

Chapter 87

Constructing Multicultural Society on Web: Minorities on Information Society

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ABSTRACT

As a public sphere traditional media have some blockages for the disadvantaged groups to participate in the cultural and social life. New media help these groups for being visible in a majority and provides a base for multicultural societies. This article tries to find out the conditions of constructing the multicultural society through new media. For that purpose, a content analyse of the art and culture pages of the website and an interview have been realized with one of the founders of www.suryaniler.com. It is trying to find out that how new media helps to the minorities for the participation in the cultural life and being visible in a majority. The paper also examines how a webpage can promote the relation of people who have been spread all over the World.

INTRODUCTION

There is much criticism directed at the media about the absence of pluralism. The economic and political conditions do not allow to support pluralism in the media. But in democracies, different voices are needed to be heard for the health of the society. If only power elites control and dominate the media, then pluralism which is one of the main functions of democracy, cannot stay alive and flourish. Globalisation produces a global culture that is spread through the World

by the mass media very easily. If the media is used for getting more profits, multiculturalism is difficult to take root in the society. The circulation of goods and culture make a profit for the cultural industries. The groups inside the society must be similar and homogenous in order to maximize profit. On the other hand, the nation states prefer to protect their national culture and cultural identity. In these circumstances, on one hand, there is a cultural industry that effectively spreads global culture and on the other hand, there are nation states that try to protect their cultural

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identity. Apart from these, there are some groups of people who want to protect their own distinct cultures within these circumstances. Minorities are among these groups.

If people cannot find a channel to voice themselves in traditional mass media then multiculturalism may find a new channel in the “new media”. Assyrians are a minority group in Turkey who like to protect their minority culture. In this study, the aim is to find out that how a minority group uses new media facilities and how they contribute to the multiculturalism in the society. For collecting data, the website called www.suryaniler.com is used for content analysis and in depth-interview is realized with the assistance of founder of the website. In this study, mass society, information society multiculturalism and new media, minority are the key words.

Definition of Minority and Minorities' Rights

Jose Ortega y Gasset describes the society with two main parts: minorities and masses. The groups in the mass parts are very similar in preferences and as their characteristics, their qualifications are similar. The other part is called minorities. Minorities are different from the masses, at least one qualification is different from the rest of the society. Owing to this difference, they can stay out from the masses. Masses consist of people who feel, see themselves the same with the others and they are happy to be together (Gasset, 2003).

If we look at through the historical context, in ancient times, women and slaves were not accepted as citizens. Thus, there were just a few people as citizens and the society consisted of citizens and slaves. This means that the separation in society was between classes but it was not related to minorities and masses. “Minority” word was not used also in the Middle Ages. In the Middle Ages, there were also divisions within the society but

what really mattered was the political separation between the Church and the people, as the church was very powerful and possessed all the authority.

Indeed, the concept of minority was mediated through the idea of unity. First, there must be unity and then there must be something outside of that unity. Clearly, ‘unity’ is defined in modern states, it is constructed with the modern state. Empires are not centralist because there are different ethnic and religious groups with different languages. Empires accept these differences, the only important thing is dependence to the empire. On the other hand, when a modern state is constructed, the minorities become out of the state. Because a modern state is constructed on one language, one cultural identity then minorities appear outside of one national cultural identity (Oran, 2008).

There are some common things for identifying the concept of “minority”. These qualifications are distinctive property of the minority groups. United Nations rapporteur Capotarti gives some characteristics of the minority as below:

1. They are different from the majority. Nowadays, these differences often are related to the religious, linguistic and ethnic background.
2. They are in few in number nationwide.
3. Even if they are few in numbers, they cannot properly be accepted as a minority if they play a dominant role in the community. For example, the people of European origin used to play that kind of role in the Republic of South Africa during the Apartheid period.
4. They are citizens. If the person is not a citizen, then he is in the foreigner’s category (Oran, 2008).

Turkey’s independence was accepted internationally in Lausanne Agreement that was signed on the July 24th, 1923. In Lausanne Agreement, the third section is about “Protection of Minorities”.

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