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THE PRESENTATION OF THEOLOGIAN IDENTITY ON TELEVISION IN TURKEY

Selman Selim Akyüz[1], Enderhan Karakoç[2]
Selcuk University Communication Faculty, Konya, Turkey

Abstract

Consumption is dominant todays so TV's broadcasts entertaintment programmes in order to get more audiences. For that reason it is defended that TV is the opposite of the religion worths, tradition and moral or it is also defended that TV ignores these worths. Because of these it is possible to say TV is a secular device. On the other hand religious organizations which want to reach crowd, tried to peace with TV and succeeded.

In this work the presantation of identity of the men of religion on TV is dealed, especially religious publishing and "televangelism" in USA was examined. People started to argue imamate on TV of Turkey. In this direction programme which Yaşar Nuri Öztürk, well-known theologian of Turkey, participated in, was examined.

It is seen that Öztürk's point of view which are out of dominant İslam were atracted attention, tried to atract the audiences with his speeches and syles. While he was doing these he used the show features of TV. It was seen that Öztürk represents identity like protestant preachers on TV in USA, he branched of usual man of religion in Turkey.

Key words: *Religion, television, identity of man of religion, theologian.*

1. INTRODUCTION

When the historical process of the development of mass media is examined, it is seen that politics and therefore religion are always intertwined with media, sometimes hand in hand and sometimes opposed to each other. The fact that Martin Luther remarked that "the printing press is the loftiest and most significant blessing from God that helps convey the revelations of God" and that the papacy objected to it saying that it would weaken the belief in God reveal the importance of how mass media are used.

Orthodox religious beliefs that had been formerly in trouble with the printing press and the radio were literally put to test in the 20th century first through the radio, and then the television and the internet. The clergymen and the religious institutions that stood in defense against theses *enchanting* devices started to make use of especially the radio and the television to propagate their beliefs first in U.S. and next all over the world (Melton et al. 1997). Evangelic clergymen in U.S., who have greatly made peace with the show aspect of the television have coined and introduced the term "televangelism" into literature.

In Turkey, however, the religion managed to gain ground on television during thematic television channels both due to the late start of private television broadcasting and owing to the distance put by Islamic belief towards the television, which is a secular device. Yet, the opening of private television channels from 1990 on has led to the emergence of popular men of religion. Some of the men, by means of whom the channels aimed to get high ratings, not only attracted attention and interest but also evoked reactions. In this study, a popular man of religion who the public are not accustomed to in Turkey is examined.

2. TELEVISION AND RELIGION

Different references exist that push religion and television into separate lanes. Gülerarslan (2010), states that while religion is related to the divinity and based on the other worldliness, television is a secular, worldly device and that it would be impossible to achieve religious perception due to the structure of the device, however seriously the element of religion is taken in programs broadcast on television.

Postman (2010), who asserts that the messages conveyed to people as regards public issues, that is, politics, religion, family and education, are distorted by television and reacts to the allegation that this device conveys "serious" messages though the device is "unserious", criticizes the relationship between television and men of religion. Postman (2010) claims that television is an important device that corrupts religion, noting that the Amish of Pennsylvania, who shun from technology and even from watching movies rushed to the film set when the famous film star Harrison Ford arrived in their town.

Fore remarks that there is a conflict between television and religion but that religion may use television in spite of all odds.

"*You shouldn't expect television or radio to take the place of the church. Using the media, Christians can help people understand the messages of the Bible and encourage them to go to a place where they might find more answers. And this place is the church. Television must be a bulletin board of publicity for all religions and a means of service for a local community, and it shouldn't go beyond this border* (1993).

One of those who advocate that religion occupies a more "*grave*" place in social life in U.S. but that television has made religion "*lighter*", Cover claims that, because television preachers are in peace with capitalist status quo, they give messages that easily distort the essence of Christianity.

The introduction of religion to television started in Turkey with the onset of TRT broadcasting. However, whereas television channels belonging to the church were set up in U.S and Europe, religious programs were broadcast in Turkey on Thursday evenings or on religious days. Together with the Declaration of the Republic, religion was removed from political life, and a secular aspect was established in television broadcasts.

2.1 Religious Publications in U.S.

Despite the criticisms that television erodes religious values, all religions, especially Christian missionaries, have sought to make use of the impact of this miraculous device to strengthen the religious beliefs of people.

Noting that the domination in the broadcast of religious programs in the field of show business is possessed by Evangelists of North America when international TV channels are examined, Kurt (2009) states that *televangelism* is an activity belonging to the New World, rather that to Europe. Televangelists who make use of such devices as radio and television have also contributed to the revival of Conservative Protestant theology (Kurt quoting from Davie, 2009).

A young preacher coming from an evangelist family in U.S., Rex Humbard, while living in Ohio, adapted the worship rituals of the church to television and conducted the first regular religious broadcasts on an independent television channel (Melton et al.1997).

During 1960's, religious broadcasts covered a long way forward. What Postman relates reveals to which lengths religious broadcasting reached in U.S. during those years and how efficiently the men of religion used television.

"Pat Robertson is the director of "700 club" ceremonies, which is a television program you can watch for 15 dollars per month. Priest Robertson is a modest, clever person, and has a face as charming as

that of a talk-show host. He takes "Entertainment Tonight" as the communication model. His program features interviews, singers and Christian comedians whose faiths were refreshed. Besides, the images of the people who were dragged to the edge of hopelessness and have been saved through 700 Club from that point are shown in the program" (2010).

According to Postman (2010), such programs raise people to the level of transcendentalism both by bringing them up to the presence of Jesus Christ and by making them television stars.

Evangelists not only established churches and charities all over the United States but also took interest in the media, and preachers appeared on television shows in a more fervent manner than they were at the pulpit. Bostancı (quoting from Kurt: 2009) states that such channels as CBN (Christian Broadcasting Network) and EWTN (Eternal World Television Network) and televangelists have played a significant role in the rise of Evangelism. Fervent preachers, male or female, black or white, masterfully used the techniques of communication in a devout state.

2.2 Islam and Television Broadcasting

Melton et al. (1997), preparing a timeline as regards the history of religious broadcasting, emphasized the reasons underlying the late adaptation of the people from an Islamic walk of life to television. Television came into use in Islamic countries in the early 1960's for political and religious propaganda. Religious leaders broadcast their weekly religious ceremonies and their readings from Qur'an as well as such religious activities as annual pilgrimages to Mekkah. However, Islamic countries have lagged far behind the Western World because of such problems as the accumulation of broadcasting under the control of governments, the differences in broadcasting systems from one country to another, speaking different languages in the Islamic world, the limited number of professional broadcasters and the lack of economic investments. Also the dictates of Islam to keep off from showing off are seen to have been another constraint in using television.

3. RELIGIOUS BROADCASTING IN TURKEY

Religious broadcasting first started in Turkey with TRT. The first program to have a religious content in Turkey was the broadcasting of the Islamic memorial service conducted in 1974 for the sake of the soldiers that died during the Cyprus Peace Campaign. In the same year, a special program for Laylat al-Qadr was broadcast live for the first time on TRT from a mosque during the Ramadan month (Furat quoting from Çankaya, 2008).

In 1980, the longest running program of all channels was started to be broadcast. Hosted by Asaf Demirbaş, the program titled "The Belief World" continued on TRT until 2004 (Furat, 2008).

Together with the opening of private channels one after another from 1990 on, the channels that hold religious and national concerns in the forefront began broadcasting. TGRT, Channel 7 (Kanal 7) and Milkyway TV (Samanyolu) are the forerunners of such channels. Making films featuring the lives of important figures, TGRT initiated a new trend. A large number of noted players acted in these films in which the transcendental aspects of famous men of religion and dervishes in the history of Islam were narrated, and these films aroused interest especially among conservative section during the 1990's.

Subsequently, "mystery serials" were put into broadcast on channels that gave priority to religious programs. The study carried out by Koçak et al. (2006) on these serials revealed that 3 out of 4 viewers watched one of them. It was established that the viewers took interest in these serials for the purpose of strengthening their faiths and seeing that justice had been served.

With the end of the "mystery serials", religious programs in Turkey have become restricted merely to religious conversation programs.

When we look at the program flows of the national television channels that operate through terrestrial broadcasting in Turkey in April, 2013, it was seen that not any programs having a religious content were broadcast on such big channels as Kanal D, Star TV, TV8, Fox TV and Cine 5. Religious issues are discussed in the morning program broadcast on Fridays on Show TV. A religious program is broadcast once a week on ATV, one of the four most commonly watched TV channels in Turkey.

Religious discussions are conducted on many channels on the satellite and cable platform as well, and the people who claim to have solved the mystery of Qur'an, those who assert that they control jinns or the members of an alien sect appear on television. In this respect, we see a view not very different from other examples of religious channels and publishing in the world (Gülerarslan, 2005).

While there are no religious channels operating terrestrially in Turkey, there are 13 thematic channels on the Turksat satellite that broadcast religious programs in Turkish. The leading ones among them are Hilal TV, Dost TV, Irmak TV, Semerkand TV and Diyanet TV. Whereas a great majority of religious channels are known to be closely related to Islamic communities, the preaches of certain men of religion are unfailingly broadcast in most of them. Irmak TV and Mehtap TV broadcast the preaches of Fethullah Gulen, who is the founder of the movement known as Gulen Movement and who now lives in the United States, and Hilal TV broadcasts the preaches the theologians Mustafa İslamoğlu and Nurettin Yıldız. The theologian Nihat Hatipoğlu comes to the fore on ATV, as does Ömer Döngeloğlu on Kanal 7.

It is necessary to have a look at how a man of religion is defined in Turkey while specifying the characteristics of the identity of a man of religion on television. Noting that the man of religion had also the role to legitimize the affairs of the state in the Ottoman society, Yenen (2012) states that, like all the other institutions of the state, the institution of religion was subjected to a serious questioning in the last period of the state.

In the period of the Republic, however, the religion went under the control of the state, and the "men of religion" who were appointed to mosques to lead the prayer of namaz came to be called "religious commissary" (Yenen, 2012).

In the period when private television channels didn't exist, TRT brought onto the screen the men of religion who were employed in the Head of Religious Affairs and in universities, yet with the opening of private and thematic channels, men of religion who are more "*in peace*" with the show aspect of television have emerged. There are two types of men of religion that are currently represented on televisions in Turkey; one is conservative-Islamist men of religion who never make any concessions from the essence of the religion and who use television just to convey the orders of the religion. The other is the one who advocates that the man of religion shouldn't have a cold face to tell people about religion better, who uses the show aspect of television, who doesn't avoid revealing his private life like innovative Protestant televangelists (Kurt, 2009) and who claims that most of what people have long believed is "*fictitious*".

4. YAŞAR NURİ ÖZTÜRK AND IDENTITY OF MAN OF RELIGION

In this study, the identity of a man of religion which corresponds to the second definition and how religious issues, show and entertainment are used together on television are aimed to be revealed.

Starting to frequently appear on private channels in Turkey in the 1990's, Prof. Dr. Yaşar Nuri Öztürk was elected MP from the Republic People's Party after a brilliant academic career and set up his own political party after his resignation. Giving up politics showing his scientific studies as an excuse (ntvmsnbc.com), he has been appearing for two years on a morning program hosted by a famous presenter, Saba Tumer, on Show TV, one of the most widely watched television channels. Because the channel was taken over and sold to another media group by the state due the previous owner's debts to

the state, the program was discontinued in the last episode. It is claimed that the reason for the program to be discontinued was that Ozturk, who is known to the public for his harsh tone, criticisez the government and the Prime Minister (rotahaber.com).

Within the context of the study, the discourse analysis of the last episode, which was broadcast on June 14, 2013 was performed through the "critical discourse analysis" method developed by Van Dijk. This frequently used method yields positive results in establishing a relationship between the context of the phrases or statements used and their ideological purpose (Şeker and Şimşek, 2011). Also, The context analysis was employed to determine how long the guest and the host, respectively Yaşar Nuri Öztürk and Saba Tümer, talked about political, ideological and religious issues for show and entertainment.

The program titled "Today with Saba Tümer" is daily broadcast on Show TV, and mainly features issues for magazines. On Fridays, which is a holy day for Muslims, Yaşar Nuri Öztürk joins in the program. The broadcast that normally lasts for 3 hours but is this time discontinued 26 minutes after its beginning starts with the presentation of Saba Tümer in accompaniment to a religious music in which the ney, a mystical musical instrument, dominates. The screen is divided into three through the program; there are views from nature in the middle, the presenter is to the right side and the guest is to the left side.

Table-1: The Distribution of Duration For the Topics Talked About During The Program

Topic	Political – ideological	Religious-political	Religious	Issues for magazines
Duration (26'00")	7'45"	5'25"	6'57"	4'13"

In the program that lasts for 26 minutes, religious issues takes up 6 minutes 57 second, the comments on political issues through a political perspective takes up 5 minutes 25 seconds, political and ideological issues take up 7 minutes 45 seconds, the issues for magazines and those about the private life of the guest take up 4 minutes 13 seconds.

While political issues were talked about less in previous weeks, it is thought that the Gezi Park events extended this duration. The issues for magazines are often the topic of the conversation due to the "vagrant" personality of Yaşar Nuri Öztürk, as he himself said.

4.1 Religious Statements in The Program

5 minutes 20 seconds after Tümer's program started, theologist Yaşar Nuri Öztürk uses the first religious statement quoting from Qur'an, and likens the youth who are struggling against the government to the youngsters that supported Moses in Egypt, struggled against the pharaoh.

Opposing harshly to the practices which were later introduced into the religion, describing himself as "a Qur'an Believer", and stating that the solution to any problem of humanity could be found in Qur'an, Öztürk also gives answers to the questions received from the public.

The questions reflected on the screen through kj and their answers are as follows:

The question: Can we perform namaz outside the fixed, declared times of prayer, whenever we like?

The answer: Sure, (s)he can perform it whenever (s) likes. In fact, namaz is what is performed when it comes from inside. The other is like a soldier on watch. You are obliged to perform it.

Question: Do the poor have any rights on the rich?

Answer: The Qur'an literally states this. The poor have rights on the possessions of the rich.

4.2 The Political-Ideological Statements in The Program

The first question of the presenter is as to evaluating the agenda of the country, which was not related to the religion. And Öztürk gives an account of the "*Gezi Park Protests"*, which had spread all over Turkey and approves the activities with the phrases *"resistence"*, *"patriotism"* and "*love for Atatürk"*.

Also Öztürk uses the word martyr, a religious word used for the soldiers and policemen when they died, for those who died during the events, which the government and a certain segment of the society in Turkey describe as "*violence prone and opposing to democracy*".

Harshly criticizing those who make use of the religion, Öztürk states that the left segment has come closer to the religion due to these events and accuses the government, without revealing any names, of abusing the religion:

"When you mention using religion, hypocrisy, abuse and defamation come to mind. Today they are using it. The capital of the religiousness is defamation. The slanders (he) produced about this decent team of resistance are in record numbers. Awareness is needed with the support from the Qur'an to get rid of this."

Öztürk also states that it wasn't Marks but the Qur'an that brought the concept of "*surplus value*" and that it is a rule for the rich to give away the surplus goods of theirs to the poor.

When Yaşar Nuri interpreted the way that the minimum wage and gross domestic product are calculated as devilry, the presenter again interrupted, saying that everything is going pink, and I think you shouldn't be so desperate, and closed the program after reading a question from the viewers.

4.3 The Elements for Magazines in The Program

Looking at what the guest is wearing at the very beginning of the program, the presenter welcomes him in joy "My Hodja, welcome. I am instinctively urged to say that you are like a groom, and I said so" and asks her first question.

The presenter Saba Tümer frequently interrupts during the program and changes the subject with sensational questions, smiling and asking questions about the private life of the professor, who has been brought up with his private life and whose fiancée is in Ankara. Such a dialogue goes on between the two:

Tümer: My Hodja, what have you done in Ankara all week?

Öztürk: Five days has passed in Ankara this week. Why do you consider it strange? Ankara is a town of love for me.

Tümer: My Hodja, we have been making programs with you for about two years, and I have never sit with another man facing each other for so long (laughters). I know what lies in your heart.

Öztürk: Forgive me, my Lord.

Tümer: I understand where you will lead the conversation, how you assist me through your looks, the tone of your voice, the words you insert into the conversation. What have you done in Ankara?

Öztürk: There is no escape from reciting a poem, is it? I went to Ankara, stayed and loved.

Relating that he received reactions from the viewers the previous week when he had said that he would participate in the contest titled *Survivor*, Öztürk remarks that he has given up joining in the contest as his fiancée, who is a singer, got angry.

Also the presenter and the guest continue the program, bursting now and then into laughter, and especially the presenter gives strange reactions to some remarks from the guest, which were hardly encountered in the religion.

The following words by Öztürk help reveal his identity of man of religion and why he receives high ratings:

"If you removed craziness, vagrancy and semi-insanity from my life, I would be nil."

5. CONCLUSION

In Turkey, men of religion are perceived to have strong oratory, not to deviate much from what the public know as right and to give practical and worship-related knowledge of use in everyday life. In a country in which religious cults and communities have a strong influence, the identity of man of religion on television is represented in accordance with this perception of the people. However, television, a secular device, has brought up the identity of a popular man of religion, few in number but popular, thanks to the producers who assess religious broadcasts as based on ratings. Prof. Dr. Yaşar Nuri Öztürk makes many beliefs his adversaries with a new discourse and occupies the agenda with his private life, sides against his opponents and appears to be a "*fervent television preacher-televangelist*".

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