

Full Length Research Paper

Context problem in news and ideological presentation of custom killings in newspapers: An example in Hürriyet and Sabah daily newspapers

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This paper aims to discuss the reproduction of ideology in news discourse caused by the lack of context information. The discourse analysis focuses on news presentation in Turkish daily newspapers (Hürriyet and Sabah) about a young girl, Güldünya Tören, who was killed in the name of honor. In the frame of this paper, approaches on cultural studies are reviewed to help clarifying some aspects of her case; however, Teun Adrian Van Dijk's critical discourse analysis model was the main focus. The analysis demonstrates that the representation of the event in newspapers is deprived intentionally of context information. Social, cultural and economic explanations are disregarded and news presentation is highly popularized, personalized in order to create sensational news, thereby reinforcing the ideological domination of the state by custom killing example.

Key words: News discourse, news context, ideological reproduction, customs, fourth estate, secondary definers, ideological state apparatus.

INTRODUCTION

This paper focuses on the news which appeared in Turkish daily newspapers about Güldünya Tören who was killed in the name of honor by her brothers in February 2004 for having a baby out of wedlock. The event is narrated as follows. Güldünya, living in a small village near Bitlis, in Eastern Anatolian part of Turkey where the conservative way of living is still influential, gets impregnated by her cousin's husband. She was sent to İstanbul to escape from her family and severe custom rules. She finds refuge in an Imam's house (prayer leader) who was from her village and gives birth to a baby boy named Ümit meaning hope. Then she gave her child out for adoption to a family. Being pursued in İstanbul by her brothers, she was shot and wounded in the street. From the hospital's intensive care unit bed, she pleaded for the police to save her. Unfortunately, her brothers, pretending to be visitors, entered late at night

the unguarded hospital and shot her in the head, turning off the life support machine.

Such killing in the name of honor or custom, women being killed by family relatives to clean the family honor, is a deep-rooted, traditional practice in certain segments of Turkish society. Mostly veiled, it became "news", especially since in the 90s and in 2004 when Güldünya Tören affair took place, in the media with a huge coverage, and great number of newspapers headlined the story during several weeks.

The paper aims to demonstrate how two Turkish daily newspapers promote a preferred meaning in their treatment of a custom killing affair, using Güldünya Tören's story as an example. The study focuses on the analysis of how language choice and page settings in a newspaper become signifiers. The theoretical background of the study is supported by cultural studies suggestions about news researches (Curran et al., 1991; Hall, 1999; Hall, 2002; Smith, 2005) figured in critical communication approaches. News is analyzed according to the hegemonic way of reading where the readers are

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considered as passive and ideologically persuadable.

Teun Adrian van Dijk's critical discourse approach is the principal analysis model; this technique seeks to find out the misuse of linguistics, and consequently to reveal wisely included ideas of inequality, injustice and power in news contents in order to create an ideological production and re-production on people's perceptions.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Ideology occupies an important role in supporting and solidifying the existing social structure and relations. By the way, dominant classes in a society execute hegemony through ideology (Fairclough, 1992); one of the most important realms where the ideology is produced is the media. Cultural studies concerning ideology suggest that dominant, powerful people and institutions and the state itself use media and news to recreate and reproduce the social concepts in order to manipulate the masses easily. In other word, news supports ruling class elite's values and norms. Ideology produces reality, sets up power relations in discourse; thus the dominant class ideology is totally accepted by the masses. Consequently, the dominant class and the one under domination can be defined systematically.

Ideological discourse analysis examines not only how language and representation produce meanings but also finds out the power of relations and the formation of identities (Cited by Hall in Meyers, 2004). This is the reason why news discourse studies aim to understand how social meanings and information are established and produced (Arslan-Yeğen, 2004). News becomes the area of transformation of political actors' ideas to public opinion and area of establishment of their ideology, power and rulership through media (İnal, 1999).

As the news discourse is where the ideological production is done, media becomes a tool for the majority to accept the dominant ideology (Özer, 2001). News discourse context analysis reflects the preferred perspective of the media and the state.

News discourse may contain authorities, involve people's personal statements and interpretations as well as basic information in an incident; or may be critical in order to create an opposition, represent the plurality of media thereby fulfilling its ethical role of informing and educating. According to the first preferred perspective, media institutions may adopt a popular look to news even to the most serious ones just to maximize their profits. The most important thing seems to prepare and present the news in a very short time and to have a huge coverage. The content and the news value principles are determining factors to qualify news. On the other hand, the media's critical and ethical perspective does not seem to guarantee a huge coverage and a readership among readers always, or ideologically and purposely educating and informing the readers are not the principle aim of media holders and the state.

METHODOLOGY

The study about ideological reproduction in news discourse in the example of *Güldünya Tören* news in *Hürriyet* and *Sabah* daily newspapers is limited to news that appeared about her from 27 - 29 February, 2004. During these days news appeared on full page and the affair occupied the headlines of the newspapers. The present study includes syntactic, contextual and background analysis of headlines, news leads and news content. In the frame of this study, Teun Van Dijk's critical discourse analysis is the major methodological reference as well as Allan Bell's work on news discourse. Their explicit models about news discourse analysis give the best access to the ways which the state ideology is being reproduced by the media.

Van Dijk (1983, 1985, 1988a, 1988b, 1991, 1993, 1995, 1998, 1999) has several studies about the discourse analysis, discourse, ideology and their production in media. With his interdisciplinary approach to ideology, Van Dijk (1993, 1995, 1998: 8) draws attention to the importance of cognitive process and defines ideology as the basis of social representations shared by members of a group. According to Van Dijk, discourses including the use of language, text, talk and communication are the most crucial social practices in ideological formulations of social production (Kuo and Nakamura, 2005: 394).

Van Dijk (1988b: 9) considers the message as a form of public discourse, besides emphasizing the importance of contextual factors shaping the basic form of news discourse and takes on news story in two different linguistic analysis forms "syntactic" and "semantic". News syntax is grammatical form of sentences and semantic is the meaning of sentences, words and the whole discourse.

Van Dijk's (1988b: 15) discourse analysis model is composed of macro and micro structure. Macro structure is composed of thematic and schematic analyses; news, such as stories or arguments, follows a hierarchical scheme. News production is done thousand times a day under heavy limitations of professional routines, time and printing process which is organized by a scheme. In the said scheme headlines and news lead sum up together the whole story (Van Dijk's, 1991: 114). They serve also as an introduction to the text as well as being the abstract of the full story on a macro level. Main story, parts and time information are presented in the introduction; they point out the upper level of the scheme (Van Dijk, 1983). Furthermore, it is possible to understand the main idea from the title and the introduction. In macro structure analysis, titles, news introductions, main event, news sources, background results and context information, evaluations of people and events are taken into consideration.

Syntactic analysis, local coherence, lexical choice and rhetoric analysis are done within the micro structure analysis. Sentence structure is taken into consideration in syntactic analysis. The choice of words has a very important meaning of ideological structuring. In news rhetoric, quotations from witnesses, photographs are used to make the news more persuasive and convincing. Dijk undertakes news components on the level of meaning and according to him headlines and news leads make an opening to text in a semantic way. So titles cannot be independent of the text: they reflect the text and are derived from it. Van Dijk (1985) considers the headlines and introductory news as the first stage of journalism practice. According to Bell (1991) headlines, news leads and texts are read all together but the production process follows the successive setting of headlines, texts and titles. News leads provide the reporter a full concentration on text; on the other hand headlines are given by others also called "secretary of page". Headlines just summarize the main story but do not give a real introduction to it. Bell suggests that headlines are given after the rendition of the text so the reader reaches the meaning after reading the content. News leads may include information which will not be repeated in the story later on and can be derived from the

title. On the other hand the headline can be extracted only from the news leads.

For Bell (1991) news lead is the most distinguishing part of news discourse; it exposes journalist's writing talent because it is difficult to write news leads without a journalistic education. News lead is written in "micro-story" format and recapitulates the whole story, actors and requires journalist's writing expertise to sum up everything in a short paragraph. It includes also information about the location of the story, opinions of different actors involved. Main event is generally announced on news leads and it comes after the headlines and before the text and the spots.

ANALYSIS OF CUSTOM KILLING PRESENTATION IN NEWSPAPERS

Headlines and news leads

Hürriyet and Sabah newspapers present the affair of Güldünya by announcing it in different headlines and news leads for several days. Expressions used in the headlines have a dramatic aspect, making it difficult for the reader to understand the essence of the story at first. The emphasis is put on "how the affair happened" rather than to "what happened". Word of "custom" appears many times in the headlines and the blame is put on the people's beliefs, norms and values rather than themselves. Therefore her death is revealed when the sub-heads, top-lines and the whole text are read all together.

Headline: "To Hell with Your Customs"; "May Your Customs Cease To Exist"

Sub-head: "Two brothers fired their sister in the middle of the street in Istanbul in the name of custom. The sister is injured but she did not die. 13 h later they attacked her at the hospital room and took her life" (Hürriyet, 2004).

Statements on the headlines are addressed to Güldünya's brothers like "a revolt"; direct form of address creates a personalized manner in journalism thereby readers have the hints that news is limited to people's perceptions and interpretations. Consequently, headlines represent semantically a greater importance than news leads and the text. For example Hürriyet's headlines criticize severely the killing act and adopt a drastic attitude; as a matter of fact, in Turkish "to hell...", "cease to exist..." kind of damnation statements are used in day-to-day language when something unbearable happened or when a person is subject to very bad experiences. These headlines express the idea of serious disapproval to what happened thus the newspaper adopts a position within the affair and acts like an advocate of Güldünya. On the other hand, news is concentrated on custom killing and on its power on people and society.

1. Headline: "Just before the execution"; "Custom bullet hit twice"

1. Sub-head: "Güldünya, first fired on the street then in hospital because of custom rules, is caught to Sabah's cameras just before the execution" (Sabah, 2004).

2. Top-line: "Güldünya is dead"

2. Headline: "Cry My World Cry"

2. Sub-headline: "Güldünya, victim of custom, was killed in her hospital room in front of three patients who declared they "did not see anything". The police did not protect her when she was injured; after her death guarded her corpse. Her family refused the mortuary."

3. Headline: "Güldünya is unplugged."

3. Sub-head: "Shut by custom bullet and in vegetative state, Güldünya's life support unit is closed. Her family refused her body, refused to donate her organs; they said "We want nothing left of her" (Sabah, 2004)

4. Headline: "State funeral for Güldünya"

4. Sub-head: "Police took off her corpse to Bitlis. Her ritual prayer is performed by director of Religious Affairs. The minister will look after her baby."

5. Headline: "After her death, Güldünya became precious."

5. Sub-head: "For Güldünya everyone stood up. People took care of 22 years old lonely mother of a baby boy Güldünya after her death." (Sabah, 2004).

In Sabah newspaper, headlines firstly announce Güldünya's shooting; her death and then her killing "in cooperation and in vain"; and finally her proud funeral. They reproach her killing and suggest that her crime is committed in cooperation; the police did not take the necessary precautions to avoid her possible death, witnesses ignore the crime so she had been killed in full view of people, no measures had been taken to avoid her death. Newspaper shows an intense opposition to Güldünya's crime. In fact, there was not an official "state ceremony" but the newspaper expresses state officers' interest to her in headlines. This preference is caused by the consideration of authorities to Güldünya killing more than their feeling of duty. Headline number 5 expresses "a deep sorrow" of the newspaper for her death and tries to find those responsible for the crime. Progressively, newspaper's attitude changes and headlines have an interrogating attitude, as seen on headline number 2: "she is dead, everything is over, are you happy now?" Sabah also is giving a popular meaning to news. Headline number 2 includes the name of Güldünya, "dünya" which means "world". Headlines number 2 and 3 reach the peak concerning personalization; they give extreme importance to her death.

On the other hand, the use of the word "execution" is so strong that it draws the attention to "her merciless killing". In Turkish law the word "execution" is defined as "to satisfy a court judgment, a death penalty" (Dayinlari, 1997: 484; Özcan, 1985: 364; Ovacik, 1995).

"To execute a person" a court judgment is required. In this affair, law system is disregarded and customs rules

seem legitimate. News discourse transposes “family council” to “law court” and “the brothers” to “official executioner”.

Concerning the news leads, *Hürriyet* reserved a large coverage to *Güldünya* killing the first day of its announcement; the spot is presented as leads and the main concentration is on her death. Some of the characteristics mentioned by Bell take place in leads:

“22 years old *Güldünya Tören* who has a baby from her cousin’s husband was shot by her two brothers in the middle of the street. Her brothers realized that she was not dead then bombard her with bullets. Her baby adopted, *Güldünya* is brain-dead” (*Hürriyet*, 2004).

In this micro-story format, news lead composed of one paragraph, there appears the news value; people involved in the event, the incident, information about her death and the adoption of her baby are presented here. The last sentence points out and expresses newspaper’s critical and pathetic approach to her execution with this message: “She couldn’t even take care of her child and love her fully”. However, there is a contradictory perspective in relation to newspaper’s critical approach that should not be overlooked; the first sentence proposes a justification to legitimize *Güldünya*’s death by her brothers:

“22 years old *Güldünya Tören* having a baby from her cousin’s husband...”

This sentence neutralizes newspapers’ impractical criticism in background and context information. However, a meaning lies underneath that sentence such as:

“The brothers killed her but she did something wrong, she had a relationship with her cousin’s husband and had a baby. If she did not commit such a mistake she would not have been killed”.

Such an interpretation can be added:

“She had a baby from her cousin’s husband, it was against customs’ rules and then she was killed; besides, her brothers became criminals because of her”.

The newspaper has a position full of contradictions; probably this is caused by personalization of the news.

“She is raped in Bitlis, sentenced to death. She escaped from her uncle’s house in Istanbul. Her two brothers found her and killed her. She is hospitalized but the custom bullet found her even in the hospital” (*Sabah*, 2004).

This news lead of one paragraph resumes the story where news value appears; actors and the affair are

presented in detail. But the way *Sabah* announces the affair is very different than *Hürriyet*; they have two different perspectives. *Sabah* says that *Güldünya* is raped; “she is raped by her relative *Servet Taş*”. This statement is used in the first paragraph. Launched as raped on news makes her more aggrieved and presents her as a victim. As a matter of fact, there is a huge semantic difference between two expressions used in *Hürriyet*: “forbidden relationship” and “she is raped” in *Sabah*.

Sabah newspaper exposes a clear and firm attitude in news leads than *Hürriyet* and expresses the idea that *Güldünya* “is dead in vain”. However, this attitude either is not enough to present the event properly because *Sabah* focuses the attention on *Güldünya* and her family.

Finally, it is possible to affirm that part of different media organizations, both newspapers, *Hürriyet* and *Sabah* are very influential in manipulating the public opinion; they have both a central-popular political view. Nevertheless, they have a different publishing policy; they may be defined as “two newspapers sharing the same field in a competitive position”. These newspapers ideologically adopt a certain positioning on the media in order to draw the attention of the readers. There is this subjective transfer of people’s feelings, personalization of events higher than the probability for newsworthiness. Individual stories are easier to identify so *Güldünya*’s affair is a highly personalized one in which the presentation of the affair is based on how a girl is executed by her brothers in the name of custom.

“Custom killing” and “*Güldünya*’s affair” issues are just a tool for media to create “red hot news” and to increase the circulation of the newspapers. Both newspapers introduce the event in headlines and news leads firstly from a general point of view; then they give personal detailed information about the event. Headlines and leads are gathered in order to personalize the event. There is disguised detailed information in newspapers discordant with each other which reflect paradoxical meanings; this can be explained as a result of journalistic practice helping to personalize the event.

Syntactic and lexical analysis

Trew (cited by Fang, 1994), in a research made on English newspapers, states that it is possible to show a person guilty when the words are in passive form; meantime wiser, slight changes in words introduce newspapers’ ideology for example to justify the violence of police forces. Similar examples are seen in Van Dijk’s (1988a) and Fowler’s (1991) studies. In Turkish newspapers, usually, active form is preferred; for example words defining police’s attitude, instead of “...three persons are arrested” is “police arrested three persons”. This presentation demonstrates police as a powerful entity, legitimizes his attitude when he transgresses a

rule or disrespects the laws (Özer, 2001). This shows how newspapers treat different institutions and people.

In Güldünya's affair, newspapers have an attitude against the family, brothers and authorities; mostly active form is used in sentences: "Her family decided that she should die" (Hürriyet newspaper); "her family decided to kill her" (Sabah newspaper). The use of active form is to emphasize the wrong decision taken by the family. The same lexical choice for Güldünya's situation can be interpreted as a desire to show her as a "victim" of custom killing. Newspaper has a critical attitude while interpreting the affair of Güldünya because the lexical choice presents Güldünya "powerless" versus her family that is "powerful". The phrase about her sentence to death by her family is written in active form. The meaning of the sentence "Güldünya Tören got pregnant when she had a relationship with her uncle daughter's husband, Servet Taş" contradicts with the general attitude of the newspaper towards Güldünya. However, it reminds the readers that she had a relationship with a married man; such an attitude is critical in Turkish society, and so the murder is legitimized.

According to İnal (1996), lexical choice of news reflects the ideological attitude of the newspaper: "Language and discourse is a field of challenge reflecting the power relations on sexual, ethnic and religious differences. Challenge in language is a concept related to discourse. The meaning of words, its accent is formed in discourses." According to Fowler (1991), powerful institutions make themselves legitimate with the use of language. Here, Hürriyet uses the term "fellow woman" for Güldünya and the "names" of other parts in the event. Sabah qualifies her as "Güldünya living in Bitlis". Her origin is mentioned in Hürriyet to underline that custom crime is frequent in undeveloped regions like Bitlis, even though the crime happened in İstanbul. More and more the message becomes "man has to accept that custom belongs to other regions even though the murder happened in İstanbul".

Mostly, Güldünya has been presented by her name in both newspapers. Even though other people like her brothers, her mother, her father, her cousin's husband are mentioned on the news, the main subject that makes the news popular is Güldünya herself. Defining the affair around only one person extracts the importance of custom and custom murder and highlights Güldünya.

Background and Contextual Information

Media institutions' political-economy necessitates reliable source. However, the difficulty of obtaining the whole story of a case with full information results in closed texts. Thus it seems easier to present a case in a personal and typical way; "why's and how's" is not transmitted properly. For example in the case of Güldünya some of the information is missing and insufficient background and

contextual information tries to reflect the whole story. Conceptual explanations will be given to better understand and analyze the case in order to position the context of the murder.

Concepts of "honor" and "custom" are derived from a society's social, cultural and especially from its social value system. In general terms, "custom" in Turkish Law Dictionary is defined as "unwritten moral and legal rules obeyed since years in society". And "honor" is used as synonym of virtue, chastity, honesty, morality and glory (Aykut, 1999). This concept attributed to rural culture is transposed to urban life by emigrants; this is particularly seen in traditional family milieu where individual and individualism does not count. Custom, a social norm, is considered as an independent and superior concept beyond the individual. Thus, it is a part of traditional belief and values system coercive to individual. In this perspective, sanctions are applied without any question or opposition and refusals are severely punished.

In patriarchal societies, woman's chastity is "man's honor"; woman on low status, her sexuality has an extreme value (Tezcan, 1999), consequently chastity and honor concept is related to woman's sexual behavior, sexual attitude and it reflects the traditions, customs developed by the society. Protecting "woman's chastity or honor" is associated with protecting woman's purity and avoiding sexuality. But protecting woman's honor is not limited only to woman; man also has a word to say about it; man has the duty to protect her honor related to him such as his wife, his sister, his mother etc. Man gives importance to protect woman's honor and chastity for him and for the sake of his family and defines an opposite behavior as "disgrace". Woman's passive role is justified by two reasons: first, an opposite behavior humiliates family's men and division of labor approved by traditional social values places woman under man control; single girls are under father's will, widows are under the will of her husband's men relatives or her brother (Tezcan, 1999).

Consequently, a woman is not perceived as an individual sufficient to herself but dependent and related to man. She has to obey to customs and traditions; the protection of her sexual purity has a symbolic value. Illegitimate child, prostitution, getting pregnant and having a sexual relationship with a man before marriage are disapproved and becomes a threat for family's honor. In this context, there is a socio-cultural environment which approves, encourages and protects honor murders: "Clans". People who committed such a crime are seen as people behaving according to the rules, values and morality of the community. So they are approved by their environment (Tezcan, 1999). In this frame, customs are more powerful than people and it is a social and cultural reality. In the frame of Güldünya's affair, news discourse in these newspapers highlights the reality of custom killings in Turkish society. But the news presentation reinforces the personalization and reduction of the event

to Güldünya. This affair is not handled on the news on a global perspective, as a societal problem but as the problem of a young girl who is a victim of custom killing. There is no proposal of a solution for the issue but just damnation of what happened.

For example, news suggests Imam (religious leader) criticized that the police did not take enough precautions to avoid Güldünya's murder, even though her life-long protection would not guarantee the end of custom murders. So it seems imperative to abolish completely "customs" to erase custom murders. News is composed of point of views of different people involved in the affair but still there is no real information to form a deep perspective in order to solve the real problem. Explanations state expressly that there is no enough context and background information to understand the affair. There is not even a definition of custom or a deep look to "what happened" and "how it happened".

The personalized perspective to the affair makes it popular. There is not a critical look to customs, only information about the murder is conveyed; cultural, social and economical reasons lying behind the custom murder are not discussed. News discourse is only concentrated on Güldünya Tören and what she has been through; connoted message is "woman disobeying the custom will be killed". However, newspapers should present this affair with a different perspective that makes people understand the "how" and "why" of the custom killing. News should be presented in a context in which reasons of custom murders, structural problems, eventual solutions and defaulters' attitudes are discussed. Short-term and long-term solutions should be proposed by researchers and academics in the field.

EVALUATION AND CONCLUSION

Studies about news and news discourse in liberal-plural communication approach are concentrated on the importance of objectiveness of the press (D'Alessio, 2003). So the press can fulfill the functions of observing, informing, forming a public opinion (Irvan, 1995: 76-77) and being objective by presenting the news with a neutral language with variety in interpretations. The present study defines the ideological reproduction caused by insufficient context information in news discourse with the example of custom killing. News is presented in a uniform way and news discourse constructed a certain meaning with the headlines. Readers witness only the superficial sides of the affair supported by personal statements, quotations, definitions, positioning, photographs which propose the same thing; consequently news became typical.

Both newspapers reduce the custom murder to Güldünya and to her murderers in their presentation on the news, thereby personalizing the event. They try to be critical to killers and to show her as a victim.

Nevertheless with their lexical and syntactical choice they cannot prevent presenting the killers as powerful vs. the victim as powerless and the murder as legitimate vs. victim as responsible. So a very serious event is popularized. The affair is announced with sensational headlines on the news; titles are personalized and finally it takes the form of a "photonovel" played around Güldünya. The story starts with information about her pathetic life and her tragic ending announcement. The role of bad guy is played by her cousin's husband and her brothers. The story ends with the transport of her funeral to Bitlis from Istanbul.

Is this presentation the correct one? Did press accomplish its duty? It is really difficult to answer these questions; the absence of enough context and background information for readers to build up their own opinions makes difficult a fair answer. The lack of accredited sources, witnesses and speed problem imposed by media institutions can be also the problem. Thus, news discourse is structured on a bias way where no detailed information like why and how is given about the news. Consequently, Hürriyet and Sabah newspapers lose their objectivity, do not fulfill their essential role of informing and forming a public opinion and become just the producers of the dominant ideology.

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