SECULARIZATION PROCESS OF HOMO MEDIALIS

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(Received 20 September 2013)

Abstract

The study deals with the secularization process of *homo medialis*, i.e. a man shaped by cultural imperatives of socio-cultural and distinctive media reality. On the basis of stating relevant socio-cultural determinants influencing the approaches of media producers the study attempts to specify the factors for polarization and gradual change of the character and mission of the media production. The authors state the basic theses of the proceeding secularization process of media production recipient – *homo medialis*.

Keywords: cultural imperatives, hyper consumer society, media hedonism, mediamorphosis, media reality

1. Introduction

In modern perception, the secularization is interpreted as a turn away of the population form what is perceived as holy, as sacral. According to M. Eliade the consciousness of a real and semantic world is tightly bound to the discovery of sacrum. The human spirit has noticed the difference between what seems to be real, powerful, rich and full of meanings and what does not possess these traits, i.e. chaotic and dangerous flow of things, which appear and disappear randomly without making sense [1]. The relationship to sacrum as to the opposite of violating and profane was in his history manifested through cults, myths and religious systems. Their common denominators were the motives and needs own to own to *homo religiosus*. According to V. Šabík cultural, civilization, generally historical aspects of Eliade besides other things point out the power of religion resulting from the human experience, e.g. when overcoming a shock or fear. This is proven by the forms of presenting individual and collective experience in threatening situations [2]. Cults, myths and religious systems have at the same time demonstrated the relationship of *homo religiosus* to the transcendent and represented the idea universality of human spirit resting upon perpetual returns of repeated themes and motives.

The study specifies those phenomena and factors which significantly participate in the process of gradual secularization of *homo medialis*, i.e. a man shaped by massive reception of media production in modern and late modern society. It is rooted in the presumption that the process of secularization is

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ambivalent in its nature as its consequence is the dichotomy of choice with which the contemporary man is confronted.

2. The ambivalence of secularization in modern and late modern society

When we examine the secularization process from the historical perspective, based on the analysis of political, social and cultural events, it is obvious that its origination is conditioned by the emergence and development of modern societies. Their mental basis has been created by the representatives of the French Enlightenment. In the name of postulating ratio as the highest principle of knowledge and with the motto - brotherhood, equality, liberty – a revolt against old rules, aristocratic and religious power is born. The modernization of society is also understood as a process transforming the traditional society into industrial one. It is conditioned by strengthening the new political and economic power, urbanization, migration of population, the growth of literacy and a turn away from value hierarchy and moral of a feudal society. In the new socio-political, economic and cultural limits and streams of enlightened ideas, the establishing 'cult of reason' is becoming a sign of modern era being born. However, M. Petrusek emphasizes that secularization does not necessarily mean strict atheism. It is mostly about anti-Church attitudes of its participants. Two other dimensions are important attributes of this process. On one hand it is perceived rationally as a result of a man letting the prejudices, superstitions and magical practices behind. On the other hand it is perceived in existentialist way as the loss of transcendent, as the loss of bonds to something higher, higher authority [3].

However, it is obvious that the result of rationalist and existentialist traits of secularization is the loss of order leading the individuals to extreme individualism and to shifts in understanding traditional, higher authority. While the big religions represented the order of mind with individuals and society, a modern man submits to rules ordered by his egoism and desire for self-realization. The order in traditional societies has presumed the acceptance of manners and norms, which guaranteed the religious systems. The vitality of morals and order required a general social consensus regarding the respect for certain hedonistic and utilitarian limitations. D. Bell illustrates it on the inferiority of aesthetic stimuli and expressions to moral principles. The Old Testament emphasizes unacceptability of uncontrolled human nature and its expressions such as sensuality, aggressive sexuality, violence, killing whereas modernism has broken the boundaries set by religion and the source of authority has been shifted from sacral to profane. Through individualization a man loses his bounds to society and basic institutions which were in traditional societies a necessary prerequisite of his existence. Secularization has loosened the order which guaranteed the protection of society´s members against the difficulties of natural, animal and primitive human passions and needs. Religion represented imaginary gate against this 'daemon', provided continuity with the past. As soon as culture met 'the daemon', the requirement to set autonomous parameters of

aesthetics emerged. The dominating opinion claimed that the highest value was experience, anything was allowed, including passions, murders and other topics dominating the modernist surrealism [4].

John Paul II points out the consequences of radical change in value hierarchy according to which the communities of believers experience suffering as the face the spread of indifference, secularism and atheism. It refers mainly to the countries of the so called first world "in which welfare and communism, even though accompanied by situations of horrible poverty and hardship, inspire and condition such life as if there was no God" [5]. His words highlight the state of an individual´s conscience constantly confronted with various stimuli, with choice of experiential situations in the area of commodity temptations, fear of poverty and distress, stimuli from experiential lifestyle balancing on the edge between the morals of sacral and profane. In reference to late modernism M. Petrusek speaks about the period starting in the 50's of the last century and it is characterized by specific features such as: emergence of new life forms and pluralism of lifestyle, development of new models of social behaviour resulting from the birth of welfare society, influence of media world making the man perceive two worlds – everyday world and simulated world mediated through mass media. We can add elimination of direct repression and its substitution with methods of media temptation which stabilize social commonness, significant change of value models pointing out the low degree of ethic norms acceptance, birth of new postmodern mentality, strengthening of acculturation processes and their contradictory perception, rapid growth of globalization processes including the accompanying global risks such as the new forms of social differentiation, new stratification arrangement of society, new social movement, etc. [3, p. 33-34].

Within the context of mentioned shows of late modern society the authors speak mainly about new paradigms of pluralism and its consequences – fragmentation and individualism as important ambivalence sources of current secularism. G. Lipovetsky stresses the fact that the belief in God has become an individual issue of an individual and his decision how to experience and profess his personal faith. Typical features of current world are the decay of religious traditions and local limitations, subjectivization of what is sacral as well as high number of conversions based on personal choice [6].

However, there is a significant difference between modernism and postmodernism regarding the attitudes of individuals towards the Church and religious belief. The late modern era causes the erosion of beliefs in religious systems and teachings as such, whereas modernism questioned the existence of religious order and religious institutions. The late modernism man faces a free choice from various options: he may choose the belief in accordance with value and moral systems of a religion or he drowns collective religious ideas in extreme individualism (generated by the era) and belief in personal, pragmatic God, authority that is tolerant of breaking the morality. Another option is represented by radical, conscious rejection of higher authority or authorities as well as religious values and morality based on so called higher, transcendental

principles and focus on the present. Such alternative offers life here, in this moment, indulging oneself with challenges and offers of 'the daemon' and matter. Radicalization of the secularization process in late modern period is made more and more intense by urgent pressure and challenges of social reality on the experience of everydayness. Pluralism in the areas of values, morality and relations to the transcendental is determined by the attitude to the effects of several factors such as lifestyle, behaviour patterns or dominant ideology, further on preferred value scale and morals, isolation of an individual, postulation of ego as the highest value or the need to identify with authority representing certain value system and morality within given collective conscience and cultural membership of particular society. It is apparent, that the ambivalence of secularization process in late modern period resides in pluralism, fragmentation and individualism. Even though they allow the individuals to choose freely and compose their own repertoire of relations to religion, the transcendental, higher moral authorities and define their own preferred system of confessed values in given society, they deprive them of the existential sense of security.

3. Creation of cultural topos and mentality of late modernism

Paradigms of individualism, fragmentation and pluralism are strengthened by globalization tendencies, which have played an important role in the process of gradual creation of mentality of the late modern society since the second half of the last century. Several authors such as Z. Bauman [7], Ch. Lasch [8], U. Beck [9], G. Lipovetsky [10], J. Lohisse [11], etc. specify range of factors which significantly participate in creating cultural topos of the late modernism. Among them we find commercialization of all social spheres, including areas of culture and ideas, ideal of consumerism connected with the phenomena of standardization, homogenization and unification of mass production or bigger social mobility or technical-technological possibilities in communication. The listed factors are simultaneously in a sharp contrast with the efforts of individuals to create individual lifestyle and attitudes leading to narcissistic exhibition of one's own – if possible most conspicuous and original ego. Individuals are supported both in cultivating sense for imitating and copying the models of fashion and culture designers and in saturation of one´s consumerist desires for luxury, exotic and excitement, which are personified mostly by media celebrities. On the other hand the individuals try to individualize these models, adjust them to own aspirations, search for own identity and specific, original self-expression. The contemporaries are permanently confronted with two contradictory tendencies:
1) Strengthening of mass culture status and its typical features – standardization, homogenization, unification and hyper consumerism.
2) Strengthening of pluralism, fragmentation along with the individuals´ efforts for exhibition of own individualism, spectacular presentation of one's unlikeness against the mass of uniformed entities.

It follows that the conditions for self-expression in globalized late modernism are energetically modified within the bounds of strengthening the processes of individualizing a society. The loss of individuals' security is both the paradox and a symptomatic phenomenon of this process. The insecurity results from the mental topos of current culture which has lost the stability originating in traditional social relations. These were based on the pillars of family, Church, social class or national community. M. Solík speaks about origins of culture which is different, different "too much" or even "foggy" [12]. The loss of traditional models of individual's identity leads to: permanent re-evaluation and search for own identity, undermining the functionality of social institutions and finally to desocialization of individuals in given social environment. Within this context M. Fforde notices the interconnection between secularization, dechristianization and desocialization as a consequence both of losing the bounds between people and growth of materialistic matrix and influence of mass society [13].

The truth is the traditional bounds were to large extent limiting. Speaking about social immobility or implementation of individuals´ ideas about organization of own lives they did offer sufficient amount of proven models and patterns for creation of individual or group identities. According to Z. Bauman the advancing individualization means cutting off from the coordinates of life ensuring stability. In this way the decisions of contemporaries become both independent and autonomous. Free self-expression of individuals has never witnessed such a large extent; it has never been so exciting and at the same time so threatening as it is in the present time [7, p. 96]. In his study M. Fforde sees the reasons for such dynamics in consensual support of man's materialistic visions, denial of the belief in transcendental, creation of lifestyle of egoistic individualism causing the decay of society. The consequences of this mental state of society are pathologic phenomena, e.g. collapse of family, suffering of children and young people, chaos in sexuality, high level of violence and criminality, decline in trust among citizens – disruption of interpersonal relations, record number of criminal acts and imprisoned, enormous increase of people leading lonely lives, alienation from political institutions, decline of civic society, decline of good manners and rapidly spreading depression epidemic [13].

Media production plays an important role in the process of individualization, desocialization and dechristinization. According to E. Henčeková media in modern society represent the main tool of cross-European communication and the channel for expression of attitudes and needs of individual minorities [14]. S. Gálik points out educational dimensions of media production when he claims that sports, politics and mainly media have become the current religion [15]. It is a fact that media due to the huge consumption of their production and influence upon recipients take over the traditional socializing, enculturating and accultural role. The recipients are offered media dictations of various cultural IN and OUT imperatives through which they shape thinking and behaviour of all social classes and age groups. The IN and OUT

terms originated and were established in creative workshops of cultural and fashion designers and professionals in marketing. Initially during the 80's of the last century they were spread through lifestyle magazines and later used in various, mainly electronic and digital media. They dictated what was IN (acceptable) and what was OUT (inacceptable) in all spheres of everyday activities, fashion, lifestyle, including eating habits, ways of relaxation, spending holidays or sexual practices, not excluding the way of thinking. OUT was used for the purpose of excommunication of inadaptable ones, those who refused design by media and ways of thinking offered by them. Cultural imperatives IN and OUT decide about our morality, values and taste [16].

Cultural imperatives help to create and shape the cult of image supporting uncritical worshipping and imitating. The cult of image in the sense of cultural IN imperatives (supported by media environment) is one of the most effective strategies among marketing and designer approaches. Within the context of creating its cultural topos and its mentality they significantly contribute to the formation process of man's, who massively receives the media production – homo medialis.

4. The formation process of homo medialis

G. Lipovetsky considers the phenomenon of commercialization to be an important tendency in current society. It is accelerating and penetrates into all spheres of human activities gaining control not only over things and goods, but also over culture, communication, procreation, life and death [6, p. 37]. Commercialization of the European media means a significant change in their mission as they become inferior to market conditions and financial profit. According to D.C. Hallin and P. Mancini the primary goal of media has changed from spreading ideas and reaching social consensus to production of entertainment and information sold to the consumer society [17]. Media have started to apply sophisticated marketing strategies in the sphere of production and distribution of broadcasting time, pages of periodical press or sale of final products. Ľ. Čábyová stresses necessity of all commercial subjects to make use of marketing approaches as the basis of success is in correct segmentation of market, its targeting and consequent formation of position for potential customers [18].

Commercial principle also defines the value of the final consumer – recipient. Transformation of a recipient into a devoted consumer is the guarantee of media success on the market. The goal of marketers' efforts is the formation of a hedonistic consumer category – object of marketing and media projection of various desires, dreams, expectations, experiences or pleasures.

Parameters of consumer hedonism accepted by the society were specified by D. Bell in 1960's when the logic of understanding the market and economics began to form a hedonistic lifestyle. Such lifestyle is dominated by the idea of immediate satisfaction of all types of needs [4, p. 21]. When speaking of the development of lifestyle commercialization G. Lipovetsky defines the categories

of consumer, hyper consumer up to turbo consumer [10, p. 108-115]. According to Z. Hudíková it is the extremeness what is typical for current media, mainly television production. She emphasizes that as negative consequences of the presentation of these - for society - extreme elements we may regard: abnormality becomes a norm; behaviour and emotions within society become even more tense; there is a subconscious pressure of expectations directed at people ('Showing off and fascinating is a must'; 'You have to be successful or otherwise you are not a valuable person'); the behaviour patterns and norms of society are perceived as changing/moving by the young generation; there is a passive attitude to negative topics within the society; we witness 'idiotization' of a nation and tolerance of superficiality [19].

Hedonistic character of media production has become a principle of creation and perception of media contents and messages, not only of entertainment genres. Recipients are amazed by the experience media production as it offers countless number of emotional stimuli and emotional states, such as emotion, joy, laughter, fear, hatred, horror, etc.

Nowadays we can generalize the principle of such creation within the mass media production and divide it into two basic categories on the basis of plot presentation and application of hedonistic elements:

- Production in individual types of media resulting from fiction, narrative approaches and typification of plot participants. It may concern entertainment programmes, thrillers or certain journalistic forms similar to fiction.
- Production created by mediation of information about real events within society. It works with real plot participants and applies narrative approaches, e.g. various types of reality shows.

Massive application of hedonistic elements in media production has been during the last decade of a new millennium supported by new developmental information possibilities in the area of digital technical-technological platform. S. Gáliková-Tolnaiová speaks about the process of mediamorphosis in the context with creating media reality through new Internet-cybernetic communication. She points out that the cyberspace becomes an essential part of human life or his lifestyle, his society and culture [20]. Ramonet considers television as central medium because it has a strong emotional influence upon the public [21]. Its successor variant – multimedia Internet has even stronger ability to stimulate experience, feelings and emotions.

On the basis of the above mentioned facts the assumption is confirmed that creating media reality within the context of applying hedonistic elements is essential for mediamorphosis of a modern man. It is also present in the processes of shaping and secularization of homo medialis. Various factors participate in the process of creating the mental disposition of homo medialis, e.g. commercialization, cybernatization of media production and the phenomenon of hedonistic hyper consumerism of symbolic media culture offering specific media reality.

5. Conclusions: secularization process of homo medialis

On the basis of listed and analyzed phenomena and factors it is possible to formulate the source theses and specify the categories of factors participating in advancing secularization of homo medialis in late modern society:

- Secularization in modern and late modern society is ambivalent as it provokes contradictions among individuals who decide either for individual choice leading to chaos or for traditional security guaranteed by order.
- Individuals in late modern society choose and compose own repertory of relations to religion, the transcendental, higher moral authorities and they set their own preferred system of confessed values.
- Within creating the dominant cultural topos and mentality of a late modern society the cultural IN and OUT imperatives are implemented through media and contribute to the shaping process of a man – homo medialis who massively receives media production.
- The process of shaping a homo medialis is influenced by several factors: dynamic development of communication forms within the cybernatization of media production, commercialization, hyper consumerism of symbolic media culture, media hedonism and mediamorphosis of a human subject as a result of specific media reality reception.
- The process of shaping secularization of homo medialis implies listed phenomena and factors consequence of which is the corrosion or modification of an individual's relations and majority society to religion.

In the context with the sinister scenario of further cultural development of a society's cultural topos and its media culture we hear more and more critical voices and witness educational initiatives leading to the education of recipients, teaching them think critically and decipher the media texts correctly. According to D. Petranová critical thinking is the basic unit for the development of individual´s basic media competencies. It enables the individuals develop the skill to identify important facts and connections in the infinity of information and consequently formulate opinions and solutions [22]. J. Višňovský points out the importance of the skill to decipher media and subsequently social communication through encoded verbal and nonverbal symbols. He ranks is as one of the major conditions of a non-pathologic socialization of an individual. [23] The ambivalence of secularization process in late modern society and mainly the loss of security and renaissance of individuals' critical thinking along with the skill to decipher media contents may signal a turn in the proceeding secularization process of homo medialis.

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