The Expediency of Nationalism: An Articulation of Interests in Indian News Media

INTRODUCTION

This paper analyzes the media discourse around the decision by the government of India to allow partial foreign ownership of print media in the news segment. The decision taken on 26 June, 2002 allowing foreign direct investment (henceforth FDI) of up to 26 per cent in print media news outlets reversed an earlier cabinet directive from 1955 disallowing foreign ownership of newspapers and went against recommendations made by a parliamentary committee set up to study the implications of foreign investment in the news media. This decision was preceded and followed by intense debate on the issue carried out within the pages of the very newspapers this decision was going to affect. The government continued to tinker with the provisions further liberalizing the rules of ownership on 16 July 2005. Predictably, given their direct stake in the matter, Indian newspapers took positions for and against the government’s decision and through the use of their editorial and news pages tried to influence it in their favor.

This paper uses the theory of articulation (Hall 1986; Grossberg 1992; Slack 1996) to explore the coverage of the issue by four Indian newspapers and through it conduct a morphology of discursive power. Using the insights of articulation I claim that both sides of the debate sought to exercise discursive power through a redefinition of key themes in the debate in order to press their case with the government. These themes were: i) global trends, ii) the status of print media vis-à-vis other sectors, iii) national interest and lastly iv) public-opinion. Through exploring how these four themes were articulated with one another and showing the contingent nature of those connections, my study validates insights from theorists that articulation entails the construction of identity over
different and unrelated elements in the discursive realm (Grossberg 1992). The choice of these four themes over the others sought to tap into the existing potency of these terms within the Indian public sphere. I provide a brief background to the debate as well as the role of each newspaper in it before moving to analyze the discourse.

**CONTEXTUALIZING THE FOUR NEWSPAPERS**

This study does a thematic analysis of the debate around FDI in the print media carried out in the pages of four English language newspapers in India. Of the four newspapers chosen for this study, The Times of India and The Hindu argued against allowing FDI in the news print media while The Indian Express, and The Telegraph took positions in favor of allowing FDI. Taken together these four capture the polar positions within the debate while also bringing in a geographically diverse representation of the English press in India. While The Telegraph is a single-edition daily published out of the eastern city of Kolkata, The Hindu is published from several cities but headquartered in the largest south-Indian city of Chennai. The Times of India and The Indian Express are both multi-edition dailies headquartered in Delhi.

Given the multitude of newspapers in India (many of whom were involved in the debate), picking these four helps limit the contours of my study and allows me to negotiate the constraints of space limits for this essay. Consequently my analysis cannot claim to capture the entire picture of the debate, given the numerous publications involved in it, but explores a crucially representative section that played out within the pages of these four papers. Since each of these newspapers belong to larger groups with other publications that advocated the same position my analysis includes relevant stories from the business papers of the four groups as well. I conduct a longitudinal study of
these newspapers’ discourse to specifically locate stories that invoked the four themes that I analyze. I analyze editorials, opinion pieces and news stories leading up to and after the date of the decision but also include pertinent stories outside that range.

By focusing on the English language press my study seeks to engage with an elite discourse on the issue crucial to understanding the modalities of power in post-colonial India. Even though the non-English press in India outnumbers the English press by a huge margin (Jeffrey 1999), scholars have shown (Rajagopal, 1997) that the latter often claims to be the bearer of the agenda of modernity and progress thus differentiating itself from the “traditional” and “conservative” India. The readers of the English press constitute the elite, affluent and privileged “intelligentsia” and others who aspire to be in that club. This divide between the English and the non-English press replicates a larger social and linguistic divide in India that Rajagopal (1997) has termed the “split public”. Given this difference my study explores how the debate was carried out within a press that imagines itself ostensibly closer to the corridors of power in New Delhi but is clearly far removed from a vast majority of citizens of the country who don’t know English. This self-conception is especially worth noting since despite English newspapers being read by a tiny minority who can read the language, both sides of the debate claimed to have “public opinion” on their side during the debate.

The debate saw an interesting realignment of forces whereby archrivals came together because of similar interests on the issue. Publications that had fought bitterly and publicly over the accuracy of their rival’s circulation figures in the past, joined hands to pressure the government. This reorganization of forces surprised media analysts and was a clear example of how, in the face of looming threats to their business interests
differences could be expediently set aside. As I show later, for some newspapers their stand against FDI in the news print media was diametrically opposed to their position on the issue of foreign investment in other sectors of the economy.

In terms of size, the two newspapers supporting FDI far surpassed those opposing it both in revenue and circulation. *The Times of India* is owned by the Bennett, Coleman & Company, that earned revenues of 23.63 billion rupees in 2005 (Vanita-Kohli, 43). These numbers include revenues from many non-print media entities they own. As opposed to that *The Hindu* group earned revenues of 4.53 billion rupees (figures available for 2004) and the Indian Express group 1.23 billion rupees. Similarly the circulation figures for *The Times of India* and *The Hindu* is approximately 7 million and 3 million copies respectively. The opponents of FDI have far smaller circulation numbers with *The Indian Express* at 700,000 copies and *The Telegraph* at 500,000 copies. That the well-established large dailies opposed foreign investment while smaller fledgling ones supported it is of course no surprise.

My study begins with the assumption that the smaller newspapers needed the financial support that FDI would bring in while the well-established dailies were clearly threatened by the competition that foreign ownership would lead to. Even as newspapers layered their interests with the language of neutral editorials and objective news-stories those layers were easy to peel off, as my analysis of the coverage below shows. The perspective of a critical political economy of the media (Mosco 1996; Golding and Murdoch 1991) helps us make connections between financial interests and communication practices of media institutions. In explaining this approach Golding and Murdoch (1991) state that the approach allows us to show how the “economic dynamics
of production structure public discourse by promoting certain cultural forms over others’” (p. 27). In the case of the debate over FDI in the Indian print media we see this attempt at structuration at play. However, it is not the central goal of my paper to connect the newspapers’ discourse to their economic interests but to go beyond those relationships to analyze the articulation and re-articulation of similar themes by both sides of the debate. Through parsing out the force field within the discursive terrain to understand the operation of power within that realm my paper seeks to unravel the very nature of power today. I elaborate on the theory of articulation and its uses for my study below before moving to analyze the coverage by the newspapers.

THE THEORY OF ARTICULATION

The theory of articulation explains the contingent coming together of elements within the discursive realm to forge a temporary alliance. It seeks to posit an anti-essentialist explanation for the correspondences between hitherto disconnected elements within the social and the discursive sphere. Stuart Hall (1986) borrows from Laclau (1977) to argue that discourse itself is the site of struggle today and the clashes over meaning help us get to the nature of social struggle. This move to the discursive terrain does not equate the social with the linguistic but assumes that “the social operates like a language.” (p.57), claims Hall. Lawrence Grossberg (1992) extends this point against a deterministic notion of structural configurations and provides a more open-ended and non-determinate view of the “shifting field of forces” (54). In this shifting terrain meanings are not pre-given, correspondences not necessary and social practices are understood through their effects rather than as pre-determined consequences of certain causes. While determinism would posit a one-to-one correspondence between two points
within the social, discursive or material realm, Articulation leaves open the possibility of correspondence and claims that correspondences are indeterminate and work across complex “planes of effect”, claims Grossberg (1992). Jennifer Daryl Slack (1996) continues this conversation to foreground the processual nature of social articulations and likens it to the process of hegemony seen as a means of continuously creating and maintaining consensus. Similarly, articulation must be seen as an ongoing process of creating connections, she argues. The fact that articulation is processual also ensures that every articulation enables a possible rearticulation. Given the contingent nature of associations, their recombination with other elements is just as likely though not always as obvious. Certain attempts at rearticulation, claims Hall, have to move “against the grain of historical formations” (54). Hence the discursive power that rearticulates must contend with the force of existing meaning (often historical) that resides in the signifier being rearticulated.

In explaining how articulation functions Hall (1986) uses the example of religion as well as the discursive reformulation of blackness by the Rastafarians in Jamaica. The deep embeddedness of religion within cultural milieus necessitates that new social movement must articulate themselves with existing social and cultural notions about religion thus enabling multiple rearticulations between religion and social elements. Similarly the rearticulation of blackness by the Rastafarians in Jamaica innovatively co-opted the language of the bible “to get a meaning that fit their experience” (54). Highlighting these attempts to ascribe new meanings to pre-existing concepts is an insight from articulation theory that helps us understand how the debate on FDI in India was carried out.
In applying the theory to study the FDI debate my paper seeks to emulate attempts by scholars (Jin 2005; Vavrus 2002; DeLuca 1999; Sikka 2008) who have deployed the insights of the theory to unravel a web of discursive connections and show how new meanings were created out of those associations. Sikka (2008), for instance, shows the articulation of the missile defense shield with three different public issues likely to resonate with Americans. She argues that the articulation of the missile defense shield with national security, with a specific terrorist threat from rogue states and with the idea of technological progress successfully helped reify the political ideology of neo-liberalism. Similarly, Vavrus (2002) through her extensive archival research unearths the articulation of “tradition” with women’s education in colonial Tanzania and then its re-articulation as a hindrance to development in post-colonial Tanzania. Hence while the concept of tradition had a positive valence during colonial times when it was used to promote women’s education it was used to differentiate the past from a modernizing present in the post-colonial times. In both these moments the discursive power of the state apparatus was used to articulate tradition with an entirely new meaning.

Social movements today are increasingly about the struggle over meaning and the role of articulation in understanding those movements is crucial. De Lucca (1999) echoes Hall’s claim about articulation’s role in these struggles to argue that, “In a world without foundations, without a transcendental signified, without given meanings, the concept of articulation is a means to understanding the struggle to fix meaning and define reality temporarily.” (p. 334) Exemplifying how this struggle occurs De Lucca cites the example of toxic waste sites that could be understood through a hegemonic lens of a normal consequence of economic growth or through the resistive meaning of “corporate
colonialism”, “institutional racism” or “class discrimination. Both these meanings are attempts to make connections and hence rearticulate environmental pollution to nodes with favorable and unfavorable valences within the discursive realm.

As opposed to inter-textual associations articulation’s role in highlighting intra-textual connections is shown through Yin’s (2005) analysis of The Joy Luck Club about the conflict between first and second generation Chinese Americans. Yin (2005) argues that the movie made contingent connections between elements to reify a hegemonic American culture while differentiating it from Chinese culture defined as the Other. This was done through i) a selective representation of Chinese culture, ii) through attributing negative traits to Chinese culture instead of individual characters while attributing negative traits of American characters to individuals, and iii) through subsuming class and gender hierarchies under culture.

Similar to the instances above, my study seeks to show that newspapers in India connected disparate elements within the discursive realm to create a gestalt effect where different arguments were supposed to come together with public opinion to create an insurmountable force that the government would have to contend with. I show below how in their attempts to define the four concepts differently they emptied those concepts of the earlier meaning to fill them with new arguments that were dictated their barely concealed self interest. For instance, national interest was defined one way by a group and then completely differently by the opposing one as were the other three concepts of global trends, public opinion and the status of the media. This was an attempt to privilege one version of reality over another and this contingent, non-deterministic and arbitrary articulation first within the discursive realm and then between the discursive and the
material realms helps us validate the Foucauldian insight that power today operates in the discursive realm. In the section below I explore the nature of this operation in detail.

ARTICULATION OF THEMES IN THE PRESS COVERAGE OF FDI

i) Global Trends

The opponents of FDI claimed that their position on the issue was in line with global trends given that some of the most advanced industrialized nations curbed foreign ownership of print media. Hence, if India had permitted FDI in the print media it would be out of step with the global consensus on the issue. In its editorial appearing on June 27, 2002, the day after the government’s decision, *The Hindu* showed (represented?) this global consensus by stating that “a number of democracies in West Europe, North America and Oceania continue to maintain prohibitions or restrictions on foreign ownership of print (and electronic) media”. Similarly, *The Economic Times*, a sister publication of *The Times of India*, in an article (April, 17, 2005) around the time government was contemplating revisions to its FDI guidelines cited the example of China as “the world leader in attracting FDI” but that disallowed foreign investment in publishing, producing and distributing books as well as newspapers and periodicals. The article conveniently juxtaposed China’s leaping economy with the curbs on media ownership failing to mention that most of Chinese media is state-owned. It also cited the case of Brazil reporting that 70 percent of the voting stock in newspaper and broadcasting must remain with Brazilians. It continued this list by stating: “Even countries belonging to the G-8 have restrictions on FDI in print. France does not allow more than 20% foreign ownership in a company that produces a newspaper. Italy has reciprocal relationships with countries outside the European Union as regards foreign ownership” (*The Economic*...
*Times*, April, 17, 2005). The article also cited the instance of Australia with similar restrictions.

The editorial in *The Hindu* (June 27, 2002) also claimed that negotiations at the World Trade Organization (WTO) showed that: “While every service from health to banking is on the table in the ongoing WTO negotiations, the one service that no country has tabled a proposal on is the print media”. Using the broad stroke of a global consensus on the issue, supporters of FDI clubbed together different socio-historical reasons that dictated each country’s policy on the matter. They always cited as examples the emerging or industrialized economies to buttress their claim that the very countries India was seeking to emulate had restrictions on media ownership.

As opposed to this interpretation the supporters of FDI defined global trends as one of large-scale integration between economies and cultures – an exciting phenomenon India could not miss out on. They insisted that sticking to a cabinet resolution of 1955 when India was still a young and newly independent nation, was out of touch with the realities of the rapidly globalizing world. The concerns dictating the 1955 decision were no longer true hence obviating the need for protection of the print media. An editorial in *The Telegraph* began sarcastically: “The Gregorian calendar says unmistakably that this is the year 2002. But a large part of the official mind in India is still stuck in 1955” (Coils of the Past, *The Telegraph*, June 25, 2002). The editorial then claimed that the cabinet decision was, “…the last relic of an era in which state ownership and state regulation were the watchwords of policy, and foreign capital was perceived as an extension of imperialism”. Continuing the sarcasm it went on to say: “it is to be hoped that the present cabinet can free the press from 1955 and allow it to enter the 21st century” (*The
Telegraph, June 25, 2002). Implying that the 21st century was one of global integration and openness their position would allow India to embrace the world as opposed to keeping it isolated.

The supporters of FDI sharply contrasted conditions from 1955 to the present times and stressed the innumerable changes that had occurred since. Elaborating on this the other supporter of FDI The Indian Express argued in an editorial:

In 1955, India was just a four-year-old republic that had been through just one general election. It was a country that was tentatively finding its feet in terms of its own identity and a place for itself in the comity of nations. Therefore, if the politicians of that era had believed, in good faith, that they needed to guard the mindscape of the fledgling republic, well they at least had a good reason for doing so. But what can possibly justify hanging on to such a restriction in this day and age? In circa 2002? After we’ve been through 13 general elections and have defined ourselves as a self-confident democracy? (June 25, 2002)

By protecting the national media from foreign powers the government was underestimated their ability to resist those powers and carve their own niche on the global stage. Hence global trends were interpreted by the supporters of FDI to counter the fear of foreign control and by the opponents to show that media-protectionism around the world bucked the trend of global integration. These differently articulated meanings of the same concept show how the debate over FDI was largely a struggle to define phenomena, concepts and reality itself - a point elaborated upon by Hall (1986) and De Lucca (1999).

ii) Status of Media vis-à-vis Other Sectors

Interestingly, most of the publications that opposed FDI in print were champions of foreign investment in other sectors of the economy, such as telecom, aviation and consumer goods. Hence they sought to justify their contradictory stand on FDI in the
print media by arguing for the special case of the print media and frequently touting the phrase “The Fourth Estate”. Opinion pieces frequently cited the phrase to distinguish the print media from other sectors of the economy already open to foreign investment. Katyal (June 27, 2002, *The Hindu*) asked a question at the end of his piece: “Will the first three estates — the executive, the legislature, and the judiciary — be opened up later?” This question sought to equate the media with other branches of government namely the legislature, the judiciary and the executive. Similarly, Ramachandran (December 12, 1999, *The Times of India*) noted: “If the fourth estate can be opened for foreign investment then by what logic can foreign participation be kept out of the other three estates, namely, executive, judiciary and legislature? The constitutional scheme envisages a unity of purpose for all four estates”. Emphasizing Ramachandran’s point and countering those that placed the media in the same category as the others, an editorial in *The Hindu* (June, 27, 2002) appearing on the day the government took the decision stated, “Suffice it to say that by equating the press with other commodity-producing sectors, they betray a blinkered understanding of the role of the press as an informer, educator and watchdog in a democracy”.

Ramachandran (12 December 1999, *The Times of India*) also tried to distinguish the print media from other forms of media (and not just other sectors of economy) by claiming that the newer media could not claim the hallowed status of print. He wrote: “Arguments that technology has overtaken the media and that satellite TV and Internet have made borders irrelevant dodge the question of whether these media belong to the fourth estate. The fourth estate is the print media”. This particular differentiation within the media was crucial because of the rapid growth of the Internet and television. Most
foreign news channels (including CNN, BBC as well as 100% Murdoch owned Star News) were already available for Indian viewers. In making this distinction between print and non-print media the opponents also sought to counter the claim that the print media’s status had significantly diminished given the large-scale spread of other forms of media. The buzzword of the “fourth estate” was therefore repeated frequently and was used as much to press their case with the government as it was to justify these newspapers’ own dichotomous positions whereby they loudly supported FDI in other sectors but opposed it in the print media.

Contrary to the argument about the special status of the print media, the supporters of FDI argued that the print media was just like any other sector and making it the singular exception in the liberalization of the economy was without rationale. In presenting this argument they relied heavily on the fact that television had rapidly risen in popularity in the 1990s and was completely open to foreign investment and ownership. *The Indian Express* in an editorial (June, 27, 2002) quoted a survey and noted, “…TV news viewer-ship has increased by 285 per cent. With an estimated 38 to 47 million cable and satellite TV households in the country, how is television any less intrinsically related to the democratic processes than newspapers?” It continued, “Indeed, in a country where a large number of illiterate people now depend on television to be informed about the world, fears about a ‘foreign invasion’ and a return to the days of the East India Company must surely be directed at the visual media.” Echoing that sentiment, *The Telegraph* (June 25, 2002) wrote: “The contradiction between allowing foreign television channels and disallowing foreign capital in print media is especially striking because in a country like India, television has far greater impact and reach than newspapers”. In another
editorial *The Indian Express* argued: “If public opinion has not been mortgaged by CNN News or BBC World, why would foreign equity in print — which has far less popular reach — have such an insidious effect?” (25 June 2002)

The repeated comparisons of the print media with television was meant to highlight the government’s dual policy and push for similar laws for the two sectors. The supporters of FDI also highlighted the benefits that liberalization and foreign investment had brought to the other sectors that had been opened up since the government started liberalizing the Indian economy. Then they claimed that arguments for a special status of the print-media had functioned to deprive it of the resources accrued to the other sectors as a result of globalization. Hence, *The Telegraph* pondered:

The Indian economy was being opened up to foreign capital, global trends and greater competition. Better performance was seen to be the immediate result of the openness that would follow the removal of the license raj and regulated markets. There existed no grounds for cocooning the newspaper industry from this process of opening up. (June 25, 2002)

This precise argument was repeated by the Indian Minster for Information and Broadcasting Sushma Swaraj who was in charge of this decision, during a debate on FDI when she said: “It is natural that liberalization must take this route. First, the manufacturing sector was liberalized; then it was services, followed by the electronic media. We had to come to print”. That the government echoed an argument used by the supporters of FDI shows its successful articulation by the supporters of FDI. In a force field of competing discourses and rival attempts at controlling discourse the attempt to define the print media as just another economic entity countered its definition as a sector that deserved special treatment.
iii) National Interest

This discursive struggle continued in both sides’ attempt to favorably define the metaphors of nationalism and patriotism. By positioning themselves as champions of national security and sovereignty and reminding readers of the days of British rule, opponents of FDI sought to synecdochically identify themselves with the nation thus masking their own interests as the nation’s. Motifs of patriotism and of India’s colonial history were used to invoke emotional appeals. With a right-wing nationalist political party in power, this was an argument also designed to appeal to the elements within the ruling party that might come out in opposition to the decision.

Broadly this theme was moored around the claim that foreign entities could not be trusted with India’s national interest and ownership of print media institutions would give them dangerous power to mould Indian public opinion and mark a return to a new form of colonialism. Katyal writing in *The Hindu* (June, 26, 2002) dramatically began his piece by writing “Welcome back East India Company” referring to the name of the British trading company that initiated trade with India to eventually take control of the subcontinent. He reminded his readers, “Just recall, how modest was the beginning of the East India Company and how it spread its tentacles first in the realm of trade and then to areas connected with the country's governance.” This theme was repeated in an editorial by the newspaper, (*The Hindu*, June, 26, 2002), “The press has actively participated in shaping the agenda in democratic India and it has done so because it has been rooted in the country — owned, managed and staffed by Indians”. The editorial was dramatically titled “An Indian institution under threat” and did not elaborate on why Indian ownership was the cause for media’s active shaping of the national agenda. To highlight the special
role of media in national security, commentators also equated the media with industries such as the defense. Hence Choudhury wrote:

“the Press is different from industry generally in the same way that the Defense sphere is looked on differently. Both relate to national security (in the case of the Press in the broadest sense of the term), and it can be no one's case that "economic liberalization" should be permitted in these areas when it is demonstrably proven that such investment will lead to a weakening of that security. Here the important question is: Is there any scope that FDI in the printed media will go against national interests?” (The Hindu Business Line, March 25, 2002)

The rhetorical question concluding the passage was also partly a statement meant to articulate national interest with the interests of an Indian controlled print media. By raising the emotive bogey of neo-colonialism the opponents of FDI therefore sought to move the debate in the realm of the pathos and thus difficult to counter.

However, their inability to counter this point did not prevent the supporters of FDI from rearticulating national interest to stand for the interest of smaller papers who needed foreign investment. Giving up the high ground of objective and neutral debate, the supporters of FDI claimed that it was in the nation’s best interest to protect them i.e. the smaller, financially insecure papers that were more in need of foreign capital than the monopolies seeking to protect their turf. This clear allusion to rival publications on the edit pages was unprecedented. Focusing on the need for foreign capital by some newspapers the editorial in The Indian Express on June 27 2002 said that the move to protect the print media from foreign investment was: “…both illogical and unfair to those players who may require a financial fillip to stay alive”. This argument was an implicit admission by the newspaper of its own financial need. Similarly The Telegraph (June 25, 2002), speaking of the continuing ban on FDI in the print media stated in an editorial: “The only fallout of this is that Indian newspapers and magazines remain starved of
capital and of new technology”. The supporters made unambiguous references to the monopolies allegedly protecting their turf. The Indian Express (June 27, 2002) wrote:

The polarized response underlines how contentious the move is and how fiercely it had been resisted for over a decade by powerful media houses in the country, which want nothing more than to be allowed to continue with their long, unchallenged reign in the marketplace. Their accusations do, nevertheless, need to be answered if only because what is at stake is the interest of the reader.

The reference to “powerful media houses” was an allusion to the rival publications opposing FDI. The Telegraph (June 25, 2002) was more subtle when it mentioned “the play of narrow vested interests” referring to the rival publications. Direct references to those opposing FDI, was a break from the norms of a debate on the editorial pages where the debate had largely been over ideas without specifically stating the interests pushing those ideas. In the debate on this concept each side sought to cleverly articulate national interest with its own self-interest. In openly claiming that smaller newspapers needed to be protected for the larger interest of the country the supporters of FDI deployed the idea of national interest to their own expedient end just as the opponents had defined national interests differently to entrench their own positions.

iv) Public Opinion

The last theme I focus on that both sides sought to aggressively define on their own terms was that of public opinion being on their side. Both sides did this through giving space to anyone who would verbalize support for their position thus creating the illusion of widespread backing for their position. For opponents of FDI, the attempt to create a public brought together little known politicians, unheard of “experts” and representatives of groups speaking from far-flung places. This strategy was clearest on the day after the government announced its decision to allow 26 percent FDI in the print
media as every report on the decision simultaneously presented reactions from those who criticized the government’s decision. Both the *Times of India* and *The Hindu*, carried front-page stories on the government’s decision. The long lead-in sentence of the story in *The Hindu* exemplified the spin quite well:

> In the face of stiff opposition from a section of the polity and the media, the Government today decided to depart from the Cabinet Resolution of 1955 which governed the country’s print media policy till date and open the sector to foreign participation by allowing 26 per cent foreign direct investment in news and current affairs publications, and 74 per cent foreign investment in non-news and non-current affairs publications. (Joshua, *The Hindu*, June 26, 2002)

The story carried in *The Times of India* similarly stated its position but did so a few sentences into the story. The fourth paragraph of the story stated:

> Significantly, the Cabinet meeting, chaired by Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, overruled an earlier Parliamentary committee recommendation that the government should not allow FDI in the print media. The committee, headed by senior CPI leader Somnath Chatterjee, had overwhelmingly voted against FDI in print. (*The Times of India*, June 26, 2002)

*The Times of India* story continued to push its agenda as it reported that out of the top 50 newspapers in the country, as many as 34 representing a circulation of 76.3 percent were opposed to FDI. The percentages of 76.3 and 23.7 are for circulation of only the top 50 newspapers as no mention was made of the newspapers beyond the top 50. Given that the total number of publications in India is in the range of 43,000 these percentages reflect a miniscule section of the overall readership in the country. The claim that 34 of the top 50 newspapers opposed FDI in fact proved their opponents’ contention that most newspapers that were doing well financially opposed FDI. The story ended by painting a bleak picture of the future and used the word “doomsday scenario” in the last paragraph of the story. The headlines of the stories played just as crucial a role in attempting to articulate public opinion with their side of the debate. A story in *The Hindu*
headlined, “Decision on FDI in Print Media Deplored” extensively quoted a little known director of an unknown entity called Centre for Bharatiya Marketing Development. Other headlines in *The Hindu* that exemplified this strategy were: “INS chief calls for talks on FDI in print media” (September 21, 2003), “INS campaign against FDI in print media to continue” (September 28, 2002), “Jayalalitha opposes FDI in print media” (June 27, 2002), “Sena condemns FDI in print media” (June 28, 2002), and “Newspaper employees protest FDI in print media” (August 27, 2002). Stories in *The Times of India* followed a similar pattern and were headlined as follows: “Few takers for FDI in print” (March 24, 2002), “Media, parties deplore FDI in print” (June 26, 2002), “TDP, Oppsn oppose FDI in print” (June 26, 2002), “Opposition raps FDI decision” (June 28, 2002), “RSS, BJP opposed to FDI” (June 25, 2002), “Most publications oppose FDI” (June 26, 2002), “Jaya opposes FDI in print” (June 26, 2002), “Centre asked to reconsider” (June 27, 2002), “Industry reacts to FDI in print” (June 27, 2002), and “State Parties divided over FDI” (June 27, 2002). In some of these stories one found accounts from distant cities such as Hyderabad, Trivandrum and Patna a strategy to show the national support for their cause.

The other side of the debate used the illusive ruse of public opinion just as cleverly. They did so by presenting an overall optimism and positive response to the government’s decision thus implying that people widely supported the decision. However the “public” of the supporters of FDI differed from that of the opponents in that it largely comprised of the business community and the stock markets. *The Indian Express* (June 26, 2002) in an article headlined “Cheers to FDI in print from India Inc, markets,” tried to present the impression of widespread support for the issue by citing only one major organization, the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII). It went on to say that: “The
country’s most hi-profile and powerful industry body, Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), termed it as a ‘bold and significant step’ and stock market greeted the news by pushing up the stock prices of print media companies sharply.” Similarly the day before the cabinet was to meet to take a decision on the issue, The Telegraph gently nudged the government towards a decision claiming widespread industry support for the issue in an editorial:

> Voluble support from within industry for a new media policy is expected to shape the Center’s stand as it ponders over a 47-year-old Cabinet resolution barring foreign investment in the print media. It is the kind of support that policy makers have found encouraging as they set about reworking their proposal. (June 25, 2002)

The story went on to cite anonymous sources within the government as saying: “…the mandarins say the debate on allowing foreign direct investment (FDI) has been raging for long “but we have never seen it reach the sort of level it has since the parliamentary standing committee’s report”. Explaining the decision as the only logical course of action The Telegraph (June 26, 2002) wrote: “…since the opening up of broadcasting and the arrival of the Internet, the prizing open of the print media was only a matter of time.”

Given their linguistic distance from a majority of Indians, neither side in the debate could claim to legitimately represent the citizens of India but both sought to define the Indian public differently by quoting the representatives of the so called public in their stories. While for the opponents anyone willing to endorse their position comprised the public, for the supporters the stock market was frequently invoked to stand in for the public. Hence for the supporters, the approval of the stock market was equivalent to the approval of the nation’s citizens. That less than 1.15 percent of India’s 180 million households invest in stocks (Sainath, June, 1, 2004) did not deter their attempt to connect
the stock market with the Indian public. If the stock market indicated the mood of the nation the stockbrokers often became the spokesperson for the citizens of the country. Hence *The Indian Express* (June 26, 2002) quoted a stockbroker Gagan Banga of Indiabulls on the day of the decision as saying: “Foreign direct investment is certainly going to improve valuations of print media companies, especially the smaller ones. With the infusion of fresh funds, they would be able to aggressively market their publications leading to increased competition and better quality”. This quote was interspersed with reports of a rise in the stock prices of most media companies that were available for trading on the stock market. A vote from the market was a vote from the public.

On the day the decision was announced members of the government expectedly found complete support in the stories of newspapers supporting the decision. A story in *The Indian Express* (July 18, 2002) about a debate in the parliament on the issue was headlined: “FDI in Print: Sushma rips into Cong, Mulayam”. The story was about the minister for Information and Broadcasting Sushma Swaraj’s defense of the decision against the opposition parties. The story claimed that Swaraj launched a “blistering attack on the Opposition and some newspaper groups for condemning the move”. All the opposing views on the decision were summed in one last sentence: “Earlier in the day, the Opposition, as well as some of the NDA allies, including the TDP and the Shiv Sena, opposed the Cabinet decision”.

These rival attempts to define and hence construct a favorable even if phantom public was especially ironical given that the readership of the English press in India comes nowhere close to representing the majority opinion in the country. As Rajagopal (1997) has argued the English press and its readers, in fact, feed off the exclusiveness of
being the educated elite. Their relatively smaller readership is, “a sign of privilege rather than handicap” (Rajagopal 1997, p. 163). Given this exclusive position but knowing fully well that the ruse of “public opinion” gave credence to their position both sides sought to articulate the term fallaciously to their own positions.

DISCUSSION

The goal of this paper is to understand the modality of discursive power exercised in the debate over FDI in the Indian print media. We have seen that the themes of global trends, national interest, special status of the print media and public opinion were articulated with contradicting meanings by both sides of the debate in order to construct an alternative version of reality itself. Through these constructions both sides of the debate displaced the older meanings of the concept to give them new resonances. The theory of articulation helps us unravel how the original meaning of the term is doubly articulated with new associations by both sides thus creating a trifecta of meanings.

However it is not only in the attempt to signify new meanings to existing concepts but also in the very choice of these four themes that we see the artifice of the newspapers at play. Why, after all, were these four specific arguments chosen out of the many possible? What about these specific motifs made them appealing? Roland Barthes (1957) through explaining the process of signification in the semiotic chain provides us with clues to answer this question. The process of signification, claims Barthes (1957) morphs the nature of meaning to create a Janus-faced structure that has an older historical meaning, which is emptied out to create a form within which a new meaning takes hold. While for Barthes this process shows the operation of a myth whereby a signifier finds a new signified to form a new sign the process is similar to articulation in that it entails a
struggle to define meaning. Barthes adds that even as a new meaning is constructed traces of the older one remain and provide the new meaning with a “reserve of history, a tamed richness which it is possible to call and dismiss in a sort of rapid alternation.” Hence the new meaning feeds off the older one even as it displaces it.

In the FDI debate, common assumptions about global trends, public opinion, the print media’s status or national interest were laid aside but continued to resonate within the newly articulated meanings. It is these powerful older resonances within these concepts that explain their choice over the others. For instance nationalism and colonialism will always remain potent topics within the Indian public sphere and even as both sides of the debate defined these metaphors to their own end they sought to gain from the potency of the existing meaning ensconced in the theme. Hence the older meanings of nationalism and colonial history were given a “death with reprieve” (Barthes) since they functioned to propel the newer meanings even while remaining in the background. We see similar operations at play in the themes of global trends, status of media and public opinion. Globalization is perhaps the most common a buzzword in the Indian public sphere today and both sides used that existing resonance of the word while still defining it differently. Similarly the status of the printed word and public opinion both come with rich resonances of their own. Hence the deployment of these themes over the others is explained by this existing richness that helped them become an “accomplice” of the newly deployed meaning.

CONCLUSIONS

It has been the goal of this paper to show how four newspapers in India sought to construct the discourse in order to advance their positions on the issue of foreign
ownership of print media. This struggle over terms and concepts transferred a conflict over material interests to the epistemic realm while also seeking to conceal the relationship between the two. Only rarely did newspapers admit to their own need for foreign investment or their own fears of foreign competition and hence the debate was presented ostensibly as one about ideas and concepts. I have shown that by emptying these concepts of their older meaning and filling them up with one suitable to their own ends, participants in the debate articulated elements within the discursive realm in-effect creating a triangle of meanings. The choice of these four concepts over the others is explained by the rich resonances these motifs already had within the Indian public realm.

It has also been the goal of this paper to show that while on the surface the struggle was presented as purely discursive and ideational it concealed an implicit articulation of relationships between the discursive and the material. In so doing this study learns both from Stuart Hall’s claim that the social functions like language and Lawrence Grossberg’s promise that, “Rather than making reality linguistic, I propose to make language real (while not all of reality).” (1992, p.51) It shows the articulation of the discursive and the material and in the process argues that the attempt to privilege one definition over others, one meaning over the many possible and one interpretation of concepts and terms over the inherently polysemic nature of the semiotic chain is indeed the modality of power in the current age of mediated reality.
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