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## Political Repercussions of Technology\*

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### **Abstract**

The purpose of this study is to explain the political use of technology. The technology has a reverse side that controls, monitors and manipulates the individual and the society, changes the cultures of societies, enslaves people and transforms them into numerical creatures. As in the case of the Zapatistas, the technology may also be used by the oppressed towards the fulfillment of their purposes. The society's awareness of the reverse side of the technology, the individuals' thinking through critical perspective while allowing the information which is used regarding them and benefitting from the media and acting accordingly would be an obstacle for the hegemons to achieve their goals.

**Keywords**: *Technology, monitoring and control, mass communication means, political sphere.* 

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## Introduction

People who wanted to control the nature and their environment have created the technology. Within the historical processes the technology has objectified the people who have created it (Heidegger, 1954/1998), and it has influenced the "political sphere" just like many other areas that arrange the social life. The political sphere is both a sphere of power relations and a sphere that aims to transform the power relations that provide the structure of this sphere (Bordieu, 1981; cited in: Kardeş, 2014, p. 176). The technological products are used by the hegemons for the purposes of controlling and manipulating the society, and recreating the dominant ideology. This function implies the political impact or use of the technology. Freeman and Soete (2003) express the place of technology in our lives by the following statements:

We either see the technology as a means for enslavement and destruction of humanity just like Marcuse, the sociologist or Simone de Beauvoir the novelist or as a power that would primarily provide freedom just like Adam Smith or Marx. We are all located in the middle of the developmental process of the technology. No matter how much we want we can't avoid its impact on our daily lives and the moral, social or economic dichotomies that it poses. We can either curse it or glorify it; however we can't ignore it (Freeman and Soete, 2003; cited in: Demirhan, 2010, p. 343).

The dystopian authors, namely Huxley (1932/2014), Orwell (1949/2004) and Bradbury (1953/2012) have elaborated the societies in their novels in detail which are monitored, controlled, designed and created by the help of technology according to the demands of the totalitarian governments. Many years after these authors, the use of the technology by the hegemons to monitor the society has attracted the attention of the social scientists. According to Lyon (2010) the notion of "surveillance society" was first used in the mid-1980s by sociologist Gary T. Marx. And briefly after that historian David Flaherty has indicated that the Western countries generally have become surveillance societies "as a component of becoming information society." Lyon (1994, p.4) described surveillance society as the society where certain details of the personal life are collected, processed and stored every day in the big computer databases that belong to big companies and government offices.

In the literature, there is plenty of studies regarding the use of the cinema in manipulating the society (Akyıl, 2017; Erdoğan, 2006; Güçhan, 1993; Karakoç

and Mert, 2013), technological surveillance of the society (Lida, 2008; Sucu, 2011), surveillance and control of the society through the means of mass communication (Turan and Esenoğlu, 2006; Yaylagül, 2013a) and media (Özkan, 2006). However, in the literature there is no study that addresses the political ramifications of technology through a holistic approach. The purpose of this study is to explain how technology is used in tracking, monitoring, controlling, manipulating and maintaining the permanence of the hegemonic ideology.

## **Power of Technology**

The economic and political consequences of the technological developments may be extremely powerful, destructive and transformative or they may strengthen the already existing hegemony. The potential of the technology may be provided as an example which allows determining the winner in the wars between states and classes such as the establishment of new states through the destruction of the castles of the feudal lords due to the development of technology of weaponry (cannons and rifles) during the establishment of the European states (Aksoy, 2014). Hazar (2012) also indicates that in the historical processes, an evolution related to the technology and sciences was observed in the weaponry used by the militaries and this evolution allowed the dominant nations, which came to the superior position in technology and scientific development, to come to the influential and dominant position in world politics. The saddest examples of transformation of the technical developments into weapons are the atomic bombs that were detonated in Hiroshima and Nagasaki during the Second World War. On the other hand, the technologically advanced Western countries have been trying to supply the necessary energy for their industries from the Middle Eastern oil. And the Middle Eastern countries are dependent on the West in terms of knowledge of production which is known as know-how. This mutual dependence does not work in a way which is compatible for the interests of both parties. The West, as the party exploiting the Middle East, is more advantageous in this relationship. Thus, the underdevelopment margin of the region has not been eliminated (Akbaş, Babahanoğlu and Çaylı, 2016). Additionally, this relationship creates underdevelopment and dependency as it happened in the

relationship of colonialization. At this point, it may be said that the power which holds the technology establishes its hegemony over the other sections of the society and similarly in the relations between the states, the countries which develop and transfer technology call the shots and use the technology to oppress and exploit other countries.

## Technology in Tracking, Monitoring, Controlling and Manipulating the Society and in Maintaining the Permanence of the Hegemonic Ideology

According to Lyon (2003, p. 161), surveillance is a distinguishing product of the modern world. Detailed personal information followed up by many institutions such as filling out forms regarding identity information, fingerprints, urine and blood tests have never been requested in a routine and systematic way before the emergence of modern bureaucracies. Nowadays in the so-called advanced societies the daily lives of people are recorded by various organizations and institutions and limited through monitoring and inspection. Additionally, the methods of collecting, keeping, processing and obtaining personal information are pretty modern in terms of their dependence on rational techniques and new technologies. Turan ve Esenoğlu (2006) point out that the technology, which is said to ease our lives, make the world a smaller place and thusly liberate us by creating more leisure time, makes us more easily traceable, recordable and manageable. The Panopticon of Bentham, which is an architectural form for surveillance, has experienced a shift from the architecture to the technological devices through the technological developments in the contemporary world. The architectural surveillance is replaced by the electronic surveillance. In other words, the period of "technological Panopticon" has started (Lida, 2008). The major reason for surveillance is the sovereign's or authority's demand to know which wishes to maintain its sovereignty. The establishment and maintenance of sovereignty depends on knowledge, thusly on surveillance (Tosun, 2015). Sucu (2011) calls everything which monitors individuals "monitoring powers" such as the internet, the MOBESE system (Mobile Electronic System Integration), bosses of organizations and the ATM cameras. On the other hand, the flow of information is under surveillance. The fast development of information

technologies allowed the performance of monitoring of the flow of information over the computer networks (Tosun, 2015). Sucu (2011) indicates that by controlling people all the time, the monitoring powers always inspect whether the established order functions in the way that they want and the loyalty of the people continue or not. Additionally, the internalization of surveillance by the monitored is also relevant. Foucault (2012 p.95) expresses this situation by the following words: "Everyone who feels the prying gaze and its weight on himself/herself internalizes the gaze so much so that they reach to a point where they monitor themselves; thusly everyone would carry out this type of monitoring on and against themselves." At this point, the individual's limitation and control of his/her own actions and thoughts become relevant. Nowadays, the scope of surveillance activities of the states has expended significantly. The states monitor what is inside their boundaries as well as what is outside of their boundaries. The National Security Agency (NSA) in the U.S. has established a big center in the Utah desert to monitor, analyze and intervene into the internet communication of the world when needed. Additionally, it is known that the NSA monitors phone calls through different software. China has used the internet to determine and censor the dissidents. Similarly, Vietnam used computer viruses to monitor private data of the opposition protesting the internet and state mining policies (Richards, 2012; pp. 1934 - 1938). On the other hand, the internet serves cultural imperialism. As the internet was invented in the U.S., includes and spreads the dominant values of the U.S. and reflects the individualistic worldview of the U.S. The internet spreads the American culture to the rest of the world including American English besides American products. Thus, the internet becomes a tool for cultural imperialism (Underwood, 2002, cited in: Yaylagül, 2013b, pp. 226 -227).

The mass communication tools just serve for transmitting information (Yeşil, 2015, p. 145). It may be said that the developments in the mass communication technologies significantly made it easier for the hegemons to accommodate their ideologies within the society or in other words to get the society to consent to the ideology of the hegemons. Baudrillard (2008) points out to the fact that in the contemporary societies, the major ideology becomes legitimate

by being recreated through the means of mass communication. Golding and Murdock (1979) point out that the capitalists who control the means of production in the capitalist societies also control the means that allow the production and distribution of thoughts (cited in: Yaylagül, 2013). The messages, which are packaged by the international organizations and transmitted by the technology, manipulate the masses. The masses are deceived by the advertisements, convinced by the propagandas, and entertained by the shows. All scientific methods applied for selling products are also used to sell thoughts and the thoughts, which are decorated and packaged, find their buyers (Girgin, 2002). It is known that the segmentation and targeting approaches that help marketing commercial goods and services are regularly used for marketing political candidates in elections (Gandy, 1989, p. 69). Including the newspapers and radios, all of the means of mass communication are used by the individuals, states and global companies in monitoring and following up the society and make them more manageable. It is emphasized by Turan and Esenoğlu (2006) that due to the dreams that the means of mass communication provide individuals and make them experience the with a very low cost, they are used both to disseminate an idea and an ideology, and to reduce individual shocks and crises and thusly to prevent social explosions and provide the maintenance of the existing order and serve as an electronic sedative. Karakoç and Mert (2013) indicate that although the owners of the media having the means of mass communication and the members of the media occasionally make independent broadcasting, they mostly submit to the ideology of the power. On the other hand, the owners of the media implement an editorial policy in line with the wishes of the power due to reasons such as establishing relations with the political power, obtaining benefits and having a say in the political realm (Özkan, 2006).

Alongside with the multinational companies, the technological, political, economic and military changes spread fast. The international technology companies such as Apple, Facebook, Samsung, Google, Linkedin, Microsoft, Twitter, Instagram and Yahoo not only provide communication for the whole world through the data networks that they have established but also they occasionally use the power that they have against the states or mediate its use

(Akbaş et. al., 2016). Soros (2004) indicates that the international companies have a say in the shaping and manipulating the level of prosperity, political structures and social cultures of countries due to the fact that nowadays the capital has become a factor of production having the characteristics of free movement just like goods and services. In this regard, it may be argued that the global companies may not just be seen as an economic power, they also have political dimensions and establish dominance over societies and states.

The cinema is one of the mass communication means that may directly or indirectly influence people. It has had a significant psycho-political impact on viewers as it presents the reality in a powerful and convincing way. Sometimes it conveys its messages to the viewers overtly in a way that everyone may understand, and sometimes covertly by targeting the viewers' consciousness (Karakoç and Mert, 2013). Through its contents, the cinema reflects the beliefs, attitudes and values of the society where it exists at the time. In other words, the dominant ideology in the society is further reinforced by the ideology presented in the movies. The change that would or might take place in the contents of the movies is regarded as an indicator that a change also took place in the values, beliefs and perspectives of the larger sections of that society (Güçhan, 1993). While the propaganda cinema which plays an important role in international relations was shaped through the wars in the previous years, the contemporary cinema is shaped by being influenced from the concepts such as culture, welfare state, equality, terrorism and human rights. Thus, the subjects of the cinema change over time according to the conditions of each period (Akyıl, 2017). Especially, the imperialist states have been using the cinema alongside with economic and political pressures in imposing their own ideologies and worldviews to the nations that are under their hegemony (Karakoç and Mert, 2013). At the same time, the cinema is used in removing a failure and a fiasco of the state in the field of politics by processing it through the process of cinematic representation with the help of emotional exploitation and ideological propaganda. Erdoğan (2006) indicates that on one hand, the Hollywood movies which were shot before and after the American defeat in Vietnam treat and exploit American nationalistic feelings, and on the other hand they attempt to remove aggressiveness and psychology

of defeat through the narratives of heroism, righteousness and rightfulness presented by repeated representative fictions and at the same time they fuel feelings of enmity and also provide huge economic profits. What can be made against the fact that the technology is a means for monitoring and manipulating people and it objectifies them? Here, Aksoy (2017) argues that for the experiences regarding technology to finally transform into praxis as a practice of liberation by getting rid of being a process that objectifies people, thinking about technology and especially thinking about it without avoiding the critical perspective regarding technology is important.

# Use of Communication Technology by the Oppressed: The Zapatista Movement Example

The technology does not only serve the hegemons. The oppressed also benefit from the products of the technology and especially the internet in announcing their struggles and in obtaining success. The action of the Zapatistas\*\*\* was mostly based on communication strategies which they started on 1 January 1994 and where they openly challenged Neoliberalism and the NAFTA (Tağ Kalafatoğlu, 2015). The bases of those strategies were composed of both carrying the Zapatistas' messages from Chiapas to the rest of the world and using telecommunications, videos and computer-based communication in forming a global network of solidarity groups literally surrounding the oppressive purposes of the Mexican government (Castells, 2006). Through a declaration, the Zapatista community, which came from various cities of Chiapas and whose number ranged between 2000 and 4000, declared that it has started a war against the government on behalf of the freedom of Mexico and poor Chiapas people. This declaration was conveyed to the CNN through the cell phone of a student and thusly the attention of the foreign journalists was attracted to the performed action. During those days, by holding a press conference, the Zapatistas announced to the rest of the world that they have completely strayed away from their old Marxist ideological bases and their

<sup>\*\*\*</sup> According to Castells (2006, p. 109) the Zapatistas are not destructive rebels, they are legitimate rebels. They are Mexican patriots who armed themselves against foreign domination which came in newer forms alongside with the American imperialism. They are democrats, and they refer to the 39<sup>th</sup> Article of the Mexican Constitution which mentions "the right of the people to make changes in the type of the government or to change the type of the government"

demands originated only from the local cultures, the problems of the Mexican natives needed to be realized and they demanded real democracy. Additionally, they also requested the removal of Mexico from the NAFTA which spoiled the socio-economic balance of the Mexican peasantry. For that purpose, the Zapatistas invited the international Red Cross to the region to initiate a peaceful social movement and the international human rights organizations to investigate the situation in Chiapas (Tunç, 2005). The Zapatistas managed to convey their messages to the larger audiences around the world through facsimile and e-mail messages despite the isolation attempts of the government (Cleaver, 2012; cited in: Tağ Kalafatoğlu, 2015). In the meanwhile the government forces entered Chiapas and skirmishes broke out. However the due to the relationship of the Zapatistas with the international media, the military response of the Mexican government attracted many European, American and Canadian human rights organizations and organizations that struggle for protection of native cultures to the Chiapas region. The purpose of those groups was to ensure the reconciliation between the Zapatistas and the government regarding democratic reform following the ceasefire. On January 12<sup>th</sup>, surprisingly the Head of Mexican State accepted to end the armed conflict and to initiate negotiations (Tunç, 2005). The technological means of the oppressed allowed them to express themselves to the rest of the world, find support and succeed in their actions.

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

Richards (2012, pp. 1964 - 1965) indicates that the reasoning of monitoring carried out by the public or private actors is important, and in some cases monitoring might be necessary, however the unlimited monitoring of the intellectual activities of the individual threatens the mental freedom that the political institutions prescribe. By pointing out to the development of modern surveillance technology, Gandy (1989, p. 62) indicates that the newly developed surveillance tools serve various functions such as determining the identities and statuses of individuals including their state of mind. At this point, Richards (2012, p. 1965) argues that the surveillance should be limited by legal and social rules and a balance of power needs to be created between individuals, companies and governments who do not compromise civil

liberties. However, it may be said that it is not possible to maintain a balance of power between the rights and freedoms that individualism necessitates and the surveillance that the companies and governments carry out with the purpose of controlling, manipulating and transforming the society.

Yeşil (2015, p. 154) indicates that monopolization in the media takes place for the purposes of both obtaining economic gains and disseminating culture and ideology to the society and from time to time political powers encourage monopolization in the media. Karakoç and Mert (2013) argue that the media may change the agenda, direct the events and misinform the society however the authority rests in the power and the media, which fails to do what the power demands, would disappear. At this point, it is seen that there is an economic and ideological relationship of interest between the political power and the monopolizing media bosses, they aim to manipulate the society and the media is a means for political power.

The significance of the internet in dissemination and sharing of information is not denied. However, a certain amount of hardware, information and skills are required to have access to the internet. In the developed countries, as the costs are low, having access to the internet happens easily, but on the other hand, the internet in the underdeveloped countries is in the hands of a small minority. Thus, those who produce, market and dominate the technology would establish a hegemony over the others. In other words, those who dominate the technology would rule, monitor, control and manipulate others (Turan and Esenoğlu, 2006, p. 82). Yaylagül (2013b. p. 229) indicates that the use of the internet is determined by the power relationships in the social structure. The internet is not just a tool for innocently sharing information or entertaining. There is a background of the internet that monitors, manipulates and controls the individual and society.

The cinema is successfully used for propaganda purposes by states, primarily by the U.S., Soviets, and Nazi Germany. For instance, the U.S. conveys its ideology to the world through the Hollywood cinema. The Hollywood movies mention that the U.S. citizens are richer and freer than the citizens of other states and the U.S. military power is great. The subject matter of the propaganda cinema has been shaped over the wars in the past. And nowadays,

the cinemas are shaped by being influenced from the concepts such as culture, social state, equality, terrorism and human rights (Akyıl, 2017, p. 136 - 137). Thus, the widespread impact of the cinema over the masses also continues today. When it is though that each movie has an ideology, the cinema is used by the political power in manipulating and transforming the society.

As a result, the technology is inside our lives alongside with its blessings and troubles. As Freeman and Soete (2003) express, "we may curse it or glorify it, however we can't ignore it." The technology has a reverse side that controls, monitors and manipulates the individual and the society, changes the cultures of societies, enslaves people and transforms them into numerical creatures. The technology has become a means that ensures the continuity of the power of the hegemons. After the description of the individuals through numbers, the hegemonic power may access a lot of or perhaps all information (from the family information to the amount of money in the bank) regarding individuals through the monitoring and control systems by clicking a few buttons. Additionally, that information is archived to be used when needed. The technology is used to limit the freedoms, thoughts and private lives of individuals. It may be said that the society's awareness of this situation, the individuals' thinking through critical perspective while allowing the information which is used regarding them and benefitting from the media and acting accordingly would be an obstacle for the hegemons to achieve their goals or perhaps prevent them.

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