

Rights-based Approach to Journalism in Turkey

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Rights-based approach to journalism aims to enable media to pursue the violations of rights by reporting them as news and, in this way, to preserve and ameliorate the rights as well as to contribute democratization. Rights-based approach to journalism in Turkey is a pretty new field of study for the researchers who study media. The examples of rights-based journalism appeared further especially in European Union membership process. Thus, the news that are sensitive to rights have found a broader place in media. In the process of E.U. membership, Turkey was required to carry out some regulations that target the betterment of human rights, women's rights, children's rights and minority rights. Making news from a rights-based perspective is an action for the announcement of people's struggle for their rights to the public with the aim of preventing the violations of rights.

Keywords: rights-based approach to journalism, human rights, women's rights, children's rights, ethics of journalism

Introduction

The aim of this study is to attract attention to making news without violating the rights. As media has the power to steer and affect communities, it can be expected to take on the task of giving some values into prominence as well as restraining the news that have the potential to offend people. Making news from a rights-based perspective is an action for the announcement of people's struggle for their rights to the public with the aim of preventing the violations of rights. This study aims to attract attention to this issue.

Rights-based approach to journalism is a type of journalism that aims to enable media to observe the violations of rights and to make news considering the rights of the people. Thus, it is a type of journalism that aims to ameliorate the rights and contribute the democratization process. However, rights-based approach to journalism is not generally welcomed by the mainstream media because editorial politics is not sensitive to this issue or it is seen as a "risky" area. Rights-based approach to journalism also means that the activity of making news should not violate any right regardless of the topic of the news.

Rights-based approach to journalism should be the starting point for a journalist. This means that journalism should not ignore the violation of the rights, not wait for a "violation" to make news about "others", and does not cause the rights to be violated while making any news (Alankuş, 2007, p. 21).

The main concern of journalism shifted from freedom to the responsibilities of journalists. Standardization in journalism which means determining certain criteria in all fields from news worthiness to writing news and presentation of news is a way to enable journalism to be accountable for public and society. Professional responsibility model suggests some rules to be adopted about verifying the data collected, giving place to different sources and quoting opponent interpretations. Most of the studies in media ethics are also the products

of the efforts for appointing certain standards for journalism (Kaleağası & Akça, 2008) (Online)¹.

Turkey and Rights-based Approach to Journalism

Rights-based approach to journalism is a rather new field of research for the researchers who study on media in Turkey, and unfortunately, there are very few sources in this field. The most significant feature of rights-based approach to journalism is to attract attention to the importance of making news without violating rights. As media has the power of motivating and affecting communities, it should undertake the responsibility for preventing certain values being brought into the foreground or making news that offend people (For more information, <http://www.ijc.info/rp/tzf/htm.2005>).

Journalism is a profession that necessitates social sensitivity. The people who do not care about other people's pain, distress or troubles and do not try to find solutions to these problems cannot be journalists. Thus, journalists, by nature, should favour for the suppressed, the ignored and the alienated (Arsan, 2003, pp. 133-134). Within this context, making news about the struggles for gaining rights and sharing the violation of rights with public opinion are among the responsibilities of journalism. One of the most important duties of journalists is also their responsibility for truth. Whenever we lose our conscientious responsibility for truth, we are not journalists. We become propagandists or we become the partner of the boss or editor or the reader (Duran, 2003, p. 116). Journalists must be responsible for the "truth".

The journalists who deal with rights-based approach engage with a kind of public service. Rights-based approach is a kind of journalism that watch for the benefits of society for the good of society. It aims for informing society about violations of rights and the problems of society. It is advisor about the ways of solutions for the problems. It informs the readers for enabling them to have a say in their lives. It is a kind of public journalism that raise readers' awareness and show them the ways of claiming for their rights. Within this framework, it can be said that rights-based approach develops an oppositional perspective against the journalism under the impact of power elites although it is a new field of study for the researchers studying media. Even so, the need for the extensification of rights-based approach to journalism orienting at the compensation of violation of rights from mainstream media to local media, and accordingly, the need for raising consciousness in media about this topic come to the ground.

Supposing a direct relationship between the rate of development of a country and the attention paid to rights-based approach to journalism is completely wrong. The researches in this field indicate that developed countries do not give place to more rights-based news than less-developed or underdeveloped countries. On the contrary, as the violation of rights is more common in less-developed or underdeveloped countries, there are plenty of news about violation of rights in the media of developing countries.

Copenhagen Criteria about preventing human rights violations and the decisions about working for preventing the violations made Turkey take a step in this issue. Within this framework, the issue of rights has become more popular in media and more rights-based news have been made over the last few years. Thus, "rights-based approach to journalism" has become a new field of study and a new field of news.

It is not enough to mirror the approach of the media towards "rights-based news" for the solution of the problem we have faced. Although "rights" are commonly linked to the issues regarding the oppressed and the printed media is categorized as "rightist", "leftist", "centre" or "Islamist", newspapers should develop a

¹ Retrieved from

<http://www.siyasaliletisim.org/index.php/dr-bahadr-kaleaas/yrdr-doc-dr-emel-akca/455-habercilikte-yeni-araylar-ve-hak-habercilii.html>.

protective approach towards the people who do not think the same thing with them. When it comes to the rights, “avoiding attitude” is not an acceptable politics.

The following paragraph explains the state of “human rights” news in the websites of “best-selling” newspapers of Europe and United States in a week.

While *Le Figaro* which is published in France had 15 news about rights issues, *Le Monde* gave place to 28 news. While *The Guardian of England* chose 41 news among human rights issues, *The Daily Telegraph* selected its 20 news from this topic. *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* which is published in Germany gave place to 159 human rights news. *The New York Times* which is published in United States had 49 human rights news. Some of these newspapers are characterized as “conservative”, “liberal” or “leftist”. However, this distinction does not set criteria in terms of paying attention to rights news.

It is possible to say that the newspapers published in Turkey whose sales numbers are low have better developed their public functions in terms of bringing rights issues forward and defending the rights when compared to best-selling newspapers. However, when the determinant power of best-selling newspapers in molding public opinion and society’s getting information is taken into consideration, the point to be emphasized is about what can be done to enable mainstream media to be sensitive to rights.

On the other hand, the researches on rights-based news do not offer any data about the quality or the effect of the news. Numerical results do not speak about whether the news reported have a proper language, editing and discourse so as to really catch the readers. It is understood that the issue of rights which has not been off the agenda since 1960’s does not attract the attention of mainstream media very much. It is not common to look from the perspective of the people whose rights are violated in mainstream media. In short, the ignorance of mainstream media towards rights-based news is going on. Unfortunately, Turkey’s being on the process of E.U. membership is not enough to resolve the problem.

It can be seen that the newspapers that give more place to rights-based news are the ones that have low sales rates. The newspapers that dominate the 80% of the total circulation give place to fewer rights-based news (Kürkçü, 2004, p. 1).

Childrens’ Rights and Journalism

Childrens’ rights are a significant part of rights-based approach to journalism. News about childrens’ rights are fewer than other rights-based news. It can be said that there is no difference between newspapers from different perspectives in terms of ignorance about childrens’ rights. The rate of the news about childrens’ rights does not even reach to 1%.

However, children should participate in decision-making processes both in family and society while they also should take part in various activities. In general, children become the subject of news in festivals, children’s days and at the beginning of education years. When it comes to the news about childrens’ rights, the rights that children have and the concepts regarding the children should be known very well. Writing news about violation of childrens’ rights in an ignorant way becomes another violation of childrens’ rights in itself.

Ragıp Duran from Galatasaray University states that “it is very dangerous to otherize a child and we should arrange our attitude to a child as if he/she were our child”. Duran also attracts attention to the significance of knowing the concepts about child who is generally defined between 0 or 18 years old by indicating that this awareness affects the news (Duran, 2005, p. 1).

While interviewing a child, one should pay attention to these factors: “getting permission for the interview, choosing a convenient place for the child, asking understandable questions, avoiding accusatory attitude or leading questions, avoiding too emotional approach and verifying the data obtained in the interview” (Önderoğlu, 2005, p. 1).

The most common violation about children’s rights is revealing the identities of children in news. 21st Article of the Press Law states that “Child’s identity cannot be broadcasted no matter he/she is a victim or perpetrator”. As Korkut indicates that “We should not otherize children as well as the events and issues about children” (Korkut, 2005, p. 1).

Conclusion

The ones who do not care about other people’s pains and distresses, and who do not try to find solutions to these problems cannot be journalists. Thus, journalists, by nature, should favour for the suppressed, the ignored and the alienated (Arsan, 2003, pp. 133-134). However, both national and local media have an understanding of journalism that does not contradict with power elites. Journalists mostly cannot take initiative and, as a result, news are composed as products of a “suppressed, cornered and forced” state of psychology. The gender, sexual orientation or social class of the people who become the subject of news might set the tone of the news, and thus, the language of the news might change.

Continuity of the events that become the subject of the news is ignored while breaking the news. As news bring one dimension of the event forward, they might sometimes distort the reality. Having a consciousness and knowledge about rights directly affects language of the news. While making news about right to life or freedom of speech, the language and method that journalists should use are very important. It is closely related with the attitude of the journalist or the newspaper he/she works for towards rights.

The problems of rights-based approach to journalism can be summarized in this way: Journalists’ insufficient background in human rights regulations and rights-based approach to journalism, shortness of news making process, rising significance of speed in making news, diminishing number and importance of rights-based news and the tendency towards making news entertaining in recent years have an influence in rights-based news’ being ignored.

When viewed from this aspect, the people who work in media should make news without ignoring rights-based news, and on the contrary, by developing a rights-based approach to journalism. They should have a mentality that does not exclude or disregard this issue.

Rights-based approach to journalism mostly necessitates to keep far from the centre consciously. Thus, it is possible to say that rights-based approach to journalism develops an opponent perspective against the journalism that is carried out under the influence of power elites.

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