

Pope Benedict XVI's visit to Turkey as a global media event: A "frame shift" in media coverages



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ABSTRACT: This study investigates Pope Benedict's visit to Turkey as a global media event. The presentation includes the interaction between the global and the local in mass communication studies. The argument is that this visit makes visible some contradictions such as: East/West, EU/Turkey, Christian/Muslim, Catholic/Orthodox. Before this trip, it was presupposed that these contradictions and stereotypes reinforced by the media were to set the agenda; however, it did not happen to be the case. Instead, the existing frames had been replaced by the new ones, which was called a frame shift in news reporting. The discourse method is used to prove this hypothesis. Data were collected during the trip and the visual materials helped in building our theoretical perspective. The aim is to observe the handling of this media event by Western press. Within this perspective, our sample had been formed by pioneering newspapers: *Le Monde*, *Le Figaro*, *La Libération*, *The Guardian*, *The New York Times*, *Financial Times*, *Der Spiegel*, *BBC on-line* and *Time (magazine)*.

KEYWORDS: agenda-setting, Turkey, Pope Benedict, media event



INTRODUCTION

In this study, Pope Benedict's visit to Turkey, that was viewed by 2000 journalists from various countries, will be analyzed as a "media event." The study is based on the hypothesis that the news framing of this event will reproduce many contradictions as discourse. In order to test the hypothesis, it is necessary to underline what these news framings are. Answers will be sought for the questions such as: Did the framings that are dealt with and stipulated from the point of view of the Western press undergo any change during the Pope's visit? Were there any differences between the discourses prior to Pope's visit and the discourses during the visit in the international press/broadcast associations?

The developments such as the transition to a unipolar world in the 1990s, the USA becoming the only major global power, the shifts seen on the right-left axis

within the frame of post-modernity discussions and the formation of political axis based on cultural identities, acceleration of the discussions on the clash of civilizations as a result of the paradigm change form the context of this study. When observed through this point of view, it is possible to say that media is very influential in creating some prejudices on the minds and, especially, that the reflection forms of the global media events are recreating the global paradigm. For example, the photograph preferred by international press/broadcast associations in the news about Turkey was the figure of a woman in chador in front of a woman dressed in modern style. Pope Benedict XVI's visit to Turkey will be analyzed as a global media event within the frame of this context.

The studies of Dayan and Katz (1996) in which they had developed the concept of "media event" opened an important area in the media and communication discipline. It is stipulated that Pope Benedict XVI's visit to Turkey, which will include the early discussions and today's discussions and which will be considered as a media event within this direction, will produce some contradictions at the global level and will support the separations. It is considered that separations will be reproduced through the news framings based on the contrasts such as "East/West," "EU/Turkey," "Christian/Muslim," "Catholic/Orthodox."

The studies on news framing demonstrate that media is reflecting the ongoing events by points of view, which are sometimes similar in conjuncture and are sometimes different ideologically or culturally. Various methods different from each other may be applied in news framing: within the direction of these methods, the developments may cause a change in the framing. The changes in the international press/broadcast associations during Pope's visit, called "frame shifts," were also observed by photographs. The analysis of the photographs visually will be performed in the hypothesis. The change occurring from the first day until the last day of Pope's visit will be tried to be demonstrated.

THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA IN REINFORCING MUSLIM STEREOTYPES

The media not only provides information and ideas but also plays a pivotal role in shaping opinions; and "things like newspapers, news and opinions do not occur naturally; they are made, as the result of human will, history, social circumstances, institutions, and the conventions of one's profession. Such aims of the press as objectivity, factuality, realistic coverage, and accuracy are highly relative terms; they express intentions, perhaps, and not realizable goals" (Said, 1997, p. 49). The accuracy of this suggestion can easily be observed in the definition or description of Islam/Muslims by the majority of Western media.

Within this context, it can be argued that news contribute to the negative perception of Islam in the Western world. It is natural that in societies where the majority of population belongs to the religion of Christianity, Islam is represented as the 'other.' However, what is of concern here, is that this representation commonly

highlights the “aggression as coming from Islam because that is what ‘Islam’ is” (Said, 1997, p. xxii).

In the light of what has been said so far, this article will try to examine what hundreds of reporters from all over the world expected to find in Pope Benedict XVI's trip. The rest of the article will ask such questions as: With what sorts of news frames did these reporters come to Turkey? With what sorts of news did they leave the country? Had a shift in news framing been occurred? If so, why?

EXISTING FRAMES

Before Pope Benedict XVI's visit, the subject which Islamic world discussed most was Pope's expressions directed to Muslims and Islamic world. Besides this, many subjects in the political arena were on the agenda of Turkey and Islamic world. For example, Turkey's accession process to the European Union and the expectations of Pope's expressions concerning the subject were the matters of discussion of the society together with the politicians. The speech, given by Pope on September 12 at Regensburg, made the relations between Islamic and Christian worlds tenser and caused many arguments afterwards. The news that occurred on the press before Pope's visit to Turkey brought this tension to the peak point. Press associations gave detailed news on the purpose of the visit before Pope's visit to Turkey. While the main subject of Pope's visit to Turkey was the contacts between Catholic and Orthodox churches, other expectations had also emerged together with all these arguments. It was a matter of concern what Pope, who got reactions from Islamic world, was going to encounter in a secular Islamic country, Turkey.

The visit of a spiritual leader of Christians to a Muslim country was a subject which would draw the unavoidable intense attention of the media. Various publications were started in the world press after Pope's visit became definite. Agenda-setting function of media was telling us not what to think but what to think about. Gans has shown in his important book *Deciding What's News*, that journalists, news agencies, and networks consciously go about deciding what is to be portrayed, how it is to be portrayed and the like (as cited in Said, 1997, p. 50). The event of Pope is against us as an example of those portrayed by the media. The sanction of media was to draw our attention to the spiritual leader's visit to a country such as Turkey, which is a country of contrasts and which is talked about in many political, religious and judicial matters, through the news of the international broadcast associations.

Turkey and Pope's visit to Turkey was on the agenda of the world press from the USA to England, from Spain to France. Pope Benedict XVI's visit to Turkey and the protests realized prior to it occupied a wide space on the world press. The news on the world press started to draw conclusions by giving place to the protests in Turkey and to evaluate the visit. British newspaper *The Guardian* brought up to the agenda that Pope was protested during the protest that was organized in Istanbul at the

weekend and that Recai Kutan, who was the leader of radical wing of Islamic politics, said “you are the representative of Devil” for Pope. In the same news, they also indicated that Pope had sent friendship messages to Turkey prior to his visit. With this news, the news framing of the world press was clearer just before Pope’s visit. The possible headlines were formed now, before this crucial trip. What things are waiting for Pope in Turkey, the country of contrasts?

The frames, which the reporters were waiting to fill, were definite. They needed events and photographs that would support the contrasts in the secular Islamic country where tensions are dominant. The dominant paradigm on their minds related to Turkey was that it was an Islamic country and it sheltered contrasts. A sub-message was noteworthy in the news of newspapers in the foreign press before Pope’s visit: Do not forget Turkey is a modern and secular country but also a country where 99% of the population is Muslim.

In the news that took place in the Western press before Pope came to Turkey, it was especially underlined that the visit was a “risky” one. Together with the photographs showing that measures of “security at the maximum level” were taken, it was also emphasized that Islamic section in Turkey did not want this visit. It was also emphasized that one of the reasons of Pope’s visit was to be at the country of “others” in order to advance religious liberty for Orthodox Christians, living under threat on Islamic land (Marchand, 2006). Such messages were effective in determination of conflict frames before the frame shift.

Baran and Davis (2006) state that, “the paradigm shift is a transformation from one organizing theoretical perspective to another” (p. 133). The passage from one paradigm to another also brings innovations with it, although more scientific evidences are required, there are also changes in the definitions. In the event of Pope, the passage from the existing paradigm to a new one was named the “frame shift.”

“FRAME SHIFT”

The tone has shifted. About 2000 journalists were accredited to follow up the visit together with Pope. This visit, which occupied the agenda for a long time for the foreign journalists, was now more than a source of news; it was converted into a “media event.” This “media event” hosted by Turkey could have eliminated the questions and problems on minds concerning the country and could have brought out a completely different photograph of Turkey.

The image of Turkey, which the foreign press saw as a country of contrasts and which is reflected by that famous and frequently used photograph of a woman in chador in modern Turkey, may change (Tavernise, 2007). The agenda was Pope even before the visit. On November 28th, from the moment that Pope set foot on Turkey, the things started to change.

Pope’s visit to Turkey which is a global media event can also be analyzed by Dayan and Katz’s (1996) “media event” concept. “High holidays of mass communi-

ation” concept, which they used in defining the media event at the early stages, is still explanatory for our subject matter (pp. 1–2). They say that viewers or the audience perceive the media event as an invitation and they stop their daily works, routines and participate in this holiday experience. And they describe this state as “high holidays of mass communication.” We, the viewers, accompanied this experience in Pope’s visit to Turkey and participated in this holiday of mass communication. Our daily works, routine lives were influenced; our agenda was subject to media’s intense bombardment. Our agenda in our social activities and in our communication with our environment changed, everybody touched upon Pope in some way, interpretations and even arguments were made. Media gave us what we wanted and this event was recorded in the history as one of the rare media events experienced by Turkey. However, the foreign press could not present its audience, the contrasts that were expected. They returned empty-handed from this event. *Financial Times* article with the title “Pope’s Turkey visit an unexpected success” published on December 1st, which was the last day of Pope in Turkey, proves that the visit did not give what was expected regarding the existing frames: “This caused chaos throughout the Pope’s time in the city; it also illustrated the overblown expectations surrounding his presence on Turkish soil – that it could spark violent protests and perhaps even an attempt on the Pope’s life” (Boland, 2006). *BBC News* gives a similar approach in an article titled “Turkey Trip ‘defines Benedict papacy’: Pope Benedict has returned to Rome at the end of his first visit to a predominantly Muslim country having apparently successfully defused criticism that he views the Islamic faith as violent” (Willey, 2006).

Another subject to be discussed on the context of media event are the news frames. These framings where the contrasts are frequently used may change from time to time. As we saw in the example of Pope, the contradictions such as “East/West,” “EU/Turkey,” “Christian/Muslim,” “Catholic/Orthodox” are sufficient materials for the formation of the news and realization of its modeling. The media event of Pope’s visit to Turkey, which the West gazed upon, is being experienced on the East and bringing some prejudices together with it. The European Union and Turkey is a subject which is on the agenda for a long period of time and which will be discussed at each period with various subtitles. While the question, ‘Is Turkey European?’, is occupying the minds, it cannot be thought that the replies or comments of the spiritual leader of Christians to this question are unimportant and it is not included within these contrasts. The reporters, who know how to make news out of each case in which religion is included, will of course approach this media event with the news frames related to religion on their minds. Although it is stated that Pope’s visit is a religious one, and although it is seen as the settling and peace of Christianity within itself, Islam will also be included within that frame in one way or another. We know that traumas play a role in shaping the news and may change the contents of the news (Zelizer and Allan, 2002, p. 1). Due to previous Muslim attacks on Western world, it can be suggested that the reporters, most likely, have prejudices and that they do not

leave these prejudices at home while coming to an Islamic country. These conflicts, stated above, will shape the perception of the visit and will be included in the news frames related to Turkey in the international broadcast associations.

Existing frames were hard and easily-remembered. During this visit, the frames which had symbolic meanings for the West and which supported “frame shift” were obtained. The frames of conflict, which were dominant in the beginning, changed with these new frames. Each day, differences were observed in the content of the news frames about Pope’s fourth day visit to Turkey. The visitor and the visit itself were critical. The image and opinions changed owing to the news material obtained as a result of this media event experienced by Turkey. In the morning of November 29th, the second day of Pope’s visit, everybody woke up in an atmosphere which is more complex but also softer. The headlines of the media were not so sharp as they used to be, and it was observed that the comments were more moderate.

It was pointed out that Pope had hidden his cross during the first day of the visit (November 28th, 2006) and this was a message for reconciliation with Islam. Contrary to what was expected, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s reception of Pope, who is also a president of a state, at his plane and application of state protocol were the first signs that confuted the negative expectations. According to *BBC News*, “Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan met him at Ankara airport and they had a 20 minute meeting, despite earlier claims Mr. Erdogan would not have time. The meeting was clearly intended to calm tensions and set a positive tone for the visit” (*BBC News*, 2006).

On the first day of the visit, after the meeting he held with Erdogan, the first photograph in history belonging to Ali Bardakoglu, the President of Religious Affairs, and Pope, the spiritual leader of Christian world, side by side was on the press (*Der Spiegel* on-line, 2006). This photograph was a proof that Islamic world and Christian world can meet despite everything. These photographs, which caused tranquilization of waters in the world press and decrease of expectations, were forming the key point of the news in Pope’s visit to Turkey, which was a media event.

On November 29th 2006, there was a news on the agenda, which was the subject of many articles, columns and news in the international broadcast associations. Pope, who became a pilgrim at Virgin Mary’s House, officiated the service in Turkish and waved Turkish flag, this frame was discussed too much at the global scale. After this photograph, there were reactions in the international media against Pope. While the foreign press was expected to make news against Turks, news against Pope took place on the press. Now the weapon was directed to Pope and Turkey did well in this important examination. According to news on BBC, “The Pope offered up a prayer for peace between peoples and talked of Turkey’s role as a bridge between nations” (*BBC News*, 2006).

On November 30th 2006, we woke up again with a historical frame. Islam and Christianity met in peace in a very meaningful frame. The importance of that frame is emphasized in some news before the visit: “In Istanbul, in a last-minute addition

to his program, the Pope will be visiting the city's famous Blue Mosque. It will be only the second time in history that a Pope from Rome has entered a Muslim place of worship" (Willey, 2006). These were the last frames of this media event, which was followed-up by about 2000 reporters and which was followed-up by the world, the world was talking about these frames. A first was being experienced in Turkey, the country of contrasts. The new frames have replaced the old ones and they created a positive image of Turkey.

CONCLUSION

Turkey did not give the full picture of contradictions that were demanded by the international broadcast associations. On the contrary, it concluded this adventure with an ambience that is secular and full of peace and tolerance. An atmosphere of satisfaction was dominant on Turkish press after the visit. It was believed that the visit shined the star of Turkey and news was offered within this direction. What the foreign press said was frequently carried over to the headlines with expressions full of praise. There was an increase in the news that showed Turkey as the leader of Muslim countries which should be taken as an example. All the concerns and anxiety that were dominant before Pope set foot on Turkey were replaced by a moderate atmosphere. As a reason of this, it was stated that Prime Minister's meeting Pope at his plane frustrated all the negative expectations. Negative expectations were beyond expectations and were converted into requests. The occurrence of the events that appealed the Western press would enable the registration of the image of Turkey, which was tried to be destroyed since many long years, just at the curve of the European Union; however, it did not happen that way. The reporters coming from international broadcast associations, who prepared themselves for this event since many weeks, who hoped to find photographs and events that would support their news frames, who wanted to follow-up this visit closely as accredited, left the country with very different news.

This frame shift was an "unexpected success" for Turkey but not for Islamic world. Pope's Turkey visit was a global media event because it was an opportunity to strengthen the negative representation of Islam and other contradictions mentioned above but turned out to be a way of strengthening Turkey's image.

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