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MARX'IN YABANCILAŞMA KAVRAMLAŞTIRMASI

MARX'S CONCEPTION OF ALIENATION

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Öz

Bu yazının yabancılaşma kavramını Marx'ın 1844 *El Yazmaları*'nda kullandığı şekli ile incelemeyi ve tartışmayı amaçlamaktadır. Marx yabancılaşma kavramını kapitalizmin eleştirisinin bir parçası olarak kullanmaktadır. Bu boyutu ile yabancılaşma kavramını Marx'ın daha geniş anlamda kapitalist üretim biçiminin incelenmesinde önemli bir yer tutmaktadır. Bu nedenle yabancılaşma kavramını, Marx'ın kullandığı şekli ile, daha geniş toplumsal boyutundan ve emek süreci, iş bölümü, üretim biçimi, insan doğası, kapitalizm, mülkiyet ilişkileri ve sınıf çatışması gibi kavramlardan ayrı düşünmek imkânsızdır. Bu nedenle yazıda bahsi geçen kavramlara yabancılaşma kavramını daha anlaşılır kılmak için sık sık değinilecektir.

Anahtar sözcükler: yabancılaşma, Marx, emek süreci

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to discuss and evaluate the alienation concept as Marx used in *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*. Marx's alienation conception is part of his critic of capitalism. In this sense this concept has close connections to Marx wider studies of capitalist mode of production. Therefore, it is impossible to examine Marx's theory of alienation from his wider sociological discussion of other phenomenon such as labor process, division of labor, mode of production, human nature, capitalism, private property relations, and class conflict. Thus, I will include these aspects of Marx's works frequently to make the subject clearer.

Keywords: Alienation, Marx, labor process

INTRODUCTION

Alienation concept means the estrangement of individuals from themselves and from others. It was originally a term with philosophical and religious meanings but as we will see on the below discussions, Marx, together with Engels, transformed it into a sociological concept in his study *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*. The concept of alienation has been used and described as loss of self, estrangement, anxiety states, anomie, depersonalization, rootlessness, powerlessness, isolation, meaninglessness, pessimism, loss of beliefs and values, etc. (John 1976).

The following sections will include an overview of alienation in the literature. In this section I will focus on philosophical discussions of alienation rather than theological roots. In this section I also will discuss shortly how Marx influenced from other thinkers who studied alienation phenomenon together with studies after Marx.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE LITERATURE ON ALIENATION

The root of alienation comes from the theological literature, simply the estrangement of sinful men from God. I prefer not to discuss religious use of the term rather I would like to focus on philosophical use of alienation.

Rousseau was the one of the philosopher who discussed alienation more detailed way besides religious explanations. He was also among the major influences shaping Marx's concept of alienation. His central theme is human being's alienation from nature and society. According to Rousseau, science and philosophy are the worst enemies of the morals, because they create desires and wants and they are sources of slavery. For Rousseau, alienation is the result of human's own activity. It entails the loss of personal freedom and powerlessness. He defines the concept to alienate as to give or to sell. He constructs his concept of social contract by using the alienation term as the transfer of one's rights (Khan 1995).

According to Rousseau, in the natural state of human beings' free will is not infringed by their dependence on nature. Furthermore, the problem exists when people develop their dependency on other people. This leads to complex organizations and institutions within society. On these conditions, division of labor and private property develop. These changed situations will bring social differentiation. As we see later, Marx uses Rousseau's ideas on his theory of alienation especially the idea of labor, division of labor and private property.

Hegel was the first person who used alienation (entfremdung and entausserung) concepts in a theory in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*. According to Hegel alienation is an ontological fact that is deeply rooted in human nature. Therefore, the process of alienation is an inherent feature of human existence and that “absoluter” or “spirit.” On his process it has separated itself from itself according to Hegel.

For Hegel alienation is an estrangement and it comes after renunciation and transfer of one’s own possession to somebody else. During these process people become strangers and enemies to others. In his analysis, contrary to Marx, Hegel gives specific attention to the alienation of spirit and self-consciousness. On the contrary according to Marx, the subject of alienation is historical but not a mental process. He maintains that human nature is historical but not a mental process. He maintains that human nature is historically conditioned. This idea is explicit in his famous statement “It is not consciousness that determines life but life that determines consciousness.”

Marx rejects Hegel’s conception of alienation. He gives special emphasis to economic alienation. He says that human beings in class society not only alienate their “essential being” but also alienate the products of their spiritual and economic activity.

Feuerbach criticized Hegel’s view that nature is a self-alienated form of Absolute Mind and that man is Absolute mind in the process of de-alienation in *The Essence of Christianity* (1841) and *The Principles of the Philosophy of the Future* (1843). For Feuerbach man is not a self-alienated God, but God is self-alienated man.

From the non-Marxist viewpoint, alienation is a psychological as well as phenomenon. For this viewpoint the conflict between spirit and nature is itself a reflection of the paradox of psychic life. This view is mostly depended by psychologists and theologians. For example according to Jung the conflict between spirit and physical aspects of human existence shows “an incomprehensible something.”

After Marx, the term of alienation has been used in different meanings and we can say that it has lost its original sociological meanings. It has been used to describe a wide variety of phenomena. These include any variety of separations from society, discontent with society, feelings that there is a moral breakdown in society, feelings of powerlessness in face of solidity of social institutions, impersonal and dehumanized nature of society, bureaucratization of society.

The first group of this usage reminds us Durkheimian concept of anomie. In Durkheim’s usage anomie is a concept to bridge the gap between explanations of social action at the individual level with those at the level of the social structure. In his work, *Suicide*, Durkheim

argues that people can only be happy when their wants and desires are proportionate to their means. Human desires are boundless and this fact of human nature, together with necessarily limited resources, creates great unhappiness or ultimate suicide. The manner in which societies cope with this problem of unattainable goal is to restrict human desires and goals by imposing a framework of norms that permit only certain goals that have some chance of attainment. Therefore, although they are some resemblance as Marx's alienation, differently the term anomie describes the situation when this framework breaks down, goals outrun man and the suicide rate rises. R. K. Merton (1957) has enlarged Durkheim's concept of anomie into a general theory of deviant behavior.

Weber's usage of bureaucratization of modern society and the concept of iron cage also have some similarities with Marx's alienation concept.

In the 1950s and 1960s, American social scientists emphasized the subjective or psychological side of alienation. They mostly ignored structural aspects of alienation process. By this way, they simply ignored Marx's sociology of capitalism. For example, M. Seeman (1959) separated a variety of different psychological states, which he measured by attitude scales. His usage of powerlessness diminution of alienation refers to people's feeling that they cannot influence their social environment. He used meaningless concept that it is the feeling that illegitimate means are required to achieve valued goals. He uses isolation term that occurs when people feel estranged from society's norms and values. Another dimension of alienation, Seeman used it self-estrangement that refers to an inability to find activities, which are psychologically rewarding.

Another American social scientist R. Blauner (1964) used Seeman's dimensions of alienation. He linked these dimensions of subjective alienation to the different types of work that are found in modern industry. He mainly claims that production technology is the major determinant of alienation. He thought that automation would make jobs more satisfying and so abolish alienation. As we see some examples, American perspective of alienation with people's feelings of dissatisfaction with life is very different from Marx's original formulation.

ANALYZING ALIENATION

In this section I will try to discuss Marx's theory of alienation and its connection to other dimensions of Marx's wider sociological discussions. Therefore, before the discussion of alienation I will try to

provide a base for this concept by investigating its relations to Marx's conception of human nature, division of labor, mode of production, and labor process.

Marx derives his theory of estrangement from human nature conception. Therefore, to examine Marx's human nature analysis will be helpful to understand the concept of alienation more elaborately.

Marx defines human nature in two ways. One is biological the other one is historical. The theory of estrangement is derived from these two definitions of human characteristics especially biological one. In biological model of human nature Marx compares and contrasts human being animal. The most important characteristic of the human separating from other animals is that consciousness. Through consciousness human beings act towards nature and themselves, natural and social environment. They can act purposefully. Therefore, they can produce not only according to their needs but also beyond their needs (Wallimann, 1981).

Marx maintains that economic activity of people is essentially a social activity. He sees division of labor as a necessary result that is a cruel and tangible manifestation of economic and social alienation as he sees. Together with the division of labor there is also a division of "species man" as well, in which people lose their unitary essence. Therefore, he defines division of labor as the economic expression of the social character of labor within the alienation. Since labor is only an expression of human activity the division of labor and ways of life in this sense are also alienated. Marx sees division of labor as alienated and externalized from of the human activity.

According to Marx mental and manual division between mental and manual labor is a feature of division of labor in capitalist society and it is closely related to human alienation. To explain division of labor Marx uses the historical events. He says that the most important division is the division of material and mental labors that is the result of separation of town and city. The contradiction begins between town and city when the transition from tribe to state and from locality to nation begins. For Marx this division isolates people from community. It also divides people into two groups; who works with material and who works with mind. Thus, one of the most important divisions of labor is the division or separation of material and mental work.

In modern world division of labor is much more complex and it makes the act of production alien and external to people. According to Marx by the division of labor the exploitation of nature by human beings transformed into the exploitation of people by people. Because

productive labor and consumption of product of labor were done by different groups namely classes. The separation of town and country leded the opposition of farm labor and commercial and industrial activity. Therefore, some people produce by exploiting nature, however; on the other hand, others exploit their products and labor.

Marx sees the division of labor as a step of historical development of human beings in the past. But it does not play a positive role in modern age. He sees the present division of labor as a source of alienation.

According to Marx the objective conditions of workers generally are worse in the capitalism and its division of labor. As Venable (1945) says Marx and Engels express five different ways to explain division of labor. First of all, division of labor has separated the individuals' interests from society artificially. Second, the division of labor takes feelings away from the labor process such as separation of intellectuality from material activities, enjoyment from work and, enjoyment of production from consumption. The next way is that division of labor transforms personal values into material values in other word commoditization of everything. Another one is that division of labor enslaves workers. Owner of labor power has no more control on their labor. It becomes alien and opposed to them. Lastly, more division of labor brings less interesting, dehumanized labor process. More divisions in labor make laborer part of mechanical process.

In short, more division of labor in manufacturing causes separation of human intelligence, interests, and enjoyment from work. Therefore, division of labor in capitalist made of production creates mentally undeveloped (because of separation between mental and material work), less imaginative, less sensitive workers. On the other side division of labor creates individuals who thinks one sided. Together with high degree of specialization individuals become restricted to their own sphere of intellectual activity.

As Marx noted, by the mechanization workers began to produce no commodities even parts of them. They only work of very small part of the process. Division of labor made individual only small part of production rather than producer. They only work one part of machine and this effort does not require to think, to imagine, or to participate process. But just do his/her simple job without thinking in a certain time. They are tied to machines and mechanical production process. In this sense Marx says that the worker no longer uses his/her labor instruments, but they use him/her.

The labor process is another dimension of Marx's sociological analysis. Labor is the necessary condition for human being for Marx. It is the process of transformation of nature according to human needs. It is a conscious, purposive and planned activity of human being. Lastly it is a social process. Marx defines labor as "... a necessary condition for the existence of the human race and one that is independent of all forms of society; it is an eternal necessity imposed by nature itself, without which there can be no material exchanges between man and nature, and therefore no life" (Capital vol. I p. 50). Therefore, human being must work to live. By working they change and/or transform the nature according to their needs. During this transformation process of nature labor also transforms laborer.

Labor is the creator of use value. It is "a process going on between man and nature, a process in which man, through his own activity, initiates, regulates, and controls the material reactions between himself and nature... By thus acting on the external world and changing it, he at the same time changes his own nature. He develops the powers that slumber within him, and subjects them to his own control" (Capital Vol. I p.1978). Then Marx concludes that the labor is the primary factor in the modification of human being. By labor process Marx means a conscious, purposive and planned activity. This activity supplies human beings natural and social needs.

For Marx human labor is a social activity as well as natural. Since labor is a social human activity, it is also divided into social categories. A society is divided into economic classes except in primitive stages. In early periods of human history there were no classes. Thus all production modes aimed to supply basic most immediate human needs; and it was more direct appropriation of nature. Later, by emergence of differences in distribution of products, social classes were emerged in primitive societies. These differences brought together with exploitation relations. Society further divides itself into ruler and ruled. After this division, the nature of labor began to change. Labor began to produce what ruling class wants rather than, in general sense basic human needs. Therefore, basic driving factor of production changed to interests of the ruling class. Interests of ruling classes began to determine what kinds of production are needed rather than basic human needs. Consequently, human labor shifted from its natural characteristics to social one.

While changing nature according to their needs, human being also changes their relations to the nature and their social relations. Marx takes human being as part of nature so any changes in the nature will have affect on the conditions in which people lives. According to

Marx while controlling nature there are still much more area where people do not have knowledge to control nature according to their needs. Therefore, there are still forces that are not controlled by people. Those uncontrolled forces are more powerful than that of controlled by people.

In these circumstances, the conscious organization of production might separate human being from other animals. This conscious organization of production is a process in which production and distribution are done by planned way. This planned nature of production makes human being a social creature.

Labor, social organizations, natural objects and instruments are four components of production process. As we see later these four aspects of production closely related to Marx's explanation of the alienation process. Marx groups these four factors into two categories; subjective and objective. The labor and its social organizations constitute the subjective side of the production process. These are called as forces of production. The second category, objective one includes objects and instruments that are named as means of production.

All these four components of production are responsible for determining human nature and mode of production. Marx sees alienation as a feature of specific forms of division of labor. In this sense, the process of alienation is associated with the division of labor and private property, in other words with the labor process itself. The concept of labor process has specific importance in order to explain alienation.

The basis of Marx theory is that main determinant of human nature is the mode of production in which people employ the maintenance of human life. What people produce as a result of their labor is directly related to how they produce. Therefore, "the mode of production in a given period is responsible for the character of human nature of that period and the direction of its future development" (Venable p.81-82).

The concept of mode of production has a special importance on works of Marx. This concept is used by Marx to explain the relationship between the relations of production (relations that obtain between capitalist and worker such that capitalist both controls the means of production and can dispose of the goods and services that are produced by workers) and the forces of production (both the materials worked on and the tools and techniques employed in production of economic goods). Modes of productions can be

distinguished from another by the different relationships between forces of production and relations of production.

Marx was mostly concerned with capitalist mode of production and his writings focus on the analysis of this system. In the history of human being we saw different mode of productions which were changed by the time and end (at least today) with capitalism. Marx, in his theory of human nature, wants to show how these changes and transformations effect human nature. As it was mentioned before for Marx labor was the necessary conditions for human beings. Therefore changing conditions of labor through division of labor, means of production, relations of production etc. should have effect on determining human characteristics in society. On this circumstance Marx wants to show how labor or work shapes human characteristics in capitalist system.

The relation of capital and labor is another dimension to be mention to grasp Marx's alienation concept. Marx sees capitalism as a system of wage-labor and commodity production for sale, exchange, and profit rather than for the immediate need of producers. Marx emphasizes that although some individuals may have some choice as to persons or institutions to sell their labor power, under capitalist system and system of wage labor they don't have many choice rather capital commands labor. Because capital has more power and alternatives than labor. Marx says, "the capitalist can live longer without the worker than can the worker without the capitalist" (Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844, p.68).

According to Marx capital is coercive to the labor, but workers are not free agents. Workers have to sell their labor power to the capitalist for a wage that allows them to purchase commodities that are necessary for them to survive. Workers do not produce commodities for themselves and they do not own means to do that. Thus, they forced to work for others. In this sense the capitalist process of production forces the worker to sell their labor power in order to live. Then the capitalist system enables the capitalists to purchase labor power of worker to make rich themselves. This process keeps the worker in constant bondage. The capitalist system does not only force the workers to sell their labor power but also force to subordinate their will to an alien will (Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844). This is the central issue for alienation.

The workers not only lack of means of production to survive but also they have no control over product of their labor under the capitalist wage system. Therefore, according to Marx, the workers are alienated in two ways. Workers are forced to sell their power, and

labor under the domination of strange will is alienated from the product of their labor and from the act of production.

For Marx people are not allowed to live according to their nature under any class system of society. Their own product of labor abundance to be an object of their consciousness because they must sell their labor. Marx, on this point, concludes that, this condition of worker under capitalist production system is unnatural. The capitalist mode of production prevents workers from controlling their product of labor. On this context Marx speaks the estrangement of people from the product of their labor. In Marx's words "The alienation of the workers in his product means not only that his labor becomes an object, an external existence, but that it exists outside him, independently, as something alien to him, and that it becomes a power on its own confronting him; it means that the life which he has conferred on the object confronts him as something hostile and alien" (Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844, p.70).

In these circumstances Marx also talks about double aspects of the production process. First of all, workers must use nature to create products. So workers must use external materials in the production process of their labor. On the other hand, nature also provides 'means of life' for workers such as 'the mean's for the physical substance of the worker himself'. Therefore, Marx concludes that there is a double respect of appropriating nature; the more he produces for capitalist, the more he deprives means of life for himself. Thus in this double respect the worker becomes a slave of his object, first, in that he receives an object of labor, i.e., in that he receives work; and secondly, in that he receives means of substance. Therefore, it enables him to exist, first, as a worker, and second, as a physical subject. The extremity of this bandage is that it is only as a worker that he continues to maintain himself as a physical subject, and that is only as a physical subject that he is a worker (Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844, p.71).

In summary, the relationship of workers to their product of their own labor is that their own product dominates workers. Marx concludes this condition become against human nature because human beings have capability to appropriate their own product as well as subject it to their will.

On this point, Marx wants to answer the question "How would the worker come to face the product of his activity as a stranger, was it not that in the very act of production he was estranging himself from himself?" (p. 72). By this question, he aims to

explain the worker's estrangement from the act of production and from himself.

As we saw before Marx says that workers are coerced to sell their labor power. Then when they sell their labor power they become alien to their human nature. They are forced to sell their labor power because they do not have any other means to produce their life. They only have labor power but don't means of production. This situation also related to workers' prevention from appropriating their own product of labor. Consequently, Marx suggests that estrangement from the product of one's own labor is directly connected to alienation from the act of production.

According to Marx, the constitutes of alienation of labor are; first, labor is external to worker because it does not belong to their essential being. Therefore "he does not affirm himself but denies himself... does not develop freely his physical and mental energy but mortifies his body and ruins his mind" (Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844, p.72). Second, labor is not a voluntary act of worker but coerced. In this sense, this forced labor does not belong to worker but capitalist. Labor becomes alien to worker. "As a result, Therefore, man (the worker) no longer feels himself to be freely active in any but his animal functions-rating, drinking, prorating, or at most in his dwelling and dressing-up etc." (p. 73).

Marx reduces two other aspects of alienation from above two aspects (alienation of worker from labor process and that of from its products). They are alienation of human being from their species being and alienation of individual from other individuals. Marx's definition of human nature has two aspects; biological and social. Human being depends on nature to live like other animals but they have difference from animals in terms of their ability to transform nature and produce their means of substance. Therefore, related to first two dimension of alienation, workers link to the nature in other words against their natural ability is cut of workers are prevented from manipulating nature according to their consciousness, and of in the act of production system the link between worker and nature is cut because they are forced to produce under an alien will and their physical and spiritual link to nature is disturbed. In this sense people are estranged from nature. This means their inorganic body, nature, is taken away from them.

Marx's conception of human nature also includes that human species consists of individuals who are sharing the same biological characteristics. Furthermore, the manner how people's interest also defines their nature. According to Marx, as a conclusion, the

biological nature of human individuals as well as the quality of interaction among these individuals defines the nature of human being.

Therefore by the “estranged labor estranges the species from man” (Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844, p.75). Marx means, under capitalism the species as a whole is prevented from living according to their natural capabilities. Then, individuals are prevented from being a member of a group, which is allowed to pursue according to its natural capability. Finally, Marx concludes that “man is estranged from the product of his labor, from his life-activity, from his species being is the estrangement of man from man” (Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844, p.72).

Marx also concerned with private property and its relation to alienation. Marx concerned with private ownership of productive forces that entail the power and eliminate labor of others while he is analyzing the causal relationship between labor and capital in the genesis of alienation. According to Marx, the form of property always corresponds to the form of social division of labor. The form of division of labor, which plays a significant role in the existing of alienation, is determined by the mode of production. Changes in mode of production necessarily lead to changes in property relations. In his analysis of alienation Marx emphasis on the changes in socioeconomic relations that result from people’s industrial and commercial pursuits. Marx connects the appearance of the estrangement of man with a socioeconomic basis. For example, he says: Only at the very culmination of the development of private property does this, its secret, re-emerge, namely, that on the one hand it is the products of alienated labor, and furthermore it is the means by which labor alienation itself, the realization of this alienation (Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844, p.81).

CONCLUSION

Marx’s general sociological theory is based on economic structure and dimensions of production process. In general Marx talks about four aspects of production that are the structural factors of production process. First one is human labor which is purposive human activity. Second, social factor includes all forms of organizations for production, distribution, exchange and consumption. This is usually called division of labor that later cause divisions into social and economic classes. The third factor is the natural object of production in which labor process. And the last factor is the

instruments of labor. They are tools for production. Marx discusses the alienation in terms of these four aspects of production.

In this respect, Marx sees alienation both as a subjective state, as people's feelings of alienation, and as an objective state, a structural category that describes the social and economic estrangement of capitalism. He identifies four particular manifestations of alienation. The first one is the alienation of workers from the product of his/her labor, because what s/he produces is appropriated by others and s/he has no control over his/her labor.

The second one is the alienation of worker from the act of production. Working becomes an alien activity that offers no satisfaction, rather it is forced on the worker by external constraints and to be an end itself, and it involves working at someone else's bidding as forced labor. Work becomes a commodity that is sold and its only value to the worker is its saleability, market value.

The third one is the alienation of worker from his/her human nature or his/her species being. Because the first two aspects of alienation deprive their productive activity especially those human qualities that distinguish it from the activity of animals and thus define human nature.

The last type of alienation is the alienation of worker from other people. Capitalism transforms social relations into market relations. People are being judged by their market values rather than by their human qualities. Capitalist system turned everything to commodity. People come to regard to each other as reifications as worker or as capitalist rather than as individuals.

According to Marx capital itself is a source of further alienation within a developed capitalist economy. This is because capital accumulation generates its own needs that reduce people to the level of commodities. Therefore, workers become factors in the operation of capital and their activities. Furthermore, workers are dominated by the requirements of profitability rather than by their own human needs. As Marx says within a market economy, the rules that govern accumulation are those of the marketplace. These rules constitute a set of impersonal mechanisms which dominate all economic actors both capitalist and workers. Market has a coercive force. Marx noted that, although need of profit and capital accumulation seem to take on a life of their own, these impersonal mechanisms in fact disguise the human origins of capital and the exploitation that allows one class, capitalists, to appropriate what another, worker, has produced.

Human being works to live. This working process is done in a social frame. Therefore the essence of work is social. Marx thinks that the root of human history basis on the activity of human being “as immanent to their own history.” The foundation of Marx’s thought to find reality in social and historical term lies on this idea. The history of human societies begins with the production of the means that permit people to satisfy their material needs.

Marx in his works tries to show both negative and positive sides of labor process. In negative side Marx thinks that people lose their essence through alienation of labor. He sees human being that they do not affirm themselves in their work but deny and alienate them in this self-extern alienation. However he thinks that not all labor is alienated. There was in the past a work that was more realization and there will be in the future a labor capable of influencing man with the world according to Marx. Nevertheless, historically work renders people alienation to themselves and to their own products.

Marx sees human estrangement as rooted in social structures that denied people their essential human nature. According to Marx human essence was realized in labor. Marx means by labor that is a creative activity carried out in corporation with others by which people transform the nature themselves. In this sense the production process is one of objectification, by which people make material objects that embody human creativity. In turn they stand as entities separate from their creators. Therefore, alienation occurs when, once objectified, people no longer recognize themselves in their product, which has become alien to them. Their objectified products are no longer their own and they stand opposed to them as an autonomous power. Marx notes that objectification becomes alienation in the specific historical circumstances of capitalism. In capitalist societies one group of people, capitalists, appropriates the products created by others. Marx sees this process as the origin of alienation.

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