ALIENATION AND MASS MEDIA

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INTRODUCTION

The idea of alienation has been central in sociology since the birth of the discipline, particularly in the writings of early sociologist such as Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim, Max Weber, and George Simmel. But, yet, there has never an agreement on a common meaning for the term.

One approach views alienation as primarily the result of factors are specific to certain groups in society, usually lower socioeconomic groups; another approach views alienation as the result of general cultural conditions of contemporary industrial society, as reflected in the works of Durkheim, Weber, and Simmel. For Marx and Neo - marxsists, alienation is largely class specific, whereas for Weber it is related to more general societal characteristics (Rushing, 1972: p. 3).

The word "alienation" comes from the Latin term "alienatio". In today's English, some scholars define that "alienation" as synonym of estrangement (Feuerlicht, 1978: p. 211). In Webster's, 1968 unabridged dictionary, the term defined as "mental derangement".

In the Dictionary of Social Sciences, Kurt Lang defines alienation as "an estrangement or separation between parts or the whole of the personality and significant aspect of the world of experience". He describes the term in its references to (1) objective states, (2) states of feeling accompanying alienation, and (3) "motivational states tending toward estrangement". In these latter states, (4) separation is possible between self and the objective world, self and factors within the self, and, finally between self and (total) self.

In the International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences Lichtheim has described the concept of alienation as a basic ontological theme in Western culture stemming from a Neoplatonic doctrine of emanation. Through this doctrine, finite, existent beings are depicted as creations springing from some ultimate source.

In an excellent historical review of the concept of alienation, Schacht has listed the various meanings of this "separateness" in the philosophical writings of Hobbes, Rousseau, Fichte, Schiller, and most importantly Hegel. In The Phenomenology of Spirit, Hegel's use of the word alienation (Entfremdung) is analyzed by Schacht (1970, pp. 7-60) as being used in two distinct ways. According to Schacht, Hegel's first use of alienation is connected with the notion of "becoming alien" (Johnson, 1973: p. 29).

Three meanings can be found in today's English for the term:

1 — In legal sphere (as a synonym for transferal or sale of rights or property).

2 — In the societal sphere (as a synonym for Latin disiunctio, estrangement from other men, from his country or from the gods.

3 — In the medico - psychological sphere (as a synonym for Latin dementia, insania) in the sense of derangement of mental illness (Zablocki, 1980: pp. 160 - 167).

At present, social scientists are using the term and concept of "alienation" to a certain extent to share the same field of investigation as their colleagues who work with the terms "anomie" and "anomia". It may therefore be usefull here to give a brief comparison of these three terms and their applications in the social sciences.

Concerning "anomia", there appears to be consensus that the term refers to the subjective condition of an individual. Under the term, social scientists are attempting to measure individual manifestations.

As for "alienation" and "anomie", both concepts are distinguished from one another in terms of the history of ideas: Marx is contrasted and compared with Durkheim. Shortly, "anomie" characterized by a collapse of values and norms, while the concept of "alienation" is based on the excessive conformity to norms.

We will be looking a schematic explanation of theories about the cause of alienation:

I— Society - oriented   : Sociological and psychological
 (Conflict: man - society) theories - Weber, Durkheim.
            Philosophical and anthropological
            theories - Rousseau.

IIa— Individual - oriented   : Sociological and psychological
 (Conflict: man - society) theories - Simmel, Fromm.
            Philosophical and anthropological
            theories - Rousseau, Marx's Fisrt
            Theory, H. Marcuse.

IIb— Conflict within society : Sociological and psychological
            theories - Marx's Second Theory
            and Mills.

The above schematic explanation hopefully, would be enough to cover theoris and their bearers in our historical and hypothetical outlook to approaches developed untill today (Israel, 1971: p. 65).

Up to this point, we have reviewed the necessary literal background of the concept of alienation. In fact, our view of manipulated man throgh mass media will basically rely on these studies: However, there are some commonly agreed critical points on some of these studies and or writings, we should also cover here beforehand.

The early and latter writings of Karl Marx, at first glance, can be seen contradictory to one another. But, there is a common agreement that the consistency in his theory has never gone of .

On the other hand, his latter writings, specially the part on vanishing the division of labor in a society, and that way, preventing the men alienated, might not be clear enough to us. In fact, the phenomenon itself misproven.

Many of these early scholars haven't had a change to become acquintant to some new phenomena, like mass media television, even widely usage of radio. And, because of this reason, their approach to the concept of alienation was somehow distinct from our understanding of the concept. We shall refer to new terminologies whenever necessary in order to express our opinion on the concept.

ALIENATION, INDIVIDUAL, MASS MEDIA AND RELATED CONCEPTS

In order to observe or to be a part of alienation process through mass media, we should look to related concept and terminology. We have touched in the alienation both as a word and as a concept. By following the same path, there are other terms and concepts waiting to be touched. In accordance to the nature of the process, there has to be a kind of communication activity existed. The message or the messages subjected to the communication activity has to be delivered by some means, usually we call these means as mass media. Although, if the communication process is occuring in interpersonal level, mass media would be out of consideration but, those kind of non - mediatic activities are not subject to our consideration.

Although, perception is a psychological term, it is a discrete part of communication process, indeed. The communicator attempts to create or reshape his message in a way that to make it perceivable by the target audience. If the climate of the communication environment turns out to be a massive attempt in order for mobilizing the crowds towards desired direction, still the attempt should be considered ethical due to the nature of some aims require those kind of approach while constructing the communication activity. Like political communications, for instance, the final goal of the communicator is to mobilize the voter to cast their vote in favour of his candidate. In this step, we should apply the process of the selective perception. As voters, we should selectively perceive all messages before we cast our votes.

So, when we speak about alienation, mass media and the individual, we are also dealing with surrounding concepts as we stated above. Perhaps, we will not be satisfied just by mentioning the names, further comments will be needed.

What is mass communication as a process? Any process consists of a series of stages or steps by which something is transformed during a set of distinctive operations, like human digestion.

1 — A message is formulated by professional communicator.

2 — The message is sent out in a relatively rapid and continous way through the use of media (usually print, film or. broadcasting).

3 — The message reaches relatively large and diverse (that is, mass) audiences, who attend to the media in selective ways.

4 — Individual members of the audience interpret the message in such a way that they experience meanings that are more or less parallel to those intended by the professional communicator.

5 — As a result of experiencing these meanings, members of the audience are influenced in some way; that is, the communication has some effect (DeFleur and Dennis, 1988: pp. 6 - 7).

Man can be viewed as a cybernetics mechanism, one whose actions are governed by the information that reaches the guidance center of his brain. The persuasive communicator hopes that the information he prepares and transmits will shape the behavior of his audience. To have this power, the information transmitted must reach the senses of the receiver and be stored for the future use. This process is know as a perception.

Perception is the "process of becoming aware of objects, qualities, or relations by way of the sense organs". It tells us how a person forms percepts the things of which he is aware. This connection between the outside and the inside is the most vulnerable and critical link in the chain of communication, because it serves as a gate and functions in a "go - no go" manner. No wonder psychologist sometimes speak of perception in terms of "port of entry".

There are some traits of perception to be mentioned. One is the device of source credibility. It is used to gain automatic admittance. Second device is the use of strongly structured and intense stimuli. The third and most talked about one is subliminal perception.

The process of perception is also related to capacity of audience and channels are going to be used. For example, for conveying a message directed to educated audience, high capacity print media would be useful.

Another side of this process is selective perception. It is simply the all incoming messages via brain, and factors like personal needs and values, language, religion, etc. Plays role to allow which goes on, which doesn't (Lerbinger, 1972: pp. 115 - 119, 125 - 129).

The popularity of term alienation starts with early 60's in Western societies. The thing to remember is that those days, in terms of economics, were the day of massive production, less worker involvement and less socialization of giant corporations. In this gray toned picture, black and white were distinct, and requred some "colorification", so as to that man who lived in that one dimensional environment could be able to perceive his uniqueness, in a given way. Only by that way, the creativity of human brain should have motivated to create new product or service in massive production line, that hasn't had perceived as one of the massive production line. His consciousness of purchasing the good or service, which appears very "customized" in commercials, would be up than this cycle, would be able to save the system and its values as a whole (Israel, 1971: pp. 172 - 173).

This economical point of view of the alienation has been carried out by some "environments" for a long time. In fact, what was stated above was partially right. Yes, there was a problem of lost human being under massive productivity, but the approach to this problem couldn't be criticized easily, because it attempted to solve it, in the dynamic cause and effect phenomenon.

Another troublespot in the issue that the participation in political decision making process. By growing of populations, crowds turned to be from the publics to the masses. It is a common sense that people in the crowd are less participative, but rather tends to show obedience to outgrowing tendency, which brings us to

early discussions on concept and definition of alienation. Although, the problem stated here is basically goes beyond the territory of "structuring the public opinion", also related to our argument by which the means used in, mass media.

We should go back to the economical approach to the term. Today, national - level alienation of man through mass media is rapidly becoming international. Even, this rapid "contamionation" process does not allow every society to gain their own "experiences". The globalization of the world economy as well as homogenity of media messages are pushing almost every nation get around the powers and their cultural artifacts. This, of course, is pretty much affecting the personal experiences, like national experiences they are also getting global as their "counterparts" have been passed through. In Turkey, for instance, unlike my generation and generations before us, the new generations are much more aware of international fames. Coca Cola, Mc Donalds, Pizza Hut are much greater parts of our society than ever before.

It is possible to see in the middle of almost any journal titles like "high tech" or "What is new?" written in English.

Homogenity goes beyond the step of direct import of media contents and messages. Now, it is on its latter stages like reproduction or replication of previously used messages, especially in advertising business. It is not surprise for us to see a Proctor and Gamble commercial once telecasted in U.S. that is, of course, going beyond the simple copying, rather shows us that we now have "global individual with new values and beliefs" comparing to old "regional man".

This is very new face of "alienation in the form of globally promoted format through mass media". For a final remark, let us wish the best for the outcome of the attempt to the integrity of the mankind in the planet called earth.

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