Americanisation of Political Communication Practices

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Abstract

Globalisation, referring to an interconnectedness and interdependence across the world, creates a challenge for national states, localities and individuals. In the past, people used to define themselves with strong ties with political parties, trade unions, and churches. However, modernisation process decreased the importance of these institutions, and individualistic values became more important. As a result of that process, ties between people and political parties are weakened. Meanwhile, media played a very important role, and the mass media gained a centrality in the world. Moreover, technological developments changed the interaction between people, and "visibility" became important for politicians: The more visible politicans are on television, the more dominant they are. Therefore, these changes forced political parties to change their political discourse and new communication techniques emerged with "catch-all" parties. The U.S. was the first country, which used new techniques in political communication. Because of dissemination of information, these new techniques are globalised.

Key words: Modernisation; Americanisation; Centrality of Media; Political Communication

INTRODUCTION

Today as mass media gain more and more importance, political communication methods of parties get similar all over the world and that similarity increases day by day. Therefore, it is possible to talk about global homogenisation of media systems across the world which causes countries to get closer in their political communication practices despite of the great differences in their political systems. Hence, the term "Americanisation" is used to explain these changes under "Globalisation" debates because we can see the influence of America on the common political communication practices. Those obvious changes have been argued for a long time and they are still a subject for recent debates.

Nowadays, different countries use the same themes in their election campaignings and for some scholars; it is an obvious sign of "Americanisation". However, "Globalisation" and its implications refer to a more complex interaction between countries. Therefore, this study aims at studying the implications of the terms "Globalisation" and "Americanisation" in detail, and in what terms they differ from each other.

To understand "Globalisation", we must know what it really means; therefore, in the first part, general definitions of the term "Globalisation" will be given to make it clearer. In addition to that, for many people the term "Americanisation" emerged as a problem because of its destructive influence on cultures rather than being a necessary process for democratisation that must be experineced by those cultures. Hence, it is of high importance to clarify meaning of "Americanisation". Since the main purpose in this paper is to examine the new political communication practices, especially in election campaigns, the term "Americanisation" will be analyzed in this context in the first part.

On the other hand, in social life, which also contains political life, every process creates some values in itself and leads to other processes. The terms "Globalisation" and "Americanisation" can be understood in a better way if they are viewed not just as a single and independent process but as a result of previous processes. That is, the cause and effect relationship between each political process must be taken into account to understand these terms. Therefore, in that case it is important to study modernisation process and its results closely. Moreover, technological developments affect our social lives and may trigger other social processes. Because of that reason, the focus of the second part is modernisation, centrality and expansion of the mass media.

A comparative and multi-dimensional study can provide us with a comprehensive explanation in understanding "Globalisation" / "Americanisation" process in communication practices. Therefore, the political communication in Turkey and America is compared in the last part of the study in order to render our argument clearer.

1. GLOBALISATION AND AMERICANISATION

The term "Globalisation" has always been controversial in social science studies since the beginning of the 1990s and that concept has become an important discussion about sociocultural transformation in modern cultures (Featherston, Lash, & Robertson, 1997). In its overall meaning, globalisation refers to both "the compression of the world and the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole" (Robertson, 1992, p.8). According to Axford, the core of globalisation idea is that the world experiences a process in which there is an ever-intensifying interconnectedness and interdependence and because of these reasons we cannot talk about "separate national economies and separate national juristiction" (Axford, 1995, p.27). Hence, the idea of globalisation suggests that this interconnectedness and interdependence create a challenge for national states, localities and individuals to identify themselves without "reference to more encompassing structures and flows" (Axford, 1995, p.27).

For some scholars that globalisation process triggers a homogenisation process in which some cultures are dominated by powerful countries' cultures. That homogenisation problem is emphasized in cultural imperialism theory and according to Schiller cultural imperialism refers to a process by which a society is dragged into the modern world system and it is forced into shaping its social institution to correspond to "the values and structures of the dominating center of the system" (Schiller, 1976, p.9). On the other hand, in some studies, this explanation is viewed as a very simplistic way of definition because of the theory's heavy dependence

on the external influences; thus, as Axford (1995) puts it, understanding the complexity of the global system requires a multi-dimensional approach. Therefore, globalisation is a term for multi-dimensional process and by that process the global system is being made.

Contemporary scholars tend to explain cultural imperialism theory, which refers to a specific dominant culture over other cultures, under the broader and more complex concept of globalisation. The term "Americanisation" is used for the definition of that process. Although the term "Americanisation" was first used in the 1890s as a term of abuse (Rose, 1974, as cited in Negrine, 1996), it became an important discussion in social sciences especially after media's center-staged position in political life. Since this study's main topic is transformation of political communication and life, here the term "Americanisation" is valid for a limited meaning. Therefore, when we use this term, we have to remember that it refers to particular type of elements of election campaigns in political communication practices which were first developed in the U.S. and spread to other countries. In that limited concept, the American model of campaigning is marked by six characteristics (Kavanagh, 1995): Firstly, political campaigns in the U.S. are based on a single issue and candidate-centerness. In the U.S., issues or international problems are not mainly part of campaign strategies. Secondly, the importance of money, especially in the pre-nomination presidential campaigns, is increasing because of the media advertising. Moreover, in that case, presidential fundraising became an important element (nowadays often using direct mails). Thirdly, there is an increase in the number of professional communicators, who use effective, new communication technology, in the United States. Nowadays, during the campaigning in the U.S., the strategies are conducted by public relation experts, fundraisers and opinion pollsters. Fourthly, it is needless to say that the role of the mass media has increased since it is a very effective tool for candidates to be recognised and to evaluate the campaign performance of their parties. As professional communicators and media are more important nowadays, the connection between citizens and political parties is weakened. Therefore, the fifth characteristic of American campaign system is the weakness of political parties. Finally, "growing concern about the influences and activities of the consultance" is the last characteristic (Kavanagh, 1995, p.220).

As quoted many times by different scholars "around the world, many of the recent changes in election campaigning share common themes despite greate differences in the political cultures, histories, and institutions of the countries in which they have occured" (Swanson & Mancini, 1996, p.2). However, is it possible to argue that these surface similarities may prevent us from seeing deeper differences? Or does "Americanisation" simply refer to an importation/

exportation, adaptation/adoption process? Here an exact definition of "Americanisation" has not been given, as Negrine (1996) says, and that renders the term ambiguous. To understand the issue, it is necessary to generate more light on the problems. Hence, in the next chapter, the results of modernity, expansion of media into politics and centrality of media will be examined to make the concept clearer.

2. MODERNITY, SECULARISM, CENTRALITY/EXPANSION OF MEDIA

As it has been mentioned in the first part, in many democracies political communication practices have been changing very quickly, especially in the last decades and election campaignings share common themes in spite of the great differences in political culture and traditions of different countries (Swanson & Mancini, 1996). We can observe these common practices as political commercials, technical experts, media professionals, mounting campaign expenses and media-centered campaigns. We can see these changes across the world; therefore, it can be said that both media systems and political communication worldwide are getting more and more similar.

According to some scholars, these changes in political communication practices refer to an Americanisation process in which candidates, political parties, and news media are using the same communication patterns as the United States does (Swanson & Mancini, 1996). In that suggestion, meaning of Americanisation contains an easy characterisation of innovation (Elebash, 1984, as cited in Swanson & Mancini, 1996). Although American influence is obvious on some cases, there are some questions which have not been answered. According to Negrine (1996), there is still a lack of clarity about the term Americanisation and Americanisation has to be defined and described more clearly in this respect.

In order to understand the present condition in political communication practises, it is necessary to analyse the processes they have gone through so far. To be clearer, the term ideology and its nature should be enlightened. In that case, Marxist and Althusserian aspects of ideology are significant and will be explained.

The term ideology, invented by Cabanis, Destutt de Tracy and his friends, is defined as "system of the ideas and representations which dominate the mind of a man or a social group" by Marx (Althusser, 1971, p.158). Marx explains societies in a topographic way, envisaging that the structure of every society consists of levels, meaning that every single society has an infrastructure and the superstructure. While the former refers to economic base, the latter contains politico-legacy and ideology. In his metaphorical way of explaining society, Marx depicts the structure of every society as a building, containing a base (infrastructure) on which two floors of superstructure (politico-legacy and ideology) are constructed. This envisagement of society renders infrastructure (economic base) as the initial determinant, that leads us to the idea of what happens in the upper floors is determined by what happens in the economic base (Althusser, 1971). In his book German Ideology, ideology is considered to be a pure illusion and that is why, ideology is an imaginary construction. This aspect of ideology in Marxian view resembles what writers before Freud asserted (Althusser, 1971). For them, the dream is just a remnant of our daily lives, the imaginary remainder of the real world, presented arbitrarily and in disorder; and these qualifications of dream also show us the status of ideology in German Ideology. Like dreams, ideology emerges from reality, but it exists in imagination; it is the imaginary representation of the real world and since it appears in our imaginary world, it has no history and it is an illusion (Althusser, 1971). It is Althusser, who reaches this conclusion, and in order to identify ideology, he asserts two theses focusing on the nature of ideology. Firstly, ideology is a representation of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence:

> We commonly call religious ideology, ethical ideology, legal ideology, political ideology, etc., so many 'world outlooks'. Of course, assuming that we do not live one of these ideologies as the truth (e. g., 'believe' in God, Duty, Justice, etc.), we admit that the ideology we are discussing from a critical point of view, examining it as the ethnologist examines the myths of a 'primitive society', that these 'world outlooks' are largely imaginary, i.e. do not 'correspond to reality' (Althusser, 1971, p.162).

If ideology is a representation of imaginary relationship of people to the real world, just like dreams are reflection of the outer world in our imagination, it may be assumed that men reflect the real conditions of existence –the world- in an illusionary way in ideology, and the real world can be found in that reflection.

The second thesis asserted by Althusser on ideology is that ideology has a material existence (Althusser, 1971). Actually, the latter is the natural consequence of the former: If we assume that ideology is the reflection of imaginary relationship of individuals to the real world, so the reflection actually comes from reality, i. e. from a material world. Moreover, ideology exists in an apparatus, which is called Ideological State Apparatus by Althusser (ISA), and this existence is material (Althusser, 1971).

To get a clearer picture of what Althusser means by Ideological State Apparatus, the term must be explained in an elaborative way. According to Althusser, ISA should not be confused with Repressive State Apparatus (RSA) because in Marxist theory, State Apparatus consists of "the Government, the Administration, the Army, the Police, the Courts, the Prisons, etc.," which function by violence (Althusser, 1971, p.143). However, if ISAs are in question, a number of institutions should be considered (i.e. Churches, Schools, Family, Political Sytems, Trade

Unions, Mass Media, Literature, etc.). There are two major differences between RSA and ISA: Firstly, RSA refers to singularity, in other words, there is only one RSA, whereas ISA refers to plurality. Secondly, RSA occupies public domain while ISA occupies private domain (Althusser, 1971). Althusser (1971) applies Gramscian approach to render the vagueness between public and private spheres clearer:

> But someone is bound to question the second, asking me by what right I regard as Ideological State Apparatuses, institutions which for the most part do not possess public status, but are quite simply private institutions. As a conscious Marxist, Gramsci already forestalled this objection in one sentence. The distinction between the public and the private is a distinction internal to bourgeois law, and valid in the (subordinate) domains in which bourgeois law exercises its 'authority'. The domain of the State escapes it because the latter is 'above the law': the State, which is the State of the ruling class, is neither public nor private; on the contrary, it is the precondition for any distinction between public and private. The same thing can be said from the starting-point of our State Ideological Apparatuses. It is unimportant whether the institutions in which they are realized are 'public' or 'private'. What matters is how they function. Private institutions can perfectly well 'function' as Ideological State Apparatuses. A reasonably thorough analysis of any one of the ISAs proves it. But now for what is essential. What distinguishes the ISAs from the (Repressive) State Apparatus is the following basic difference: the Repressive State Apparatus functions 'by violence', whereas the Ideological State Apparatuses' function 'by ideology' (p. 144).

As the last sentence in the quotation suggests that Ideological State Apparatuses function insidiously; it is not as visible and concrete as RSA and it has some insidiousness in its nature. That is why, in Althusserian aspect, what seems to happen outside ideology, actually takes place in it, and vice versa: "ideology never says, 'I am ideological' (Althusser, 1971, p.175).

However, to understand the present political practices, we suggest a different way of explaining the past. In order to clarify this point, the term modernism will be explained.

The term modernisation, which carries an evolutionist meaning and refers to a necessary and unilinear process, is often used as an alternative to Americanisation. In this necessary process, the idea of importance of group solidarity and organised social centrality is declining while importance of individualism is increasing. When we look at the past of the European political order, we can see that political parties, trade unions and churches used to define themselves ideologically, and group loyalties were related to social class and religion. Individuals used to identify themselves with these groups with very strong ties and that individualistic relation was showing people's material well-being. Moreover, the institutions, as mentioned above, were central to the public sphere organisation. However, in the modernisation process, it can be seen that the importance of individual values increased and people started defining themselves as individuals instead of groups, so that rendered the ties

weaker. Moreover, during the process, another term, called Secularisation, emerged. In the past, church used to control society and the behaviour of populations, but that institution is no longer able to maintain its power and, undoubtly, it lost its control over the society. Therefore, these institutions cannot hegemonise course of citizens' community life which causes a weak connection between important social institutions and people. The number of hesitant people in election time increased because they no longer identify themselves with a specific party and that change forced political parties to generate new techniques and explain themselves differently to attract people. Therefore, modernisation/secularisation process transformed political life and, as a result, the importance of mass parties and their ideological stances (and the other dominant institutions) declined and they were superseded by catch all or electrol-professional parties. In other words, in that transformation, psychological and sociological ties between parties and citizens weakened and party membership loyalty and the number of people, who attended election, declined in many countries which experienced that transformation. Consequently, while traditional parties are becoming less effective and weakened, the number of professional staff, whose main purpose is to attract the hesitant voters, has increased. Moreover, we can say that the importance of ideologies was atrophied while individual/charismatic leaders, who attract people, emerged.

It is so obvious that mass media played a very important role during the political change process. Because of that reason, centrality of mass media is an important element of Americanisation/modernisation discussions. In the twentieth century, although there was a decrease in the number of newspapers, there were bigger enterprises and more journalists. That expansion of media caused a political change, in which individual citizens are less dependent on party because of availability of political information. As Dalton and Wattenberg (2002) put it, political parties change their approaches to media in the media expansion process and they devote "more attention to campaigning through media" (p. 12). Technological innovations and developments, meanwhile, affected the form of interaction in public and political sphere. Newspapers accelerated dissemination of information and that development created a new kind of interaction which was different from the traditional one (Thompson, 1995). Prior to the mass media, publicness of individuals and state affairs were related to co-existence. Hence, an event could be a public event after being staged in front of people and that traditional kind of publicness used to require sight, sound, visual appearance and spoken words (Thompson, 1995). Technological developments and innovations in communication practices increased the importance of visibility, and politicians became more visible via television and newspapers. Moreover, visual

appearance of political leaders became an important feature in political communication (Thompson, 1995). As a result of that process, for Butler and Ranney (1992, as cited in Negrine, 1996), politicians started and sought to communicate with people via media, and television was the primary tool for that purpose. That change created a new practice in political life and it was the practice of politicians and media, exploiting technical innovations and marketing approaches that have altered the appearance of elections. Consequently, politicians and broadcasters developed some techniques using marketing approach in order to make the image of political figures dominant and that created a competitive struggle to control people's perception (Negrine & Papathanassopoulos, 1996) and media's ability to carry messages to all population changed political communication. Political parties started using the mass media to target citizens (audiences). That fact created a transformation of political communication, which is more professionalised and individualised, consisting of polling, direct mail marketing and the internet.

Briefly, it is easy to see a connection between the modernisation process and individualistic element of modern campaigning. Moreover, there is no doubt that modern political marketing is rooted in the U.S. and "the United States was the first country to experiment with modern political communication techniques, then apply them systematically" (Maarek, 1995, p.6) and so there is also a connection between modernisation and Americanisation. Therefore, as Negrine and Papathanassopoulos (1996) formulate the more modernised society is, the more Americanised it is. Finally, because of dissemination of information through the use of mass media, these techniques are globalised in a complex and mutual way.

3. A COMPARATIVE APPROACH TO TURKEY AND THE U.S. IN POLITICAL COMMUNICATION

Although political communication practices are becoming more and more alike, that superficial similarity in the practices can mislead us because there can be dissimilarities at a deeper level, as well. In that sense, a comparative approach can provide us with different dimensions to analyse the issue, therefore we can find out problems, generalize theories and show how communication is organised (Blumler, McLeod, & Rosengren, 1992, as cited in Negrine & Papathanassopoulos, 1996).

In this case, Turkey can be an interesting example to focus on due to its three military interventions in 1960, 1971, 1980 in its eighty-nine years old history and still working modern institutions. Furthermore, after the revolution in 1923, Turkey accepted a secular state concept in its constitution, so the importance of

individualism is becoming more and more visible in Turkey. Hence, I think it is beneficial for us to compare Turkish political communication to the U.S. practices.

Turkish modernisation changed rapidly and dramatically after the 1980s and the 1990s; that change created a paradox in Turkish society. The paradox is that while there is an obvious economic globalisation tendency in economic life, there is also a traditionalist movement in the Turkish society. This new condition shows us the globalisation is not just limited to economic life but at the same time cultural globalisation is working hand in hand with the economic globalisation despite of the different results and impacts of it (Özbudun & Keyman, 2002).

We can also see the reflections of those rapid changes in political communication practices, and in that case there are some factors in Turkey that make people think that Turkish campaign communication is shifting toward the U.S. model. For instance, popularism and catch all approaches are increasing in every election period. Nowadays the number of parties, which define themselves by their ideological side, is decreasing. Meanwhile, after softening their discourses, central parties created strong ties with the main stream media and that also triggered an approximation between opposition parties and parties in power. As a result of that transformation, the importance of opinion polling and professionalism of Turkish parties' approach to the mass media increased. Central parties are conducting news management professionally and that shows that all forms of political communication are organised carefully.

Furthermore, Turkish journalism intervened more effectively during the period of last elections and some journalists declared their "color of votes" trying to manipulate their readers. Moreover, again, during election period, journalists appeared on television more often than ever and they revealed their predictions about election and its possible results. In addition to that, campaigning expenditure is increasing in every election. For example, AKP's estimated advisement expenditure in 2011 general election is 50 million dollars. Needless to say, this amount of money seems very little when we compare it with the American expenditure. Election campaign expenditure reached 4 billion dollars in 2010 American election (Voice of America, 2010).

As it has been emphasized in the previous chapter, centrality and expansion of media changed political communication practices and in that sense media have very important role in creating a modernisation process in a country. Turkish modernisation process, which changed very rapidly and dramatically after the 1980s and 1990s, also confirms this view. During the President Ozal's era, the emergence of a stronger relation between advertisement companies and political parties was seen. Ozal was the first prime minister (he was the prime minister between 1983 and 1989, the president

between 1989 and 1993) in Turkey using new techniques effectively in political communication. In addition to that, during this period there was an important step that reveals the connection between media and new strategies: Until 1986 there was just one television channel in Turkey (TRT One) and the first private channel is founded on 31th March, 1990. It is interesting because that date is overlapping with Americanisation process in Turkish political life. In 1999 election, we could see the results of that process quite clearly: ANAP worked with Lowe Adam Advertisement Agency, CHP worked with Alpha Advertisement and Cenajans/Grey, and Virtue Party worked with Irony Plus (Özkan, 2002). In that election, Alpha Advertisement Agency defined their strategy in that way: Success=Media+Leader+Projects+Professional Stuffs+Ideology. Hence, during 1999 election, ideology was the last element for CHP's campaign.

Nonetheless, there are some different characteristics in Turkish campaign communication that can not be included in Americanisation. Firstly, although there is an increase in the number of magazine/entertainment programs, and soap operas, Turkish journalism (and new emerged Turkish television journalism) is still active and sensitive about main issues in Turkey. It seems that it is the main difference from the U.S. journalistic approach because during election time, television programs and newspaper articles are more personalised and leader-centered in the U.S. Furthermore, during/pre- election period volume of coverage about election is very high. According to Blumler and Gurevitch, during the 1996 election, the U.S. news networks were almost closed (Blumler & Gurevitch, 2001, as cited in Bennet & Entman, 2001). However, especially after the 1990s, it is possible to find lots of programs, newspaper articles and researches about the main issues in Turkey. Moreover, different television channels support different political parties, although it is banned to show party advertisements on television and that proliferates the number and variety of programs and articles about the social problems in Turkey (Political parties were given advertisement right on television in 2011 by RTUK.). Although talk-show-democracy is a political force in the U.S. (Blumler & Gurevitch, 2001, as cited in Bennet & Entman, 2001) Turkish program producers try to generate more light on the issues.

Briefly, it is undeniable that America has an enormous influence on political life but other countries have also an inevitable effect on that process and they have always been very important. In the present world, there is a hybridization that forces countries to change their values and practices. However, it is a reciprocal process which encompasses every country. As it has been discussed in that section, in the new Turkish campaign practices, it is possible to see the reflections of these changes: While countries become more American -- in terms of affluence, life style and communication technologies- their campaign

techniques are getting more similar (Kavanagh, 1995). But our comparison shows that the results of this process are moulded by countries' specific cultures and tradition, and we can say that Turkish campaigns and its methods have changed a lot but they are still different from the methods of the U. S..

CONCLUSION

To understand the core of "Americanisation", it is necessary to generate more comprehensive way of thinking. If we view that concept just as a simple, one-way communication practice, that means we overlook the other facts the concept suggests. In that case, for instance, a detailed modernisation explanation is so illuminating. Moreover, technological developments and innovations create a different world and when we think about results of modernisation (individualism and secularisation), expansion and centrality of the mass media altogether, it isseen that there is a very complex transformation in political communication practices: New emerged values in modernisation process weakened the ties between citizens and political parties. Since ideology and organised social groups are not important for people anymore, political parties try to use new techniques, which were first used in the United States, to attract their voters. Meanwhile, the mass media gained a central role in our lives and visibility became very an important element for politicians because they realised that they can be recognised and they can persuade people to vote for them via getting a dominant image in the mass media. Furthermore, successful techniques, which are used in economic life, are applied to political communication practices. After proving their success, these techniques are used by many countries and they mix the techniques with their own communication traditions. These changes should not be cnsidered separately because every change is created by previous one and it also creates another change. Briefly, transformation in social life needs some long-term studies and it may provide better understanding to explain "Americanisation" in political communication.

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