biga Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences, Public Administration Department, mustafakara@comu.edu.tr.

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TOTALİTER REJİMLERDE GÜÇ İLİŞKİLERİ: FOUCAULTCU BİR BAKIŞ AÇISI

ÖZET

Gücün kökeni ve doğası yüzyıllardır siyasi tartışmaların konusu olmuştur. Bu çalışmada fenomenolojik bir araştırma deseni kullanarak totaliter rejim yaşamış üç yazarın eserleri üzerinden totaliter rejimlerdeki iktidar ilişkilerinin Foucaultcu bakış açısıyla değerlendirilmesi amaçlanmıştır. Kallocain, Tutsak Akıl ve Tanrı'nın Yeraltında adlı eserler, Foucault'nun iktidar ilişkileri şeması içinde "disiplin, özne ve bilgi" kavramları altında incelenmiştir. Veriler, bilgisayar destekli nitel veri analiz yazılımı MAXQDA kullanılarak analiz edilmiştir. Bulgular, benlik inşasının ve aldatmanın, totaliter rejimlerde sınırlayıcı güce direnmenin ve tersine çevirmenin çok önemli yolları olduğunu göstermektedir. Ayrıca totaliter rejimlerde iktidar, bedenlerin yanı sıra zihinleri de ele geçirmeyi amaçlar, ancak oluşturulan ceza ekonomisi istenilen düzeyde müreffeh değildir. Son olarak, bu rejimlerin aydınlarının geliştirdiği hakikat sistemleri öznelere yeni görevler yüklese de iktidar ilişkilerinin yönünü belirleyen asıl unsur gerçekliğin kapsayıcılığıdır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İktidar İlişkileri, Totaliter Rejimler, Faşizm, Komünizm, Foucault.

JEL Kodları: A14, Z00, Z10.

1. INTRODUCTION

Numerous theorists conceptualized power in a broad spectrum by using different methodologies. Despite several definitions, the dynamics of social power are still imprecise. Nonetheless, in its most basic definition, the relationships and contradictions between partakers who claim privileges on limited resources are considered power relations. Every actor in society operates within this spiral of linkages.

Power has several "faces" that vary with epistemological and ontological positions. As Robert Dahl famously put forward, one can see its first face when it is studied at the atomic actors' level of American Politics and observed as a consequence of behaviours (Dahl 1957). The second face, which contributes to Dahl's definition, appears when the relations involve the agenda-setting process (Bachrach ve Baratz 1962, 1963). These first two approaches focus on the decision or non-decision making over self-defined interests as a coercive outcome of the power relation. The third face of power refers to "radical conceptualization". This approach focuses on not only self-defined interests that appear in forceful relations but also manipulated interests which can appear in uncoerced relations or tacit agreements (Lukes 1974). On the other hand, the "fourth face" of power, Foucault's conceptualization, is omnipotent and not a derivative of a relation between subjects, distinguishing it from the other three aspects. Instead, in this definition, power constructs norms, values, and subjects and is always accompanied by resistance (Digeser 1992:977-85).

Resistance helps to define power in complex relation networks. Although democracies enable counterparts to conflict freely, it is hard to define power relations in such systems due to complex

interactivities. On the other hand, the resistance in totalitarian regimes, where symbols, attitudes, behaviours and rules are constantly scrutinized, isolates power relations and helps us depict them. Therefore, it is easier to track power relations dynamics in totalitarian governments. In this paper, we study totalitarian regimes and power relations with the help of Michel Foucault's *power relations scheme*.

This research emphasizes Foucault's three fundamental concepts: "disciplinary techniques, subject and knowledge/power", which are the basis of totalitarian regimes. It does so by analyzing the novels of the era between the two world wars when fascism and communism played an essential role in socio-political order. The works analyzed with a phenomenological technique are (a) dystopian writing *Kallocain* (2002) by the Swedish writer Karin Boye, one of the living witnesses of the Hitler period, (b) *The Captive Mind* (2017) by famous Polish literary critic Czeslaw Milosz and (c) the memories of the Lutheran priest Richard Wurmbrand, *In God's Underworld* (2013) in which he had written about the communist People's Republic of Romania. Overall, we attempt to extrapolate how power functions through subjects and make a viable explanation of social power webs' convoluted gist.

Totalitarian Power

Totalitarianism is an all-encompassing political system in which there is an official ideology and an unquestionable domineering leader who usually governs through a single party (Cassinelli 1960). The system incorporates all institutions from the mass media to the armed forces; the state penetrates all spheres of the economy; and eliminates civil society (Heywood 2016:52). Some advocate that totalitarian regimes are associated with the period between the two world wars and could not appear with their characteristics unique to the 20th century ever again (Branchet-Marquez 2013:618-19).

Four features distinguish totalitarianism from other anti-democratic regimes and heterocracies are a) the existence of a total ideology, b) a one-party rule led by a dictator, c) a widespread and developed intelligence network, d) a monopoly on the armed forces, judiciary system, media and market instruments. The power elite uses these control mechanisms to gain complete control over society (Friedrich ve Brzezinski 1966:126). The way to create a docile community in totalitarian regimes is through associating dissenting thoughts of power with a particular defect, whose treatment requires developing specific tools. Thus, normalization occurs when dissident ideas are labelled as diseased, and society is advised to stay away from them (Foucault 2000b:17).

Ideologies are the political religion of totalitarian states (Gurian 1978:517). All ideas outside the official ideology are perceived as a threat to the system as Gentile frames "everything within the state; nothing against the state; nothing outside the state" (Heywood 2016:75). Besides, ideologies guide not only mental processes but also physical practices. By applying normalization techniques that reproduce subjects, the regime draws limits of acceptable actions with bottom-up micro-techniques and with a continuous and strenuous effort (Foucault 2000b:74, 2007:42; Fraser 1981:272-76).

One-party systems are essential instruments of the normalization process in totalitarian regimes. Although there are organizational differences between the fascist and communist parties, the party is a means of "social integration". It is among the functions of the party to seize areas of expertise that seem non-political and comprise them into the sphere of power (Kapani 1975:106-7; Linz 2008:70). Individuals are reproduced by being put through a normalization process that the system deems appropriate. The primary motivation of the one-party elite, at the heart of power relations, is the idea of creating a classless society (Linz 2008:90-92). By mobilizing or terrorizing the masses, the party tries to achieve its goal (Branchet-Marquez 2013:597). Whether they are called "movements" as in fascism or "pioneer" as in communism, the party elites are not above or outside of power. "More normal" subjects play central roles in the schema of power relations.

In totalitarian systems, "surveillance, violence, and legal action" are the pillars of the consent production mechanism. The purpose of ongoing surveillance is to keep individuals under control (Foucault 2000b:63). It is a disciplinary technique for individuals to think they are being always watched in both public and private spheres. On the other hand, widespread violence against abnormal subjects is also directed based on a specific social classification. In addition, the principle of the individuality of the crime is not valid, and there is an effort toward atomizing the society systematically (Cassinelli 1960:69; Linz 2008:74-78; Tucker 1965:561). The discipline and self-control that arise from symbolic violence shape individuals (Foucault 2013:256). Thus, by constructing self-control mechanisms, subjects allow power to operate through themselves. In totalitarian regimes, all institutions, especially the military, judiciary and media, operate according to ideological prescriptions. The authority expects individuals to engage in functions that produce a positive or negative impact through institutions. The existence of subjects/individuals depends on their fulfilment of these actions, such as "living, working, producing, consuming, and sometimes dying" (Foucault 2000a:113).

2. METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

We employ a qualitative approach to explore power relations in totalitarian regimes from the Foucauldian perspective. To study the research problem, four questions are answered which are (a) what kind of disciplinary techniques are applied to individuals, (b) how individuals acquire their new ideological identities, (c) what kind of subjectification techniques are used, and (d) what kind of relations exist between knowledge and power, in totalitarian regimes.

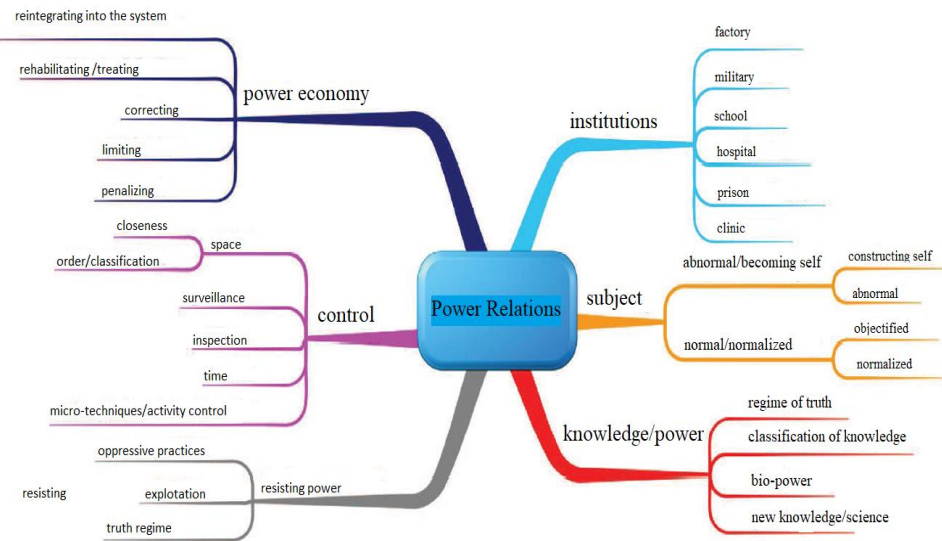
The research is designed in the form of a phenomenological study. Phenomenological work is "the common meaning of the experiences of several people regarding a phenomenon or concept" (Creswell 2013:77; Güler et al., 2015: 234). Therefore, we focus on the shared understandings of individuals who experienced totalitarian power relations.

Our method involves the analysis of written materials containing information about the totalitarian power phenomenon. Based on Branchet-Marquez's (2013:618-19) limitation of totalitarian

regimes to the period between the two world wars, the research focused on the works of three European writers who experienced the Hitler Era-Nazi Regime and the Stalin Era-Communist Regime. The works examined are (a) Swedish existentialist literary critic Karin Boye's *Kallockain*, influenced by Nazi Germany, which she frequently visited in the 1930s; (b) Nobel Prize-winning Polish author Czeslaw Milosz's *The Captive Mind*, about the transformation of intellectuals under the Nazi and Soviet occupations of Poland; and (c) Richard Wurmbrand's *In God's Underground*, where he depicts his years in prisons of the Romanian People's Republic.

We processed the data in three steps. First, the books were converted to portable document format (PDF) with the optical character recognition (OCR) software Abby Fine Reader. Second, we created our qualitative coding scheme. Based on Foucault's conceptualization of power relations, six main themes were defined: "power economy, control, resistance to power, institutions, subject, knowledge/power". Figure 1. details the themes and subthemes (see Figure 1.). Third, with the help of the MAXQDA 12 Software, a computer-aided qualitative data analysis program, the documents were coded with the closed code system. The main reason for choosing this approach is to keep the connection of the power relations with the theory read between the lines of the texts (Creswell 2013:181).

Figure 1. Power Relations Coding Chart from a Foucauldian Perspective



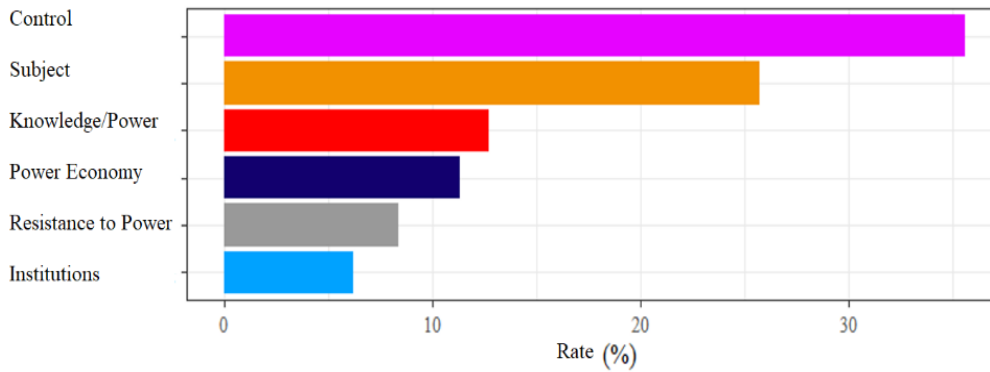
Source: (Kurnaz 2017:40)

In qualitative studies, the terms "credibility, transferability, consistency and verifiability" are used in exchange for validity and reliability (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2016: 277-283; Kozak, 2015: 137). Since the data are obtained from the published works, it points to their credibility and, therefore, their reality. We ensure the transferability and verifiability of the research by explaining the analysis process and data in detail.

3. FINDINGS

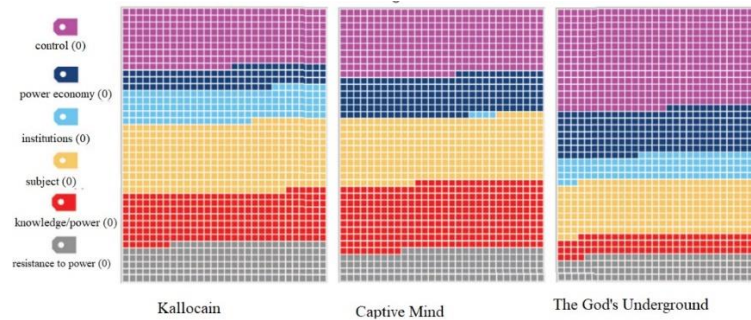
The distribution of themes in all coding demonstrates how a totalitarian power machine operates. Chart 1. presents the main themes' ratios. *Control* that restricts "space/time/activity" and *subject* which focuses on what/who is "normal" and "abnormal" in the system covered more than the other themes. The preservation of the system is made possible by maintaining forceful discipline and self-control instruments upon subjects. Following these two themes, *knowledge/power*, which specifies how power functions, and *the economy of power*, which questions whether power is the one that punishes or disciplines, are coded almost equally. The themes of *resistance to power* which questions the strategies against oppressive practices and the regime of truth, and *institutions* through which power operates, have taken the last two places. Resistance is an act when the subject does not submit to normalization processes and oppressive practices.

Chart 1. Distribution Rates of Coding on Books to Determined Themes



Source: (Kurnaz 2017:43)

Figure 2. Document Portraits Showing the Distribution of Themes in the Books Examined

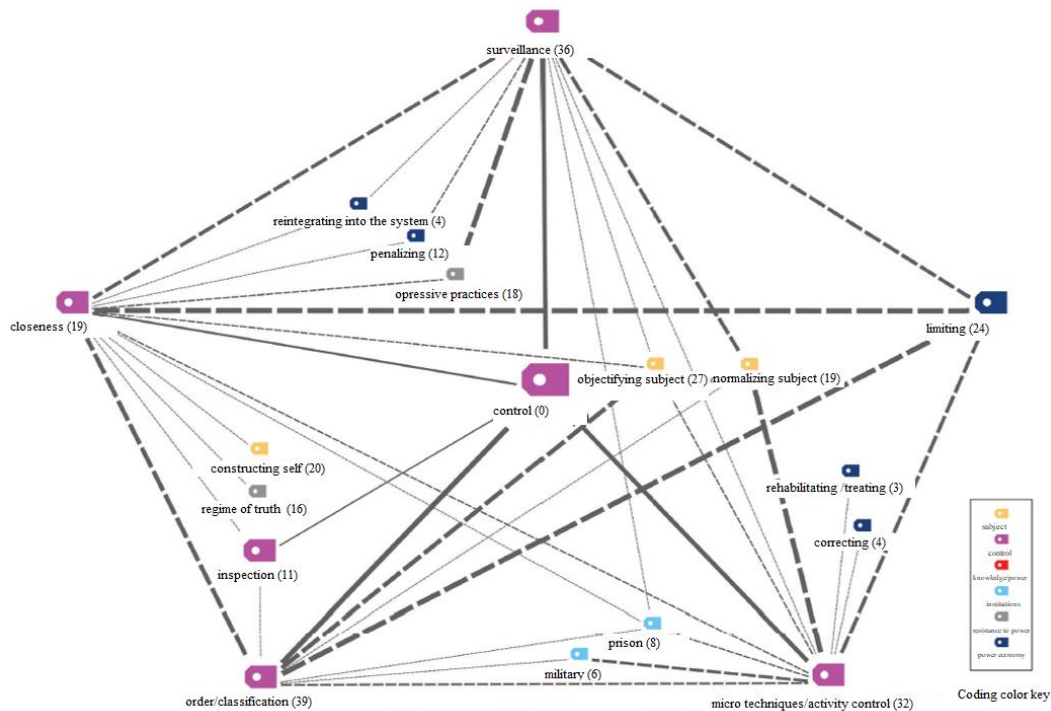


Source: (Kurnaz 2017:44)

Figure 2. visualizes how the themes are distributed in the texts. While *control* is most concentrated in In God's Underground, *knowledge* is minimal. Due to the author's fourteen years of incarceration, the difficulties in accessing information were decisive in this case. In The Captive Mind, *institutions* are coded scarcely contrary to *knowledge* that comes to the fore. From the standpoint of an intellectual, the

intensive discussion of the conversion of other scholars through knowledge is effective in this regard. In Kallocain, on the other hand, the themes are distributed almost evenly. However, this work allocates more space to subjects' transformation through *knowledge* and *resistance to power*.

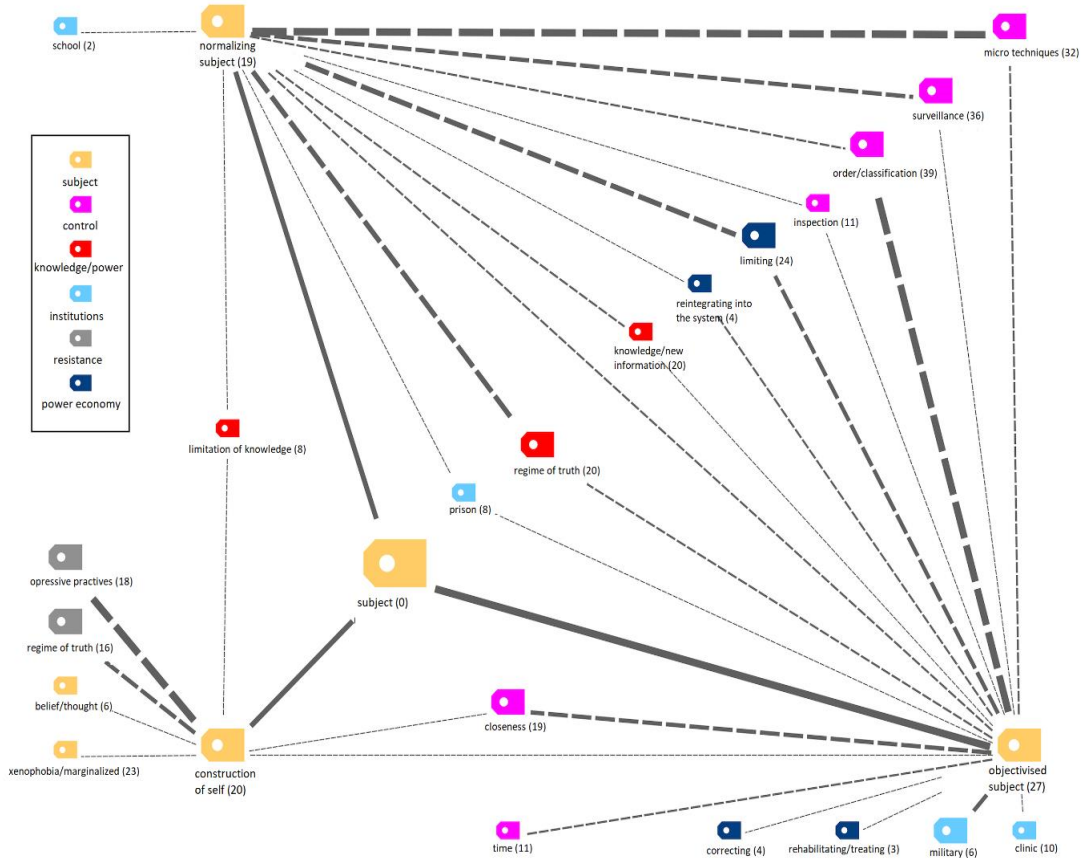
Figure 3. Code to Subcode Relationships Map of the Control Theme



Source: (Kurnaz 2017:50)

Figure 3. displays the sub-themes of the *control* theme. The most significant ones appeared as *order/classification* (39 times), *surveillance* (36 times), *micro techniques/activity supervision* (32 times) and *closeness* (19 times). *Order/classification* is coded together with *closeness*, and the limiting economy of power reveals that the subject's transformation to an object of power in totalitarian regimes happens with the procedures that categorize and confine. However, the presence of the *normalized subject* at the intersection indicates that power reproduces the subjects by normalizing them. In addition, "*surveillance*" is a centralized and continuous process that maximizes control by integrating with the captivating nature of the power in totalitarian regimes. It performs surveillance, normalization and delimitation procedures in a closed architecture and oppressive patterns. Limitation appears according to the order and classification in which *micro-techniques* are used. In other words, the normalization of the subject is maximized in a closed architecture where divergence is minimal and finely prescribed physical arrangements rehabilitate and correct. The system distills its subjects via continuous discipline processes. This is how it exercises onerous dominion.

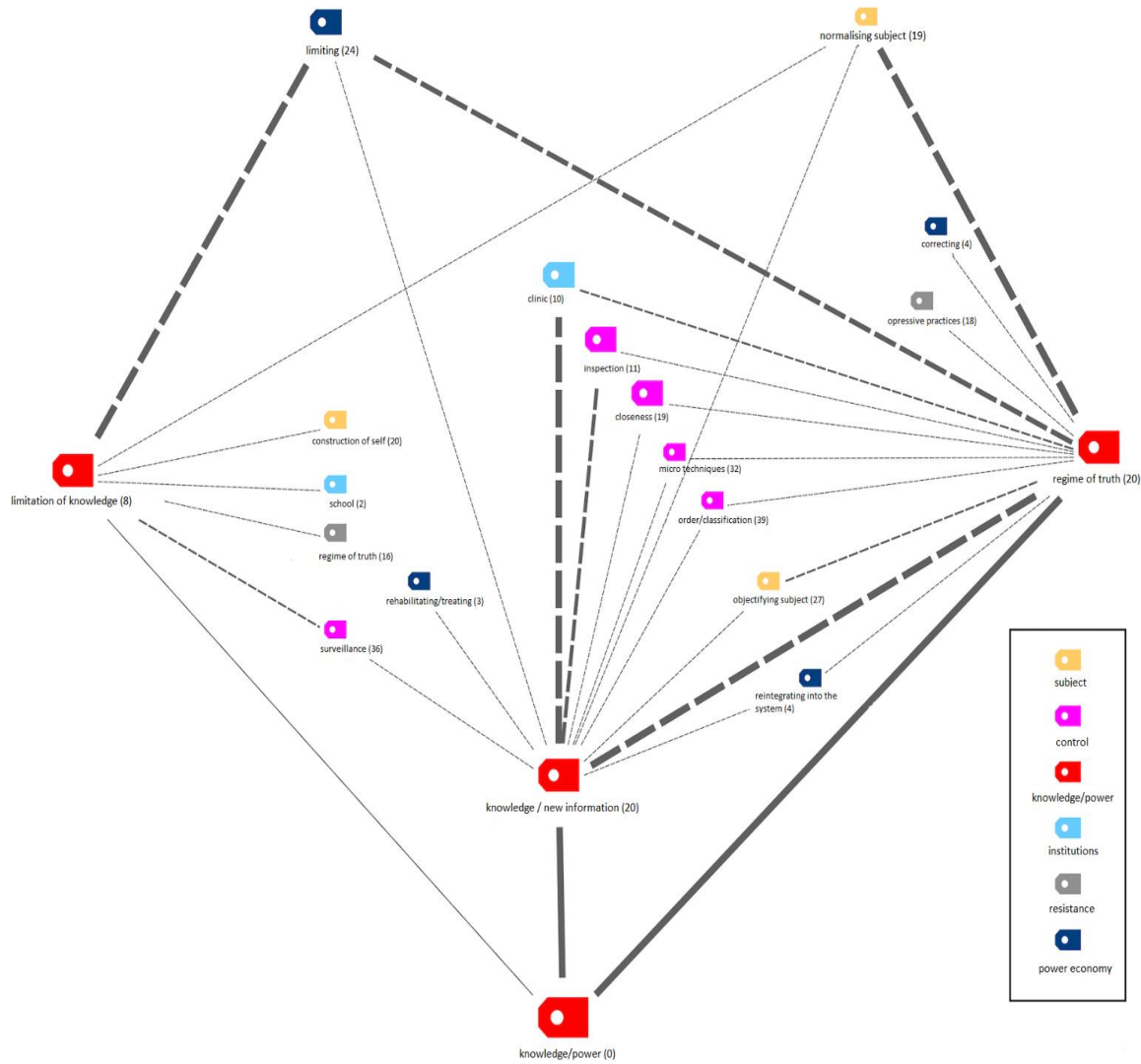
Figure 4. Code-Subcode Relationships Map of Subject Theme



Source: (Kurnaz 2017:53)

Figure 4. demonstrates the sub-themes of the *subject* theme. The most influential ones are the *objectivised subject* (27 times), *self-construction* (20 times) and *normalizing subject* (19 times). First, it is seen that the subject evolves into the object of power through normalization, which is corrected and rehabilitated through school, prison, army, and clinic. The truth regime is associated with normalization, while order and classification dominate the objectification branch. Through this strategy, the totalitarian rule has its subjects venerated and complied with the rigid social mores. Nevertheless, the limitation of knowledge is the major problem in the "malign subject"s resistance to power, that is, in the construction of the self. While the subject rebels against domineering practices, he strives to escape the truth regime.

Figure 5. Code-Subcode Relationships Map of the Information Theme



Source: (Kurnaz 2017:55)

Figure 5. shows the principal sub-themes of the *knowledge/power* theme, which are *science/new knowledge* (20 times), *the regime of truth* (20 times) and *the limitation of knowledge* (8 times). Restriction of knowledge and the regime of truth relation shows that power is productive even within oppressive practices. It produces new knowledge and new procedures of normalization. In addition, there are two different dimensions of the new information produced. The first has scientific nature produced in the clinic. The other dimension is the roll call obtained by the supervision of the subjects.

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Our study shows how discipline and control tools are utilized in totalitarian regimes from the Foucauldian viewpoint. Based on the findings, surveillance is the most obvious of the practices determining power relations in totalitarian regimes. The regime transforms individuals into the eyes of power, detaching them from all ties until it turns them into cells connected to the body. Any opinion other than the official ideology is seen as a significant threat to the state's existence, and doubting the

treachery of others is made a state duty and the raison d'être of individuals. In conclusion, a "Panopticon" requires the person to challenge the closest, where even the bedrooms are monitored.

Subjects who balk or contradict the normalization procedures should construct a tolerable pretence to elude sanctions or, worse, the concentration camp. Even so, this facade protects the abnormal if and only if fortified with knowledge because he must maintain a life full of guile. Otherwise, the regime eventually surmises something is wrong and gradually stiffens the discipline, augments the pressure, and exacerbates the surveillance. This continues till the value of its life becomes meaningless to the system; then, this subject begins serving the regime as the object of symbolic violence and capital punishment.

Knowledge reproduces power and sustains the structure. Bodies are tamed with micro-practices, and the minds are subdued with the reproduction of knowledge. With severe punishment practices, surveillance and propaganda, bodies and minds are brought under control and individuals are normalized. Eventually, the system has individuals built a new self that cannot produce ideas other than official ideological discourse.

The success of power relations depends on the regime of truth based on rational normalities and sound justifications. The norms produced by the authority develop a sense of duty in individuals. Despite the violent acts of the system, ideal and docile subjects are produced with normalizing knowledge. Those who resist conversion and refuse to deceive are sent to camps and forced into a battle for existence there. Another web of power operates local and illegal ways in the camps. When the prisoner is thrown into his cell, his relationship is limited only to his guard. Since all he knows is limited to what his guard had passed on to him, the regime also captures his knowledge. Regulations of space/time/knowledge prevent the prisoner from reproducing himself and transform him into a passive object of power. Dissemination of information in the micro threads of the power web makes its value transitory. The proprieties of the system could alter quickly. Therefore, the prisoner hinges on this ephemeral news. Otherwise, divested of his rights, he tumbles from the edge of an abyss.

Totalitarian closeness and transformation efforts also produce resistance simultaneously and respectively. Concentration camps or prisons are not rehabilitators; on the contrary, they are places where the system produces symbolic violence. This normalizes masses effectively but results in fragile consent in society because normalization stops when the government tries to operate on instincts. Oppression does not eliminate the hope for resistance. As self-construction of intractable subjects, deception becomes a weapon against oppression and surveillance. However, if the individual gets too used to the game he plays for a long time, he may become an acceptable subject unconsciously.

The central crossing of knowledge flow is a remote hamlet whose residents are power elites who exploit, regulate, curtail, and sometimes manipulate the flow. Experts produce information locally, and power elites institutionalize this knowledge to strengthen their position in the system. Institutionalized

knowledge reproduces the subjects; however, when it conflicts with local knowledge on the power web, the regime of truth is redefined. Being a loyal comrade or a fierce enemy of the government depends on knowledge; the regime of truth stimulates the metamorphosis of one into other. The information flow that can create a greater reality and encompass the other one drives the power relations. Therefore, institutional power can be reversed with the flow of information. In other words, the zenith does not exist in the formation of a social power relation network. On the contrary, using knowledge, dilates until it fills all the attainable cracks and is comprised into another, more extensive power web.

In totalitarian regimes, the control tools such as surveillance and institutions and the functionalization of knowledge trigger the normalization process of the subject. Even in such systems that classify and restrict continuously, power is productive by repeatedly creating subjects and its regime of truth. Therefore, Foucault's power relations scheme has the potential to serve to understand today's power relations, where information flow is incomprehensibly fast, and networks occur not only in the physical world but also in cyberspace. Even though the developing technology has removed the knowledge economy from the states' monopoly, the new processes of truth regimes and the normalization of subjects continue through the data society phenomenon created by the internet. In other words, the development of technology has led to the emergence of new surveillance tools and micro techniques.

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| Tasarım / <i>Design</i> | Yöntemi, ölçeği ve deseni tasarlamak / <i>Designing method, scale and pattern</i> | Res. Asst. (Ph.D.) Ahmet KURNAZ Assoc. Prof. (Ph.D.) Mustafa KARA |
| Veri Toplama ve İşleme / <i>Data Collecting and Processing</i> | Verileri toplamak, düzenlenmek ve raporlamak / <i>Collecting, organizing and reporting data</i> | Res. Asst. (Ph.D.) Ahmet KURNAZ Assoc. Prof. (Ph.D.) Mustafa KARA |
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| Literatür Taraması / <i>Literature Review</i> | Çalışma için gerekli literatürü taramak / <i>Review the literature required for the study</i> | Res. Asst. (Ph.D.) Ahmet KURNAZ Assoc. Prof. (Ph.D.) Mustafa KARA |

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