

THE REPRESENTATION OF THE WOMAN IN THE MEDIA DISCOURSE IN ALBANIA

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ABSTRACT

In the Albanian society, gender differences remain even though several initiatives of national and international authorities aim to eliminate stereotyping related to gender differences. In this context, media can and must be, the most essential contributor towards improving women's status. Media, through its power, can greatly influence public opinion by orienting the information the public receives and how the public should think. This approach in communication science is part of the "framing" theory, which is related to agenda setting. The research question raised in this paper is about how the woman is represented in the written media in Albania. Are the stereotypes created by society reinforced by the printed media? The methodology used in this study involves discourse analyses of the printed media, specifically the independent newspapers during October 2012. The findings of this study explain that, while the press brands the woman, representation enforces her stereotype.

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INTRODUCTION

In Albania, the years 1990 are years which are related to important political changes because after a period of nearly 50 years, the government system changed from a communist system into a democratic system. This political change reflected consequences even in economical, social life of the country because such transformations touch all fields. People who hoped for a new democratic system and had aspired to be free were unprepared because these important paradigms were destroyed. Such transitive situation will affect all the factors of the society in different shapes and ways but in this thesis important for us is the role and the position of the woman.

Important changes are evident when studying the dynamics involved with the transformation of women's status. During the communist system, images of a woman showed she could do everything that a man could, because she was represented as an equal with the other gender, at least superficially. The change of political system reactivated the wide differences in relation to duties and rights according to gender. Gender stereotypes have been present in our society for centuries because of the historical context of Albania in terms of tradition and culture. In addition, economic factors played a role, because in the transition did not economically favor the growth of women's incomes. In this context, when we study the role of the woman in Albania, we find discrimination and the existence of stereotyping of society's members. In this thesis, we examine the role of the media as a reinforcing or opposing agent of stereotyping, in regard to its representation of the woman in her discourse.

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Data and Methods

This thesis analyses the representation of the woman in independently written media during October 2012. The selection of the material was done by analyzing daily newspapers that belong to an independent written media enterprise. There was no preference of dates because the purpose was to study the media's spread on the representation of women by selecting random dates during October 2012. The sources of the study were the newspapers: Panorama, Gazeta Shqiptare, Shekulli, and Koha Jonë, which are newspapers that are nationally distributed and have a major role in the written press, according to their circulation sales. The "framing" theory was used in this study. The main approach of this theory relates to "agenda setting" with both relying on the importance of media's role in the formation of public opinion by orienting public thinking. The division between these two theories relies on the elaborations of Goffman (1974) and other theorists involved in the study of gender and discourse. Weight is given to the importance not only of the question of what but also of how the journalist presents his work. The way in which the news is compiled and presented to the public influences their decisions that will endure, because transmitted messages have the power to influence the way people should think about an event or issue.

This study analyzes discourse based on the approach of Fairclough (2003), which emphasizes that:

My approach to discourse analysis is based upon the assumption that language is an irreducible part of social life, dialectically interconnected with other elements of social life, so that social analysis and research always has to take account of language. (p.2)

The discourse was studied by referring to the classification of Halliday (1994) in relation to functions of language. According to Halliday (1994), language has three simultaneous functions, conceptual, interpersonal, and textual. In terms of conceptual, the journalist, through the language used, expresses their inner experiences according to events related to their reality. The most important instruments of this function selected for the study are the lexical and transitivity. According to Mills (1995) "the study of transitivity is concerned with how actions are represented; what kind of actions appear in a text, who does them and to whom they are done" (p. 143). Transitivity is best for representation because it relates to the opportunities available to the journalist to form discourse by referring to the participants and the role that they play in the process. The most important element here is the evidence that each text relates to the journalist choice on the way it is formed, given there are many different forms to represent an event regarding the usage of verbs. Also by referring to the lexical, different strategies can be used to name those involved in the process.

Media discourse

The transmitted messages journalistic media differ from those of others forms of communication because of the specialties and tools specific to this profession. In analyzing the discourse we need to consider the language used, as journalism can greatly influence the society in which it operates.

"Journalism has social effects; through its power to create the issues of agendas and public discourse, it can enforce the beliefs; it can create people's opinion not only in the world but also in their country and the role in the world; or if it doesn't shape your opinion in a particular issue it can slightly influence those you have thoughts on." (Richardson 2007, p. 13)

When we study the discourse of media, we should consider its main features, which relate to the specifics of the text, its production, and the audience's uptake. The form of the news often relates to the opinions and thoughts of the most prominent groups. When authors create the news, they write it knowing that they reach their desired audience through it and thus can attain their chosen objectives. In this thesis, we focus on media discourse and not only question the messages transmitted from newspapers to the public, but also how these are transmitted, by referring to the specifics of the text, in terms of production and reiteration of gender differences.

Gender and media discourse

Gender representation is a topic that has attracted interest in the study of media. Different studies on the language used in discourse show that gender stereotyping is formed through discourse or through the language in use. Discourses can influence the roles and gender stereotyping. Here we refer to the approach of Butler (1990), who emphasizes that "people do gender rather than have gender". Gender stereotyping is related to the perception of members of a society, as a consequence of culture that exists in that society. The stereotyping that accompanies the woman implies she is a member of a "weaker" group, or as emotional, less powerful, irrational, or similar. These existing labels are part of media discourse in the representation of events. Media coverage is not a true representation because many factors influence the final stage, when text is ready to be assimilated by the public.

News is a representation of the world in language; because language is a semiotic code, it imposes a structure of values, social and economic in origin, on whatever is represented; and so inevitably news, like every discourse, constructively patterns that of which it speaks. News is a representation in this sense of construction; it is not a value free reflection of 'facts' (Fowler 1991, p. 4).

The discourse in media serves to present and reproduce these stereotypes, using existing ideology. "Ideologies are representations of aspects of the world which can be shown to contribute to establishing, maintaining and changing social relations of power, domination and explanation" (Fairclough 2003, p. 9)

Analyze: The representation of woman in the written media referring to the articles

The newspapers chosen for analyses were from four media outlets that were important in terms of the written press in Albania. The articles used in this thesis are listed below with reference to the sections used in the study.

The following provides the media representation of the woman.

The newspaper, "Gazeta Shqiptare", published these articles:

- "The girlfriend cheated, he kills them, shots himself" (Skënderasi, 2012, p. 1)
- "The girl whom I raised evicted me from the house" (Mitre, 2012, p. 9)
- "The declaration for feud, Ylli Cocka is accompanied by the police" (Skënderasi, 2012, p. 11)
- "High school student being violated, the 26 years old is arrested" (Lisi, 2012, p. 11)

The newspaper, "Shekulli", published the following:

- "Man kills wife on the verge of divorce" (Sh, 2012, p. 3)
- "Witness of the "murder" is threatened by the defendant" ("Witness of the Murder", 2012, p. 11)
- "Ndreca's wife: Government forced Gjergj to self-immolate" (Çela, 2012, p. 4)
- "His girlfriend was molested; he wanted to retaliate with explosives" ("His Girlfriend Was Molested", 2012, p. 7)
- "Woman denounces husband: Arrest him, he will kill me" ("Woman Denounces Husband", 2012, p. 7)
- "Edlira Bejko: The self-immolate was warned, they did not react" (Çela, 2012, p. 4)

The newspaper "Panorama", published these articles:

- "The father of Aisha, daughter dishonored me, I closed the mourn when I learned that she was pregnant" (Ilincaj and Musaj, 2012, p. 1)
- "The policewoman was massacred, sentenced to prison uncle and nephew" (Bajrami, 2012, p. 8)
- "Men play with the fate of the country" (Lumezi, 2012, p. 6)
- "Muhamet Vata jointed after arrest"; ("Muhamet Vata Jointed after Arrest", 2012, p. 1)
- "Shaban Norja: Sexual relationships with two sisters of Aishe" (2012, p. 5)
- "36 years old woman dies at hospital, family: The fault of doctors" (Xhelili, 2012, p. 10)
- "Ajshja was abused under threatens and pressure by Shabani" ("Ajshja Was Abused", 2012, p. 1)
- "Investigative experiment: Nazimja capable of killing" (2012, p. 11) "The death of 36 years old, doctor: the family hid the abortion" (Xhelili, 2012, p. 12)

The newspaper "Koha Jonë", published these articles:

- "Deceived for marriage, turned her a prostitute for 5 years" (Qoraj, 2012, p. 10)
- "Tends to kill his wife and her parents" (Qoraj, 2012, p. 11)
- "The bride threatens the mother in law for fortune" (Qoraj, 2012, p. 11)
- "Seola: Everyday a chatted with dad on Skype" (2012, p. 15)
- "The bliss of Mother Teresa, confession through memories" (2012, p. 7)
- "Imprisoned the youngster in a hotel, turned her into a prostitute" (Qoraj, 2012, p. 10)
- "Jealousy kills wife with a hammer before the children" (Qoraj, 2012, p. 12)

- "Emulation for a boy, the minor cuts the high school student" (Qoraj, 2012, p.11)
- "The old man denounces his wife; on the day against the violation toward women" ("The old man denounces his wife", 2012, p.11)

Bad news or social news

The results of analyses reveal a domination of articles related to abuses of women by different ways including physical and psychological that end in murder of women. Despite attempts by the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, to implement policies and strategies for gender equality and against violence, the problems remain. There are a number of different factors affecting women in society, including economic dependence, low education level, and lack of information that influence gender differences. Women often do not report cases of abuse because of fear, shame, others' opinion, or mistrust in legal bodies. This situation influences the consequences, with cases known only when violence is in extreme forms. Such events are searched by media for coverage, which encodes messages for informing, but which the media in its discourse fails to tell "all". This occurs because:

Media chooses the events according to the importance and significance of the news, which has to fulfill some criteria; so the news is not simply what it happened, but that which is presented as valuable and important to be a "news". (Fowler 1991, p. 13)

On this logic we analyze the dominant published articles with females in the role of victim as part of different abusings, in a time when the woman in society can be represented in other roles. An interesting point of view for the selection of media coverage is that nearly all the articles were involved in chronicles. Referring to such topics, the case of Aishe Vates (killed October, 2012) was an exception as it was placed on the pages of press as well as in chronicles. This case which was a concern in terms of it's the dynamics presented, included participation of various experts and authorities that accentuated the message for greater societal awareness of the issue.

Lexical and transitivity

Lexical is a major tool in the conceptual use of language. This refers to the way journalists choose to name those involved in the event and is significant because it is not unintentional. The journalist can use different denominations to characterize what is displayed in terms of social categories. This relates to involvement in a certain category, by ignoring inclusion of another type of category in sections of the text describing the person. Reisigl and Wodak during their work "have called these naming options a text's 'referential strategies' and have illustrates that choosing to describe an individual (or a group) as one thing or as another can serve many different psychological, social or political purposes..." (Richardson 2007, p. 49). These strategies provide an understanding of the way in which the women involved are represented in the media discourse. Their labeling mainly consists of these words: girl, girlfriend, victim, wife, woman, bride, and prostitute. The study of lexical and referential strategies (part of transitivity) regarding those described in the discourse reinforces the stereotyping of characteristics of this target group, with labels like irrational, dependent, and emotive. Thus, we emphasize that "linguistic usage is sexist, responding to the

ideological paradigms in discourse which assign women special, deviant status in certain respects" (Fowler 1991, p. 97).

Another distinctive feature of transitivity is the process itself, which relates to the use of verbs. We note there are different types of verbs, all with particular characteristics, but in this thesis their identification is important rather than classifications. The verbs used in the texts mainly include: discovered, killed, cut, violated, threatened, reports, was, humiliated, and imprisoned. Two important approaches are used by journalists in terms of the construction of the sentence: where the subject is placed before the object and where the object is placed before the subject (or deleted). Both are forms that do not change the process because they both describe the actions carried out against women. The only exception the one case where the man is denounced for violation made by his wife.

The circumstances that comprise the narrative and those involved in the event are related by use of adverbs and idioms that reinforce the position of the victimized woman. In this case, unlike others, the circumstances are not used to create bias and support division, but forward messages that aim to produce sensation in the public.

Symbolic representation

The articles used in this study were separated into two main categories. The first category was discussed above and relates to the representation of women in the victim role. It is the most dominative category when considering the timing of the study. The second category relates to a different model of a woman's representation. The results from analyses explain a symbolic representation of woman, referring to themes and discursive structures. Two articles published at Shekulli newspaper, describe two women who were wives of ex-politicians who had been persecuted. The two persecuted men had been participating in a hunger strike, in demand of their rights. In this case, the women were being interviewed from a wives' position. Thus, they take place in media discourse only by their familiar bond, where they belong.

At another time, the newspaper, Koha Jonë, publishes only one article relating to the ceremony of the 9th anniversary of the beatification of Mother Theresa. Mother Theresa is a symbol of peace, but as far she represents the woman, there are no articles about women on this day, i.e. no opinion or related analyzes about women's positions or contributes.

The newspaper, Panorama, publishes an article about the left wing leader who made a call to women; he wants them to be the masters of their own fate and the masters of their own country, and make the "big change". If we refer to Randall (2003), we can classify this article as a unimportant in terms of women's representation, because that kind of news is positioned at the end of the pyramid for newsworthiness, because in such news nothing has really happened.

CONCLUSION

Media has the power to rule and orient public opinion, enforcing perceptions about reality and is an effective means of creating new opinions. Based on results of analyses in this study, the media's influence is important in orienting the public (the reader in this case), about what to think in the case of women's representation. There were two main media discourses identified during analyses.

Firstly, the largest number of articles, published in newspapers, represented women with use of existing stereotypes in Albanian society. The cases that media chose

as news were those related to accidents and deaths. The stereotypes created by society are strengthened by the way the media discourse is structured. Throughout the many cases of women's violation, there was only one case that was presented with a social view and which was discussed by professionals, such as psychologist. Among many news articles, the women were victims of violation that concluded in death and only one case involved messages to produce awareness in society.

Secondly, there were numerous articles that related to a symbolic women's representation. In those articles, the women are not represented as victims, but as somebody's wives or somebody's relatives. This symbolic role is seen in the discourses of political leaders as well.

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