

Conceptualizing intersectionality as a methodological tool in the analysis of 19th century western women travelogues

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Abstract

My paper aims to reflect on a methodology that could help to further deepen the critical analysis of travelogues written by western women visiting and writing about Ottoman Turkey during the 19th century highlighting their dual position as “colonized by gender but colonizer by race” (Ghose, 1998). This research draws deeply from Edward Said’s seminal work *Orientalism* (1978) and tries to work towards filling up a gap left by the late Said in his study: the issue of gender. My paper intends to show that gender is a salient variable that assumes importance in the interaction with discursive constraints, related to imperialism, femininity, authority, aesthetics, publishing etc. and at the same time needs to be weighted in respect to the deep heterogeneity that characterized women travelers, different by nationality, faith, class, marital status, education, political and social ideology. By showing the broad and composite spectrum of perspectives envisaged by women writers, their position as both oppressors and at the intersection of multiple oppressions, this paper argues for a more complex methodology of analysis of both gender and colonialism, where women travel writings can be located at the intersection of shifting and multiple overlapping circles. This complexity needs more sophisticated instruments of analysis that can be envisaged in the methodological tool of intersectionality, intended as the examination of the intersection of multiple forms of discrimination.

Keywords: Women travelogues, Orientalism, Feminism, Postcolonial studies.

19. yüzyıl batılı kadın seyahatnamelerinin analizinde kesişimselliği metodolojik bir araç olarak kavramsallaştırmak

Öz

Bu çalışma, 19. yüzyılda Osmanlı Türkiye'sini ziyaret eden Batılı kadınların yazdıkları seyahatnamelerin eleştirel analizini daha derin bir yöntem ile ele almayı amaçlamaktadır. Bu araştırma, Edward Said'in önemli çalışması Oryantalizm'e (1978) dayanmakta ve toplumsal cinsiyet sorununda Said'in bıraktığı boşluğu doldurmaya çalışmaktadır. 1990'lardan itibaren birçok yazar Oryantalizm çerçevesinde toplumsal cinsiyet sorunu üzerinde çalışmıştır (Melman, 1992; Lowe, 1991; Mills, 1991; Lewis, 1996 ve 2004; Yeğenoğlu, 1998; Foster, 2002). Bu çalışmalardan teorik destek alan bu araştırma, toplumsal cinsiyetin genel olarak emperyalizm, kadınlık, otorite, estetik, yayıncılık vb. söylemler ile etkileşim içinde olduğunu vurgularken, aynı zamanda her kadın seyyahın farklı milliyet, inanç, sınıf, medeni durum, eğitim, politik ve sosyal ideolojiye sahip olduklarının dikkate alınması gerektiğini savunur. Bu kadın yazarların baskı yapan olduğu kadar, baskı gören özellikleri yazdıkları seyahatnamelerin daha karmaşık bir metodoloji ile analiz edilmesini gerekli kılmaktadır.

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Bu çalıřma, batılı kadınlar tarafından yazılan seyahatnamelerin keřişimsellik (intersectionality) metodolijisi ile analiz edilmesini önermektedir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Kadın seyahatnameleri, Oryantalizm, Feminizm, Sömürgecilik Sonrası çalıřmalar.

Introduction

This paper is a first step in a wider project that aims to analyze a selected number of western women travelogues written during the 19th century and describing Ottoman Turkey. The intent is to reflect on a methodology that could help to further deepen the critical analysis of travelogues written by western women by drawing a more complex model of both gender and colonialism, where women travel writings can be located at the intersection of shifting and multiple overlapping circles. So, the focus in this paper is going to be on the epistemological and methodological aspects, while its application will be elaborated in further articles.

The starting point of the research is the issue of gender. This paper intends to show that the issue of gender needs to be evaluated within two levels of analysis: at the macro level as a salient variable that assumes importance in the interaction with discursive constraints, related to imperialism, femininity, authority, aesthetics, publishing etc., and at the micro level, as it needs to be weighted in respect to the deep heterogeneity that characterized women travelers, different by nationality, faith, class, marital status, education, political and social ideology.

The paper is divided in five sections. After a brief introduction and some reference points, in the second section is set the epistemological basis for the analysis, mostly rooted within a Foucauldian epistemology. In the third part the instruments furnished by intersectionality and by the analysis of the matrix of domination are considered. In utilizing the specific methodology of intersectionality, the main reference point is constituted by Black Feminist Thought and in particular the analysis focuses on the work of Patricia Hill Collins (1990) that has utilized intersectionality to highlight the multiple oppressions of black women. In the fourth section the issue of agency is evaluated through the use of the structuration theory and the duality of structure elaborated by Anthony Giddens. In the conclusion the methodological instruments introduced in the previous sections are re-elaborated and summarized.

1. Literature review

My research is deeply founded on Edward Said's seminal work *Orientalism* (1978). *Orientalism* is a groundbreaking masterpiece that has opened the way to Postcolonial Studies. Said evokes Michael Foucault's concept of discourse to describe how historically Orientalism is specifically a "Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient"(1978: 3). Said shows how Orientalism served as a system of representations that consolidated the West's authority and supremacy over the East and did not just reflect or describe it.

In Said's interpretation of Orientalism, the Orient is created, constructed through various representations made by the West through "a set of forces", that are not intended as purely economic or military but have to do with "learning and consciousness" and then to "Empire" (1978). For Said the representations made of the Orient have been instrumental to its colonization and they can be considered as political instruments of domination.

One of the main criticisms made to Said's work has been his lack of involvement with the issue of gender. Starting from the 1990s a great number of critical studies have been published on women's travelogues and in particular on works written on the travel in the Orient. The works by Billie Melman (1992) Lisa Lowe (1991), Sara Mills (1991), Reina Lewis (1996), Madeleine Dobie (2001), Melda Yeğenoğlu (1998) are only a fraction of the critical works written on the subject. Building up on this existing critical set of works, that are mostly rooted within a Foucauldian epistemological approach, my aim is to integrate the previous analysis with the instruments furnished by intersectionality and by the analysis of the matrix of domination.

One of the foundational authors in intersectionality is Patricia Hill Collins that utilizes the term in her *Black Feminist Thought* (1990). She fosters a fundamental paradigmatic shift in how we think about unjust power relations. She affirms:

“By embracing a paradigm of intersecting oppressions of race, class, gender, sexuality, and nation, as well as Black women's individual and collective agency within them, Black feminist thought conceptualizes the social relations of domination and resistance.” (2000: 273)

As highlighted by Collins there are few pure victims or oppressors for each individual derives varying amounts of penalty and privilege from the multiple systems of oppressions which form everyone's lives. As such “an individual may be an oppressor, a member of an oppressed group or simultaneously oppressor and oppressed” (2000: 225).

My research aims to utilize the methodological instrument of intersectionality to study travelogues written by women in the 19th century and show their specific conditions of “oppressed” as women but at the same time of “oppressors” as westerners and on how this specific overlapping of identity categories has influenced their representations.

2. Epistemological basis: the theory of representation

According to Sandra Harding, epistemology constitutes an overarching theory of knowledge (1987). For Patricia Hill Collins: “It [epistemology] investigates the standards used to assess knowledge or why we believe what we believe to be true. Far from being the apolitical study of truth, epistemology points to the ways in which power relations shape who is believed and why” (2000: 252). So, it is very important when setting a research to specify on which terrain we are going to plant the seeds of our research.

At the basis of my epistemological approach is the theory of representation, as set by Foucault and, following his path, I am interested in the relations he establishes between representation, knowledge and power. According to Foucault, language use cannot be taken solely as an innocuous activity of representation. Language is a site where ideology, power, and representation are contested. This idea is pursued by Edward Said and elaborated in his work *Orientalism* (1978) so moving Foucault's analysis within the domain of the relations between West and East. Said affirms that: “The Orient that appears in Orientalism is a system of representations framed by a whole set of forces that brought the Orient into Western learning, Western consciousness and later Western Empire” (1978: 202). Adding, a few pages later: “My contention is that Orientalism is fundamentally a political doctrine willed over the Orient because the Orient was weaker than the West, which elided the Orient's difference with its weakness” (ibid: 204).

Many of these representations of the East have become *idée reęues* as Flaubert called them, accepted ideas, or as we would call them today stereotypes and they re-articulate through time various forms of racism. The only antidote against these “essentializing tropes of difference”, as defined by Jenny Sharpe, is to unmask their presumed “naturalness” and re-integrate them within the histories in which they were produced (Sharpe: 1993). According to Sharpe: “One place to begin writing the history of a stereotype is to show its emergence, retreat, revival and transformation. In other words, we need to demonstrate that racial and sexual typing has no meaning outside of its condition of existence” (1993: 27). In the same way for Said it is not only language but also geography that is immersed within ideology and power. As affirmed by Yeęenoęlu: “Geography must not be understood simply as knowledge about a natural” referent but it is inextricably linked with cultural signification” (1998: 17).

We need to proceed with an historical reconstruction of the specific conditions that have originated the stereotypes surrounding the ideas of West and East. And this operation needs to be integrated with a theory of representation that would allow us to differentiate between the external referent and the personal reconstruction done by the specific writer in their works. To be able to proceed with this analysis we need to be aware of another element: the specific “regime of truth” that is in force in the historic context we take into consideration. Within Foucault’s theory of power, a regime of truth is: “the circular relation that truth has with the systems of power that simultaneously produce and sustain it, and at the same time the effects of power which truth induces and which extend it” (1980: 133).

Truth in Foucault’s use has a history. It is historically grounded and relative to the specific context we take into consideration. Each society has its regime of truth, its “general politics” of truth – that is the types of discourses it accepts and makes function as true. These regimes of truth concur in the creation and are at the same time the consequence of specific discursive formations that constitute a continuous changing set of conditions regulating the range of possible articulations at any time; yet with each articulation the set of conditions shifts and adapts.

In Foucauldian terms, power can be disciplinary but it is primarily relational. The relational view of power also shows that power is productive, in contrast to the conventional approach that gives power a negative connotation in the sense that it excludes, represses, censors, etc. The productive aspect of power, produces truth and reality. However, in addition to producing “rituals of truth,” it also produces the individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him. Knowledge, for Foucault, is in itself neither true nor false but is strictly linked to power as it sets and define for each specific period and culture the boundaries within which statements are to be judged true and false.

The issue of truth has been highlighted also by various critics working within the field of travel studies that in the last years have critically re-evaluated travelogues and have become increasingly critical about their objectivity and truthfulness. According to Holland and Huggan for example most travel narrative should be regarded as “fictions of factual representation” (1998:10), texts that for the most part offer us only the illusion of being faithful representations of the world when in fact they are, inevitably, selective and fictive to some degrees. This idea is confirmed by a recent book on travel writing by Thompson who affirms:

“These texts [travelogues] tell us much more about the conceptual matrices, the conscious and unconscious assumptions and frequently the ambition of the individuals and communities that produce them, than they do about the people or place they pinpoint to describe” (2011: 71).

So, the first point to be highlighted is that travelogues cannot be read as objective descriptions of faraway places and people, but as fictive representations conditioned by the regimes of truth in which they have been written.

When we look more specifically at western women writing about the East through the lenses of Foucauldian epistemology, we can affirm that they describe the things they see, they represent the reality through a vision of the world subjected to the specific regimes of truth they share within their particular historical, social and cultural position. So, women, in the same way as men, do not simply describe what they see but they produce, shape the construction of the East through their representations. Their gender does not give them automatically a specific standpoint, an advantageous or disadvantageous position from which to understand better or worse than men, other cultures. As much as men they are conditioned by the specific discourse related to imperialism, colonialism, femininity, domesticity that shapes the culture and society of their time. Their representations need to be evaluated contextually and historically at the intersection of various factors characterizing the individual writer (class, race, gender, nation) and the matrix of domination they are subjected to including the discourse of colonialism and of femininity. The potential for both multiple and conflicting experience of subordination and power requires a wider ranging and complex terrain of analysis.

However, we need to recognize that for women to travel to the East and to write about different cultures can be more complex than for men due to the different position of power they cover. Most women going to the East in the 19th century, as documented by different studies, did so by following their husband, father or brother. They were mostly, but not all, middle-class women who did not have a job and depended for the majority of cases on men for their livelihood.

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3. Methodological instruments

In 1989 Kimberlé Crenshaw, a professor of law, coined the term “intersectionality” in a paper as a way to help explain the oppression of African-American women. This concept has been further elaborated in 1990 by Patricia Hill Collins in her first edition of *Black Feminist Thought* where she writes:

“Intersectionality refers to the intersection of different forms of oppression for example gender, class, race and these oppressions work together to produce injustice. [...] The matrix of domination refers to how these intersecting oppressions are organized” (2000: 18).

Intersectionality refers to the intersection of different forms of oppression for example gender, class, race and these oppressions work together to produce injustice. The matrix of domination refers to how these intersecting oppressions are organized.

3.1. Intersectionality and the matrix of domination

Intersectionality refuses both the liberal idea of a universal woman representing all others and the standpoint theory of woman being able in the name of a specific characteristic as black, lesbian, white etc., to speak for all others. By locating the various single woman at the crossing of multiple individual

and social factors and relations of power, intersectionality supports the idea that everyone is located in multiple, overlapping ways and every woman is different or equal to other women or to other men in respect to specific factors.

This matrix can be summarized along two main axes:

1. Four interconnected domains of power: a) Structural, b) Disciplinary, c) Hegemonic and d) Interpersonal
2. Multiple intersectional factors characterizing the specific positioning of women within their society. In this case I have chosen seven factors: 1) Class 2) Race 3) Gender 4) Religion 5) Marital Status 6) Age 7) Nationality.

This methodology of research allows to highlight and analyze conflicting experiences of power and subordination, denying the fixity of identities, showing the capacity that each individual has or has not to act independently. Each woman is embedded in a matrix of domination made of laws and institutions (Structural domain), bureaucracy (Disciplinary domain), cultural and ideological (Hegemonic domain) and influenced by every day interactions (Interpersonal domain). However, her capacity to resist, accommodate, act independently or become an accomplice to it depends also on the factors characterizing her singular being: her gender, class, race, religion, marital status, age, nationality etc.

When looking in more details at the domain of power it seems clear that structural and disciplinary domains are linked, or better are accepted by the individuals through the work of the hegemonic domain that has the role to bind the individual to the society to which s/he belongs and whose ideas/value are reinforced or denied according to his/her personal biography. It is within this level that play a fundamental role the multiple factors making up his/her identity. At the intersections of these multiple factors we can locate the single writers that we need to remember are also influenced by the discourse of classism, colonialism, patriarchy, gendering, femininity, religion that constitute the hegemonic domain. Furthermore, these discourses are then translated in practices (structural and disciplinary domains) and arrive to the level of every day social interactions (interpersonal domain).

As this model clearly shows, the dialectic relationship linking oppression and agency is far more complex than a simple model of oppressors and oppressed would suggest. Are women all oppressed? Are they oppressors? Do they have or can show agency?

As Foucault's notion of subjectivation (*assujétissement*) suggests, discourses which constitute the subject are at the same time the condition of possibility of its empowerment. Discursive constructions are stabilized through a forcible reiteration but it is through this reiteration that "gaps and fissures" are opened. These instabilities constitute the possibility for the object constituted to escape or exceed the norms.

4. The issue of Agency

As a consequence, the activities of human beings though influenced by various factors and by different matrix of domination cannot however be understood as simply situated and constrained. The relationship between subjectivity and social structure needs to recognize the intervention of human agency. An answer to these issues is provided by the theory of structuration elaborated in the 1980s by the sociologist Anthony Giddens and that involves the concept of duality of structure which expresses the mutual dependence of structure and agency.

4.1. The theory of structuration and the concept of duality of structure

According to this theory “social structures are both constituted by human agency and yet, at the same time are the very medium of this constitution” (Giddens,1979: 121). This means that the relation between human beings and structures is dynamic as they do not simply reproduce existing structures but modify them even as they are shaped by them.

This notion of the duality of structures allows to move away from a purely constraining forces model by allowing the social agents to produce these structures anew in the process of reproducing them. It is important also to keep in mind that for Giddens “structure” is not external but internal to agents in the form of memory traces (1984: 25).

It is agents who bring “structure” into being, and it is “structure” which produces the possibility of agency. At each point of structural reproduction there is also the potential for change as individuals can transform the traditional “rules” which have structured their past interaction by modifying it.

Why change does not happen that often and that sudden? Why routine is kept? Giddens answers these questions by introducing the concept of ontological security, a concept he derived from R.D. Laing and that is a psychological state that is equivalent to feeling “at home” with oneself and the world, and is associated with the experience of low or manageable levels of anxiety that contributes to the search for an overly consensual and static social universe.

In practice, social change will flow from an amalgam of incremental change, i.e. change that occurs as an unintended outcome of social reproduction itself, reflexive monitoring of their actions and unintended consequences. Structuration theory acknowledges the potential of the social actor for self-reflexivity and critique so providing a theoretical basis for varying degrees of dissent, resistance and potential for change.

Conclusion

As shown above, the single writer is the consequence of hegemonic discourses that lead to structural and disciplinary control mechanisms. However, at the interpersonal level various factors influence her choices. In time she can confirm and reiterate or modify with her actions the structure. So, we have a synchronic analysis of one moment in time and a diachronic perspective that allows to look for modifications in the practices due to the single agent’s agency.

The methodology envisioned in this paper assumes 3 steps of analysis:

1. Matrix of Domination and Domains of Power analysis:

In the first step, we proceed to the analysis of the hegemonic, structural and disciplinary domains characterizing the specific country and historical time considered. We proceed to the analysis of the hegemonic, structural and disciplinary domains characterizing the specific country and historical time considered. When looking in more details at the domain of power it seems clear that structural and disciplinary domains are linked, or better are accepted by the individuals through the work of the hegemonic domain that has the role to bind the individual to the society to which she belongs and whose ideas/value are reinforced or denied according to her personal biography.

2. Matrix of Domination and Domains of Power analysis +Intersectional analysis:

As a second step, at the interpersonal level, we integrate the Matrix of Domination and Domains of Power analysis with an Intersectional analysis to locate the factors characterizing the single writer. In this paper we looked at:

a) Class b) Race c) Gender d) Religion e) Marital Status f) Age g) Nationality

The single writer is the consequence of hegemonic discourses that lead to structural and disciplinary control mechanisms. Moreover, at the interpersonal level various factors influence her choices. At the intersections of these multiple factors we can locate the single writers that we need to remember are influenced by the discourse of classism, colonialism, patriarchy, gendering, femininity, religion that constitute the hegemonic domain. Furthermore, these discourses are then translated in practices (structural and disciplinary domains) and arrive to the level of every day social interactions (interpersonal domain). Then at the interpersonal level these macro elements meet with the micro ones in different ways according to the individual writer's point of intersection of factors. It is within this level that play a fundamental role the multiple factors making up his/her identity.

3-Matrix of Domination and Domains of Power + Intersectionality + Structuration analysis:

In the third step then we look diachronically at the domains of power and at the reiteration or modification the writer has made in the specific. In this last step we insert time in the analysis and so the possibility of agency. Within time, the single writer can confirm, reiterate or modify with her actions the structure. So, to the synchronic analysis of one moment in time we add a diachronic perspective that allows to look for reiteration or modifications in the practices due to the modification the single writers have brought in the specific.

The difficulty in analyzing women travelogues is their dual position, split between two possible vision of the world and never really able to abandon one of them. Moreover, the experience of this duality is not identical in each individual but subject to different articulation for each individual instance and at every specific historical moment. This paper however aimed to show that this complexity can be investigated at the micro and macro levels with the support of the methodological tools of intersectionality, the matrix of domination and structuration theory that allow for a more precise and nuanced analysis of each individual writer, equal by gender but different by lived experience.

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