



Orientalist discourse in media texts

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Abstract

By placing itself at the center of the world with a Eurocentric point of view, the West exploits other countries and communities through inflicting cultural change and transformation on them either from within via colonialist movements or from outside via “Orientalist” discourses in line with its imperialist objectives.

The West has fictionalized the “image of the Orient” in terms of science by making use of social sciences like anthropology, history and philology and launched an intensive propaganda which covers literature, painting, cinema and other fields of art in order to actualize this fiction. Accordingly, the image of the Orient – which has been built firstly in terms of science then socially – has been engraved into the collective memory of both the Westerner and the Easterner.

The internalized “Orientalist” point of view and discourse cause the West to see and perceive the East with the image formed in its memory while looking at them. The East represents and expresses itself from the eyes of the West and with the image which the West fictionalized for it.

The East, which tries to shape itself into the “Orientalist” mold which the West fictionalized for it in order to gain acceptance from the West, both serves to reproduce “Orientalist” discourse by internalizing it and fictionalizes and reproduces its own East discourse to form its own hegemony in symbolic terms.

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Introduction

Orientalism, Oriental studies or Oriental science is the name given to the entire Western-based research fields in which the languages, religions, cultures and people of the Near East and Far East communities are studied. The term Orientalism was used to describe the Eastern studies of the Americans and the Europeans which were shaped by the mentality of the development era of industrial capitalism in the 18th and the 19th centuries. In this respect, Orientalism refers to the external, isolating, discriminatory and prejudice-filled opinions of the Western European white man on the Eastern people and cultures. In his book entitled *Orientalism* (1978), Edward Said used the term Orientalism in a negative sense. Western academicians like Bernard Lewis opposed the negative interpretation of the term Orientalism. According to Ömer Baharoğlu, Orientalism is the fictionalization of the intellectual, scientific and cultural background of the West in order to contribute to the imperialist-based colonialist actions of the West and to infiltrate different regions of the world (<http://tr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oryantalizm>). On this issue Jale Parla stated that European travelers, missionaries, merchants, soldiers, artists and scientists created a collection of massive texts related to the East with their travel writings, stories, poems, paintings and researches by fictionalizing and reproducing the East according to their own perceptions. Parla noted that, as a consequence, many reproduced “images of the Orient” were fictionalized, which were researched in the universities; written as stories; handled in the ateliers of the painters; and exhibited in the museums and this fictionalized “image of the Orient” was placed against the real East and the Orient fictionalized by Europe increasingly replaced the real East (Parla, 2001: Issue 96). Accordingly, Orientalism is the perceiving and reproducing the East by the West with the cultural and ideological institutions of the West and the words, images and doctrines created by these institutions.

When it is accepted that the exploiter does not let the exploited to speak, speaks on behalf of the exploited, represents the exploited with a language created by him/her, and others the exploited, those who speaks on behalf of others and those who are othered as to prevent him/her from speaking on behalf of him/her create their own others (Parla, 2005: 13). For instance, poor people, children, workers, women, needy people, foreigners, etc. Consequently, the “image of the Orient” which was created by Europe by othering prepared a legitimate ground for it to exploit the East and for the hegemonic structure to be

reproduced. With the same method, it constituted a sample model for the East to create its own East in symbolic terms by producing its own other within itself and for the European to exploit the East by dominating it.

Gramsci states that the elites who hold the power/authority use means of mass communication in order to spread their own philosophies, cultures and ethical values; to reinforce and sustain their wealth, power and position. On the term hegemony, İnceoğlu writes that the media, rather than as an ideological device, needs to be studied as an instrument with which the authority holders transform their ideologies, cultural practices and mediations into a social consent (<http://www.bianet.org>).

Due to the fact that the elites are the manufacturers of the public information, beliefs, attitudes, norms, values, morality and ideologies, their symbolic authority is also an ideological authority. In his analysis on how the different social groups are represented in the news, Van Dijk concluded that the representation form of the elites who hold the power/authority is completely different from the representation form of the society's common people. As a result of these studies, he observed that society's common people are discussed very little in the mass media and these people are presented as problematic, inefficient, primitive and needy people who threaten the valuable sources of the West like places, residences, jobs and education (Van Dijk 1994, 276-277).

On this issue İnal states that although the elites who hold the power/authority are represented more and positively in the media, common people are represented less and negatively only when they are the wrongdoer or the victim (1996, 133).

In critical discourse analysis, discourse is a social application that represents the world; gains meaning in time, place, social, cultural and ideological context; is intentional regardless that grammatical features and structures were selected consciously or unconsciously; and is the representation of social implementations like biasness, power and resistance. Moreover, due to the achievement of the formation of these; production, implementation and reproduction of power relations by means of discourse, one can move further from commenting level and the mentioned factors can be evaluated (Ülkü 2004, 385).

Symbolic elites and their discourses determine the discourse types, titles, information amount and title, selection or censorship of the arguments and the nature of the rhetorical processes. Consequently, these conditions decide on the contents of the public information, their organization, belief hierarchies and the extensiveness of the consent which are powerful factors in the formation and reproduction of the opinions, attitudes and ideologies (Van Dijk, 1994, 281). Accordingly, the discourse in the media text is important since it gives clues about how the internalized discourse and the symbolic elites who produce the discourse view the ordinary people of the society.

The aim of this study is to show that some symbolic elites who internalize the hegemony-aimed stereotypical “Orientalist” discourse of the West cause the “Orientalist” clichés to be engraved in the memory of the society and cause the society to view itself with an “Orientalist” point of view; and consequently, the second ring of the hegemony is reproduced by some symbolic elites who represent the power/authority within the country; and “Orientalist” discourse others, deactivates, passivizes and alienates the society, and consequently, serves to form the hegemony and provides the continuance of the current status quo.

This study will be addressed and discussed in terms of hegemony concepts. As a sample application, the social structure reflected on the media will be analyzed with critical discourse analysis of Van Dijk, and an attempt will be made to reveal the views of the symbolic elites on the society and the hegemonic purpose behinds these views via the news on the ‘Third Pages’ of the newspapers¹ which are selected with the random method during a one month period among Star, Hürriyet and Akşam newspapers which perform mass publishing.

The role of media in reproducing the Orientalist discourse

Media, which is among the ideological apparatuses of the government, operates by using the ideology. Like other ideological apparatuses of the government, these gravitate towards the same goal. Each of them contributes to this single goal via idiosyncratic way for the

¹ See, Mora, N. (2008). Üçüncü sayfada Türk toplumu. *Uluslararası İnsan Bilimleri Dergisi*, <http://www.insanbilimleri.com> .

reproduction of the production relations, in other words, the reproduction of the capitalist exploitation relations. While political apparatus adjusts the individuals to the political ideology of the government, the new apparatus feeds all citizens with nationalism, chauvinism, liberalism, moralism and similar emotions via press, radio and television (Althusser, 1994, 35, 43, 45, 60). Hence, media which serves the purpose of sustaining the capitalist order is covered and hidden universally by the dominant bourgeoisie ideology. In this way, the ideology of the dominant class is ensured to be placed in the minds. Accordingly, the elites who hold the power/authority act together due to the common interests among themselves, their social origins and their viewpoint on the world. These elites, who are active as the unofficial opinion leaders in the operation of the organizations and in decision-making, are also active in building the social structure (Mills, 1974, 407). Therefore, the elites who hold the power/authority want to gain the consent of the public and keep them away from the decision-making mechanisms in order to establish and sustain their hegemony.

Due to its structural feature, commercial media depends on the profit and competition conditions of the capitalist system. Therefore, the first priority of the commercial media is not to inform but to sell more. For that reason, it aims to sell more by giving tabloid news that do not contain clear information; that avoid meddling; and that are filled with violence and sexuality in order to increase their advertisement/publicity revenues (Schwobel, 1982, 47-52). As a consequence, the basic material of the mass media that broadcast for commercial purposes is the othered ordinary people on the third page news dominated by “Orientalist” viewpoint.

Commercial media which operates according to the commercial rules is an industry which is dependent on the ads for its income (Schiller, 1993: 40). Accordingly, media serves to provide support for the economic elites, government and other elites who hold the power/authority which it uses as news sources and from which it obtains ads and announcement revenue in order to protect their private interests. Although it is said that the media is independent and undertakes the responsibility to announce what is going on in the world according to democratic doctrine, it is against the nature of the job to claim that the choices of media executives in relation with the news are based on unbiased and objective criteria (Chomsky and Herman, 1999: 9-20). Many of the biased choices in the field of

media result from the fact that staffs are selected among the people who have appropriate qualifications; from internalized prejudices; and from the fact that personnel complies with the boundaries created by property structure, organization style, market and political authority factors. Symbolic elites – who undertake the duty of manipulator by affecting the public emotionally through bringing forward the conditions and legitimacy of the dominant order and certain social values like morality, religion, sexuality and nationality – gain the consent of the public in order to ensure the continuance of the order in line with the interests of the elite minority (Schiller, 1993, 10). Therefore, power/authority owners within democratic systems benefit from the means of communication in order to sustain and spread this power/authority. While representing more and positively those who hold the power/authority, the media puts forward the weak side of the ordinary people who do not hold the power/authority. Thus, media performs the duty of being the extension of the authority in which the authority which reproduces dominant discourse within its own discourse is instrumentalized.

Orientalist discourse in the media

In his study entitled *Haberlerin Ağında İslam*, Edward W. Said stated that recently there is a strange resurrection of Christian church in the American and European media and there are ideas belonging to the periods in which opinions about the Muslims in the Eastern style that did not include any respect were uttered and where there were racial or religious segregation. The news source about Islam is media for many Americans and Europeans. Media paints a picture on Islam and uses this picture as the occasion arises in accordance with the interest of the society to which they belong. Islamic countries (East) do not oppose their transforming into a consumer market in the rush of industrialization, modernization and development. Therefore, this condition also becomes an appropriate approach for the orientalist viewpoint of the developed West on the underdeveloped East (2000: 11, 12, 144).

The postcolonial discourse which spreads in the electronic environment nowadays intensifies the clichés which are the instruments to look at the East. Television, films and all facilities of the media force the information to shape into molds which are increasingly becoming uniform (Said, 2003:35-36). Accordingly, the uniform process and cultural clichés reproduce and increase the effect of the Eastern dream of the nineteenth century which is academic,

imaginatively mysterious, dangerous, passive, suitable to be conquered, primitive and threatening.

Sözen defines the “Orientalist” discourse as putting into effect of West as a systematic scientific discipline which has associations, publications, customs, language and rhetoric in order for the West that aims to transform the East to actualize this aim (1999, 138). In his column published in newspaper Radikal in 06.11.2003, Hasan Bülent Kahraman says,

In the eyes, dreams and opinions of the West, there is an understanding, approach and method that asserts ‘East wants this’. They come to Turkey and try to show us to us. In the beginning, the course is probably a little different: the painted portraits had a ‘journalism’ value. Maybe they were ‘detecting’, recording and transmitting to both the West and us some images. This condition later developed, and the West settled on the consideration that ‘East is this’. An Eastern chain, which is not is not in any way related to the imaginary reality which they call ‘this’, was fettered on the neck and wrists of the East.

In his article above, Kahraman states how the East which was imaginatively fictionalized by the West replaced the real East in the course of time.

Yeğenoğlu states that the “Orientalist” discourse tries to place in a certain status and to position the establishment process of the Western subject differently from the colonialist discourse (2003, 12-13). With the colonialist discourse and the social gender discourse, “Orientalist” discourse reflects the Eurocentric point of view. By being internalized within the Eastern communities, it continues reproducing both itself and its own East within itself. In his research entitled *Turkey and Turks in the Western Cinema* (1996), Giovanni Scognamillo notes that some political, economic, social and cultural realities always or usually lie behind all works ranging from the lowest quality film to the most ordinary production.

The internalization of the Orientalism reveals itself in two forms. The first one is in the form of reacting against the “Orientalist” image of the East. To counter the Western prejudice towards the East, the term Occidentalism was derived to mean the Eastern prejudice towards the West. The second one is actualized in the form of perceiving the Orientalism in line with the requests of the West; positioning the East according to this perception; and considering being closer to the West as a privilege in itself. It is possible to see the internalized “Orientalist” point of view in the columns of the columnists and cinema films.

For instance, in her column published in newspaper Radikal in 27.07.2005, Mine Kırıkkanat says,

.....In every 10 square meters, this scene is repeated; our dark skinned people definitely grill and eat meat on the seaside, turning their backs on the sea. Among them, you cannot come across a single family that grills fish on their barbecue. If they liked fish and knew how to grill them, they probably would not go to bed with their dirty white undershirts and long underwear; would not scratch themselves repeatedly, would not chew the cud and burp, and would not be this thick, short legged, long armed and covered with hairs to begin with....

In his writing entitled “Mine G. Kırıkkanat ve Beyaz Türk Oryantalizmi” (Mine G. Kırıkkanat and White Turk Orientalism), Günal (2001, Birikim, Issue, 144) defines Mine Kırıkkanat as the “example of the “Orientalist” native intellectual” who despises and disdains her own culture and people, and he states that Kırıkkanat undertakes the task to be the conveyor of the Eurocentric “Orientalist” discourse “which hates everything about the East.”

Another example is from Bekir Çoşkun in his column published in newspaper Hürriyet in 03.05.2007,

He scratches his belly. He is happy to have a fat belly, because that means he lives his life to the full. He sits taking his one leg under him. When he sees women who are walking with flags in their hands, he gets angry saying, “What are they saying...” He does not like the “news”. He watches “TV entertainment show”.....

In their columns above, Bekir Çoşkun and Mine Kırıkkanat criticize the common people via an insulting expression with an elitist approach. However, the fact that the media, who must take responsibility in socializing the society, discusses this criticism constructively by drawing a cause and effect relation will be more beneficial in ensuring the society’s positively changing.

A similar point of view is shown from a different perspective in Occidentalists. In his column published in newspaper Milli Gazete in 04.04.2009, M. Şevket Eygi says,

..... This country was not like this. Religion, morality and virtue were prevailing in this country. Of course, people were committing sins, but not as widespread, openly and courageously as in today. A Muslim nation does not exist without sin or mistake. However, a Muslim nation is not like this nation either. Depravedness which is called debauchery in our religion has surrounded the society.....

By looking from his worldview, M. Şevket Eygi judges the society with a viewpoint that tries to knock sense into the society. Due to the fact that the subject of this study is

Orientalism, Occidentalism and the occidentalist discourse will be discussed in another study.

The internalized “Orientalist” point of view prevails in “Hamam” (The Turkish Bath), the first film of Ferzan Özpetek which was written and directed by him, and “Harem Suare” (Last Harem) (Demirkıran, <http://www.elelebizbize.com>). On this issue, by giving examples from the Hollywood movies that evoke mysterious, exotic and dangerous East image in his study mentioned above, Scognamillo states that Turkish baths are frequently featured places in these movies (1996:118-119). Thus, it can be stated that Özpetek internalizes and reproduces the orientalist viewpoint of the West in his works mentioned above.

Conclusion and Evaluation

In this study which is addressed and discussed in terms of hegemony concepts, a critical query has been conducted as a sample application in the societal, economic and social levels according to macro/universal and micro/local viewpoints about the representation of and perception on the ordinary people living in the lower class of the society socio-demographically in the media via the news² on the ‘Third Pages’ of Star, Hürriyet and Akşam newspapers which perform mass publishing.

Accordingly, it has been detected that 72% of the examined news are the news that contain crimes/violence and 28% of them contain sexuality/accident/other. Representation ratio in the news is 67% for men, 27% for women, and 6% for children. When the socio-economic conditions of the news subjects are observed, it is seen that 59% of the people who are represented on “Third Page” news are included in the low-income group, 28% of them are included in the middle-income group and 10% of them are included in the upper-income group. Civil servants, secretaries and craftsmen are included in the middle-income group. 50% of the men who are represented on the news are wrongdoers. Children who are represented on the news are aggrieved due to accident or crime.

²For the same research result, See Mora, N. (2008). Üçüncü sayfada Türk toplumu. *Uluslararası İnsan Bilimleri Dergisi*, <http://www.insanbilimleri.com> .

According to our research conducted within the selected sample, the cities which are featured in the “Third Page News” the most are İstanbul with a percentage of 25%, Adana with a percentage of 19%, and Bursa with a percentage of 13%. According to the information taken from the ‘Economic and Social Indicators’ table of State Planning Organization, these cities are also among the cities with the highest incoming migration ratio.

The representation of and perception on the ordinary people living in the lower class of the society socio-demographically in the media can be said to confirm the viewpoint of the symbolic elites on these people and the fact that those who hold power/authority hide their hegemonic aims.

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