

1. Dis/Locating Power and Knowledge in Media Discourse

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Abstract:

The construction of 'otherness' in media discourse is meant to legitimize and naturalize the reproduction of the ideology of opposition that widens the gap between the identification of "Self" and "Other". This identification relies mostly on knowledge and its relation to power that could be detected in discourses where voices interact with one another to assert a fixed hegemonic conception of the Self in contrast to the other. In this sense, the production of knowledge in media discourse remains subject to the interference of different authoritative institutions that represent the position of power through instilling and presenting the ideology of this regime as the taken-for-granted truth. Being annexed to power, truth is perceived as having the quality of credibility that lends credence to its producers' claim. What strengthens and bridges more effectively the power and knowledge relation is the fact that these discourses are institutionalized by authoritative systems. This fact engenders the possibility that the intellectuals themselves are institutionalized and that their role in societies is restricted. This fact calls for the urgent need of giving space for the subaltern to speak for themselves and deconstruct the ideologies that are produced by the dominant groups.

Key words:

Power; Knowledge; Binarism; otherness; Intellectual; Subaltern.

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The cultural binarism (taking the “Self” and “Other” as its main area of instigation) was a historical juncture that marks the onset of constituting the so-called ‘Third World’ as Other (Bulbeck, 1997). This construction of ‘otherness’ is, in a way or another, a struggle over identity that “can no longer be seriously considered outside the politics of representation.” (Giroux, 1994). The function of these representations is to legitimate and naturalize this struggle, which reflects the production and the reproduction of the ideology of opposition. This opposition is situated within the spectrum of the Self which always aspires to have an elevated stance vis-à-vis its denigrated Other.

In this regard, Kellner Douglas considers the question of representation a reproduction of existing struggles between the represented and the presenter (Kellner 56). In other words, “the gap between representation and represented becomes the locus of inherent political struggles over meaning on the ‘contested terrains.’” (Pötzsch, 2011, p. 77) Such political struggle between the representor and represented (or you can call it the representational struggle between the “Self” and “Other”) is the thrust of which the Self tries to render the “Other” subservient in a symbolic network of identification which mostly relies on ‘objective’ knowledge to achieve power ends. This debate over the construction of otherness relying on knowledge and its relation to power has been the locus of concentration in many literary canons, such as those of Michel Foucault, Edward Said and Homi K. Bhabha, to mention but the most pertinent.

For Michel Foucault, the relation between knowledge and power firmly stems from the historical struggle and progress. He states that he “was working on a ‘genealogical’ history of knowledge. But the true motivating force was really this problem of power,” (Foucault and Trombadori 145) which means that this relation between power and knowledge proves to be intertwined in the Foucauldian stream of thoughts. Both, for him, lead to the same end; that is to say, working on historicizing the notion of knowledge is tantamount to working on the power relations that govern the dissemination of this very knowledge.

Power, for Foucault, can be detected in every discourse, as he declares: “Power is everywhere.” (Foucault & Rabinow, 1994, p. 283) In this regard, Media discourse, as an outlet through which power can be woven may conduce to the generation of, to use Bakhtin’s terminology, polyphony of voices (Bakhtin) that interact with one another in an attempt to assert a fixed hegemonic conception of the Self in contrast to a negotiated construction of the “Other”. That is to

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say, the production of knowledge in media discourse remains subject to the interference of different authoritative institutions that represent the position of power. This act of taking advantage of authority to disseminate knowledge aims at taking steps to entrench people in a “regime of truth” (Foucault and Trombadori 18) to restrain societies within adhered rules, beliefs, values, and morals. In this sense, the role of media discourse, like any other discourse, is to instill the code of belief or the ideology of this regime of truth. Truth, in this instance, cannot be situated outside the system of power, but for Foucault, it is more than that:

The important thing here, I believe, is that truth isn't outside power, or lacking in power: contrary to a myth whose history and function would repay further study, truth isn't the reward of free spirits, the child of protracted solitude, nor the privilege of those who have succeeded in liberating themselves. Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its regime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true. (M. Foucault 131)

To gain the quality of authenticity, these power relations resort to media outlet as an instrument for the exercise of power whose interest in knowledge production is inextricably linked to politics. Truth, thus, can be perceived as a relative entity that cannot be separated from the practice of power relations serving the interest of its powerful producers. Being annexed to power, truth is perceived as having the quality of credibility that lends credence to its producers' claim. Foucault's concern is about the role of power relations with discourse to the construction of knowledge whose claims “are incontrovertibly part and parcel of the implicit design of this relationship involving both the pattern of discourse and the relations of power.” (Schneck, 1987, p. 22) That is, Foucault perceives that claiming knowledge is associated with constructing reality discursively and violently; he states:

We must not imagine that the world turns toward us a legible face which we would only have to decipher; the world is not the accomplice of our knowledge; there is no prediscursive providence which predisposes the world in our favor. We must conceive discourse as a violence we do to things... (M. Foucault 67)

Foucault avers that the pattern of discourse nowadays aims at imposing discursively a kind of discipline to regulate human statements, which ironically reflects the “realities of dominance and repression existing in current relations of power.” (Schneck, 1987, p. 20) This dominance is not operated in a strict manner but through tacitly instilling certain rules that delineate what is ‘true’ and what is marked as ‘untrue.’ Mathew Raden has insisted on this point, stating that “there are social constraints which define what is rational and socially acceptable.” (Raden, 1998, p. 455) Therefore, knowledge disseminated among people is meant to perform the function of inculcating people with the order of discourse and authorizing the exercise of power of the State. Foucault avows, “Every point in the exercise of power is a site where knowledge is formed. Conversely, every established piece of knowledge permits and assures the exercise of power” (M. Foucault 62). People, in this regard, are constructed by the rules of discourse that aim at establishing or changing the social world order.

However, unlike Foucault, who perceives the existence of power inside the discourse, Seumas Miller in his controversial article titled “Foucault on Discourse and Power” claims that all the theorists who support Foucault’s perception of discourse and power relations are victims of “debonair mystification” and that sticking to the same way of thinking of their predecessor is “itself and ‘effect’ of power.” (Miller, 1990, p. 118) For Miller, theorists should eliminate the idea that “there is *nothing* that is *not* power.” (Miller, 1990, p. 120) Such theorists for Miller “have allowed themselves to be dazzled by the glamour of the notion itself.” (Miller, 1990, p. 124) As a result, they have not made any effort to question and investigate the origin and the foundation of power. For him, this easy acquiescence to others’ stream of thoughts conduces to the restraining of some conceptions and makes their perception undifferentiated and ubiquitous. He states that:

Just as the Althusserians would have us believe that everything is somehow ideology, so the discourse power theorists see power as characteristic and indeed constitutive of everything. The result of this undifferentiated and ubiquitous conception is that the notion of power loses all explanatory force since on this account there is *nothing* that is *not* power. (Miller, 1990, p. 120)

Power, in this sense, might not exist in certain phenomena, unlike the Foucauldian vision which sees power as an omnipresent practice in society. Miller elaborates his point more thoroughly and states:

Being someone's sister is not essentially a power relationship, though the gender roles assumed in many families may have the consequence that sisters compete with

one another and seek to exercise power over one another in certain limited ways. Again, take the example of relationships of love. Here once again, there may be elements of dominance and submission, but to say that X loves Y does not necessarily entail that X dominates, or is dominated by Y; nor would the notion of power permit anything like a comprehensive account of the relationship of love.” (Miller, 1990, p. 120)

Miller’s point is not to gainsay the fact that the value of power is rated as a social phenomenon, but to avow the fact that power could be ‘something’ but ‘not everything’ and ‘not everywhere’. For him, there are certain occasions when social life can be perceived without, under no circumstances, appealing to the notion of power. Miller’s purpose is, in short, to dismantle the omnipresence of power as defined by Foucault: “power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere.” (M. Foucault 93)

In this vein, Edward Said has similarly undertaken the same line of thought that Miller tries to propound, and has limited the Foucauldian strategies within the areas of cultural and historical studies that take the position that is at variance with Western hegemony and the production of knowledge. However, Said’s works cogitate about Foucault’s notions of power and knowledge as the foundation of all forms of Western hegemony. Moreover, Said’s theory is not merely circumscribed by Foucault’s notion of “discourse,” which shakes up, perfectly and convincingly, the objects of truth. He is equally influenced by Louis Althusser’s notion of “ideology” that is rated as the embodiment of beliefs and the Gramscian use of the concept of “hegemony” that implies the domination of one class over others. These lines of thought are the nexus of Said’s theory that might briefly imply the examination of Western “discourse” that zeroes in on disseminating “ideologies” that conduce to the “hegemonic” domination of the West over the East that is transformed into a discursive Orient.

In this regard, Said accords with Foucault’s commitment not to find power outside the scope of discourse, not to reduce discourse to a merely former of meaning, but to perceive it as the constructor of power. In an attempt to understand this discursive practice, Said tends to differentiate between two basic strategies: “strategic location” and “strategic formation.” For him, these two devices are important in the sense that they help the reader approve or disapprove, adopt or dismantle the ideologies imbedded within any discourse. The “strategic location” refers to the position of the author/creator of the discourse. Though it is repudiated by many notable critics such as Ronald Barthes, who announced the “death of the author,” Said regards the context of the author as the essence through which to manifest the inserted ideologies infused within their discourses. The “strategic formation” is defined as “a way of analyzing the relationship between texts and the way in

which groups of texts, types of texts, even textual genres, acquire mass, density, and referential power among themselves and thereafter in the culture at large.” (Said 20) Moreover, Said’s argument is not merely restricted to the political circumstances of the “text” and the “author,” but also involves the influencing factors of the “reader” to investigate his/her agency, which promotes differences and oppositions that qualify him/her in enhancing or dismantling this ideological apparatus.

Practically speaking, Said tries to construct “Orientalism” as a discourse through placing his thoughts within Foucault’s theory to examine how the West is adroit at managing—and even producing— “the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period.” (Said 3) That is to say, the discourse of Orientalism is controlled by the “distribution of geopolitical awareness into aesthetic, scholarly, economic, sociological, historical, and philological text.” (Said 12) For Said, the Orient is constructed as a negative inversion of Western culture in order to establish what it is to be Western. He has noted that the Orient is perceived as “an integral part of European *material* civilization and culture. Orientalism expresses and represents that part culturally and even ideologically as a mode of discourse with supporting institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, imagery, doctrines, even colonial bureaucracies and colonial styles.” (Said 2) Like Foucault, discourse for Said is a historical object that can be inspected to understand the modes of how discourse is established and how it contributes to the foundation and identification of culture and society. This understanding helps to divulge the processes through which power is operated to control society and instill its culture.

However, Said opposes Foucault in terms of the source of this power. Clearly, Foucault considers power as separated from the institution while Said counters this idea. This Saidian opposition marks a notable appendage in his theory, since he believes that colonialism was responsible for exerting hegemony, subjugating and dominating the colonized people. This sense of extensive authority springs from the fact of having knowledge about the victim as Bill Ashcroft has unfolded:

The most formidable ally of economic and political control had long been the business of ‘knowing’ other peoples because this ‘knowing’ underpinned imperial dominance and became the mode by which they were increasingly persuaded to know themselves: that is, as subordinate to Europe. (Ashcrof, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 1995, p. 1)

By analogy, media discourse is looked on as a “strongly bounded area of social knowledge... within which the world can be known,” (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 70) and whose function is one

of the “major means of censuring the powers that be, political as well as religious.” (Oesterheld 85) It remains a demanded discourse for the West for it incorporates implicitly the “strongest possible contrast and satirical effect.” (Oesterheld 69) Thus, this means of communicating social knowledge preoccupies authoritative systems that yearn for restricting it through institutionalization. For Said, this kind of discourse gains its power by the fact of being institutionalized. This is what strengthens its function to more effectively bridge power and knowledge. This kind of discourse, for Said, should be read ‘contrapuntally’ so as to unravel the hidden colonial implications and to draw the pre-planned attention to the effects of colonization on discourse production. This Saidian “contrapuntal reading” is a form of deconstructive reading that demonstrates the extent to which the text/discourse divulges its colonialist ideologies and contradicts its essentialist assumptions. In his definition of contrapuntality, Said states:

In practical terms, ‘contrapuntal reading’ as I have called it means reading a text with an understanding of what is involved when an author shows.... Contrapuntal reading must take account of both processes, that of imperialism and that of resistance to it, which can be done by extending our reading of the texts to include what was once forcibly excluded.” (Said 66-67)

This reading remains one of the tasks the intellectual has to undertake in order “to unearth the forgotten, to make connections that were denied.” (Said 22) Moreover, the purpose behind the act of rereading the Western discourse, which Said considers yet another task of the intellectual, is, as he states, an “effort to break down the stereotypes and reductive categories that are so limiting to human thought and communication.” (Said xi)

The most disturbing question, however, is the identification of this intellectual who can be described as such. For the Italian philosopher Antonio Gramsci, there are two types of intellectuals: *Tradition intellectuals* and *Organic* ones: the first type embraces “teachers, priests, and administrators, who continue to do the same thing from generation to generation,” (Said 4) while the second type is what Gramsci defines as “the capitalist entrepreneur [who] creates alongside himself the industrial technician, the specialist in political economy, the organizers of a new culture, of a new legal system, etc.” (Gramsci, 1971, p. 4) This second type, for Gramsci, strenuously engages in society and “constantly struggle[s] to change minds and expand markets ... [and is] always on the move, on the make.” (Said 4) On the contrary, this very type tends to consider “teachers and priests... [who] seem more or less to remain in place, doing the same kind of work year in year out.” (Said 4)

The Indian thinker Rajagopalan Radhakrishnan¹ has also celebrated this Gramscian vision of the intellectual and castigated Foucault for the same point. In his comparative essay “Toward an Effective Intellectual: Foucault or Gramsci,” He states that “Foucault and Gilles Deleuze announce the death of representation and the total obsolescence of the cadre known as the ‘intellectual.’” (Radhakrishnan, 1990, p. 66) He adds, “What is particularly significant in the conversation between Deleuze and Foucault is the necessary connection between the ‘end of representation’ and the celebration of the knowledge that the masses produce without the help of the intellectual.” (Radhakrishnan, 1990, p. 67) Radhakrishnan lambastes Foucault’s discourse as it “ends up privileging ‘what is said’ without raising the question of ‘who is speaking.’” (Radhakrishnan, 1990, p. 69)

Seen from a different perspective, Radhakrishnan, following Gramsci’s emphasis that producing knowledge generates change in society, states that “change is to be produced through critical consciousness and a critical knowledge of these relationships.... For Gramsci, ‘man’ is what man *does*, and what man *does* is the active realization of changing complexes of relationships.” (Radhakrishnan, 1990, p. 84) Every man, in this sense, is responsible for generating this change in society, as Gramsci has already noted in his *Prison Notebooks*: “All men are intellectuals, one could therefore say: but not all men have in society the function of intellectuals.” (Gramsci, 1971, p. 9) Those who can act the part of the intellectual performer in society are the aforementioned traditional intellectuals and organic ones. For Gramsci, the problem with the role of these intellectuals lies in “the loss of contact between the mass and the intellectuals.” (Radhakrishnan, 1990, p. 90) Clearly, the masses do not need theories of mediation and the intellectuals should not be living in ivory towers; what is needed is to give a voice to the subaltern to speak instead of being spoken for. For Radhakrishnan, this is the exact difference between Foucault and Gramsci: “Unlike Foucault and Deleuze, who speak about subaltern reality from without, Gramsci voices this reality from within.” (Radhakrishnan, 1990, p. 90) Like Radhakrishnan, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has lambasted Foucault and Deleuze’s inattention to the role of ideology in the reproduction of power relations between the West and the rest of the world and their speaking about the subaltern from without. For her, the claim that the intellectuals represent the subaltern is a trumped-up story while, in fact, they convince the subaltern that they “cannot represent themselves; they must be represented.” (Spivak, 1988, p. 71) She continues to clear up by saying that “their representative must appear simultaneously as their master, as an authority over them, as unrestricted governmental power that protects them from the other classes and sends them rain and sunshine from above.” (Spivak, 1988, p. 71) This argument gets us back to our original discussion of the conception that “those who have

¹ He is a professor of English and Comparative Literature at the University of California, who is rated as one of the leading postcolonial theorists and literary critics in the United States.

power have control of what is known and the way it is known, and those who have such knowledge have power over those who do not.” (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 72) On this occasion, the subaltern has identified an unexpected opponent that is supposedly there to vindicate their rights. That is, the colonial authority is aware of the role of the intellectual and their influence in society. Thus, it is only to be expected that the intellectuals themselves should be institutionalized and their role be restricted. This fact is the ground on which Gramsci divided the types of the intellectuals and forced the emergence of the “organic intellectuals.” Radhakrishnan has alluded to this point in the following quote: “How to organize, persuade, and represent were concerns that were always uppermost in Gramsci’s theory; and it is in response to these concerns that Gramsci raises the question of the ‘organic intellectual and his or her capacity to elaborate ‘hegemony’.” (Radhakrishnan, 1990, p. 85)

The organic intellectual, however, might face the problem of freedom and the issue of independent thinking. Many organic intellectuals are deprived of their role in society, since the authority imposes a media blackout that keeps them out of the state of providing their unobstructed views. This kind of intellectuals is excluded for their principles and their refusal to lend their hand to the authorities and participate in maintaining the ongoing practice of hegemony over the subaltern. Mehdi Menjra could be rated as a perfect example of this type of intellectuals in Morocco. The organic intellectuals, therefore, stand between two bitter choices, that is to say, to willingly employ their intelligentsia against the authoritative system and thus end up suffering from exclusion and blackout which forces them to live on the margin of society, or (un)willingly comply with the authorities and, thus, become institutionalized to practice the traditional role as intellectuals perpetuating the system’s interests.

In fact, the question of intellectual activity “needs to be seen as partly inaugurated by what Stuart Hall calls Bhabha’s ‘symptomatic’ mode of re-reading.” (Byrne, 2009, p. 73) The reason of the ongoing subalternity resides in ascribing the other’s victimization to a merely focus on the analysis of power and domination. Unlike Said, Bhabha refuses to focus on his reading of colonial discourses on the question of binarism, since it affixes the superiority/inferiority relationships and conduces to the continuous process of colonial power. Bhabha has asserted the need to go beyond this binary division between the colonizer and the colonized and zero in on the prominence of “cultural difference” that opens up “new ways of identifying rather than ossifying and caricaturing cultures into archaic models of identification.” (Byrne, 2009, p. 133) He considers this cultural difference as “inimical to binary boundaries: whether these be between past and present, inside and outside, subject and object, signifier and signified.” (Bhabha 251) Moreover, Bhabha has gone beyond the perception of colonial discourse, unlike Said, who perceives it as an instrument of power. Bhabha rather sees this discourse as “*compelled* to be ambivalent because it never really wants colonial

subjects to be exact replicas of the colonizers — this would be too threatening.” (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 13) This ambivalence also operates from the colonized side; these colonial subjects might be “‘complicit’ and some are ‘resistant;’ ambivalence suggests that complicity and resistance exist in a fluctuating relation within the colonial subject.” (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 12-13) In this regard, Bhabha considers the question of resistance as an “effect of an ambivalence produced within the rules of recognition of dominating discourses as they articulate the signs of cultural difference and reimplicate them within the deferential relations of colonial power.” "et al."

From these Bhabhaesque conceptions that attempt to reread the colonial discourse far from being simply an instrument of power, one might conclude that the question of resistance is debilitated by some intellectuals who are accused for their complicity with the colonial authorities. In this regard, the focus is to be oriented towards the autonomy of the subaltern to speak for themselves, which adds up to dismantling the canonized discourses. The subaltern do not need the mediation of theories or intellectuals to speak with power. They need to be given a space to deconstruct the ideologies that are produced by the dominant groups— the real operators of discourses mostly categorized in the postcolonial theory as one-sided. Bill Ashcroft rightly states that “the existence of post-colonial discourse itself is an example of such speaking, and in most cases the dominant language or mode of representation is appropriated so that the marginal voice can be heard.” (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 219)

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