**Martin Kanoushev**

**THE SOCIAL (IN)COMMENSURABILITY BETWEEN TOTALITARIAN AND ANTI-DEMOCRATIC PROPAGANDA**

This paper is devoted to a particularly important scientific problem: it is a sociological attempt to conceptualize the social continuity as well as the social incommensurability between propaganda as a classic instrument of power used by totalitarian regimes and propaganda as an immanent functional moment of the postcommunist public sphere. Hence its central task is to trace those focal points of significant difference/repetition at which their discursive (non)coincidences converge and diverge, and which constitute the unified, complete and individisible ideological agenda of anti-democratic propaganda.

Why is propaganda necessary, what place does it occupy and what functions does it performing in building totalitarian societies? In the first place, the general and ultimate purpose of propaganda is to construct a particular type of social bond in an ‘amorphous population mass’ made up of infinitely disconnected, atomized and isolated individuals; a social bond that must bind the individual micro-units into a unified, indivisible and obedient totality, and thus, overcome the practical disintegration and restore the lost unity of the social body; in the final analysis, a social bond built upon the unconditional loyalty of each individual member; a ‘total loyalty’ that must thoroughly permeate the future totalitarian society. (Here I will only remind the reader that the personal oath, unified motto and inseparable unity of the *SS*, or *Schutzstaffel* – literally, *‘Protection Squad’–* in Nazi Germany were ‘My honour is my loyalty’@1). As Hannah Arendt points out: “Democratic freedoms may be based on the equality of all citizens before the law; yet they acquire their meaning and function organically only where the citizens belong to and are represented by groups or form a social and political hierarchy. The breakdown of the class system, the only social and political stratification of the European nation-states, certainly was one of the most dramatic events in recent German history and as favorable to the rise of Nazism as the absence of social stratification in Russia’s immense rural population” (Arendt, 1979, pp. 312-313). Consequently, the ultimate result of the liquidation of social hierarchies, the eradication of social stratifications and the elimination of social differences is the transformation of the atomized individuals into ‘amorphous masses’; a key historical prerequisite for the rise of totalitarian domination, which is possible only if there are vast masses and, moreover, precisely in countries where they can be sacrificed without leading to a disastrous decimation of the population.@2 However – and this is a fact that requires special attention – the atomization of society and extreme individualization precede the emergence of mass movements which most easily and quickly attract not the socialized, non-individualistic-minded members of the traditional parties but people who are completely unorganized, typically non-aligned because of their individualism, who permanently reject any commitment or obligation to society. In the final analysis, the truth is that the masses are born from the constituent elements of an extremely atomized society whose competitive foundation, with its invariably concomitant loneliness of the individual, was regulated only by the individual’s belonging to a particular class. The most important characteristic of the person from the masses is not his or her particular brutality and lack of creativity, but his or her isolation and lack of normal contacts. We must never forget that the comparatively easy victory of the so-called ‘October Revolution’ “occurred in a country where a despotic and centralized bureaucracy governed a structureless mass population which neither the remnants of the rural feudal orders nor the weak, nascent urban capitalist classes had organized” (Arendt, 1979, p. 318). In its turn, the total atomization of the already ‘built’ Soviet society was achieved through a series of purges that invariably preceded the actual liquidation of one social group or another. In order to destroy absolutely all social and family ties, the purges were conducted in such a way as to threaten with the same fate the defendants and all those around them, from mere acquaintances up to their closest friends and relatives. As a result of this simple and ingenious device, ‘guilt by association’, as soon as someone was accused, their former friends immediately became their bitterest enemies. In order to save their own lives, they offered, completely voluntarily, made-up information and false denunciations to corroborate non-existent evidence against the defendant; this was obviously the only way to prove their own loyalty, fidelity and trustworthiness. And, of course, they would claim that their friendship or acquantaince with the accused was only a pretext for spying on and revealing him or her as a traitor, a saboteur, a foreign agent or a fascist. Since merit was measured by the number of one’s denunciations of one’s closest friends, obviously the most elementary caution demanded that one avoid all close contacts, if possible: not in order to avoid revealing one’s secret thoughts, but to eliminate, in the almost certain case of future trouble, all persons who might have not only an ordinary interest in denouncing you but also in bringing about your ruin – simply because their own lives are in danger. In the final analysis, it was through this ‘method of governance’, developed to the point of extreme and incredible perfection, that the Bolshevik rulers indeed succeeded in creating an atomized and individualistic society the like of which had never before been seen in human history and which no social cataclysms could have brought about.

So, totalitarian movements are true mass organizations of atomized, isolated and ‘straying’ individuals. Compared with all other political formations, their most conspicuous external characteristic is their demand for total, unrestricted, unconditional and invariable personal loyalty of each individual member. This normative demand is made by the leaders of totalitarian movements even before they seize power and precedes the actual totalitarian organization of the country under their rule; it follows from the claim of their ideology that their organization will encompass, in due course, all of humanity. Where, however, totalitarian rule has not been prepared by a totalitarian movement (as was the case in Soviet Russia, in contradistinction to Nazi Germany), the movement has to be organized afterwards and the conditions for its development have to be created artificially in order to ensure total loyalty – one of the fundamental social ties in a totalitarian society – at any cost. Such loyalty can be expected only from a completely isolated person who, being deprived of any natural contacts such as family, friends, acquaintances, groups and communities, derives his or her sense of worth solely from his or her belonging to a movement, his or her membership in the party. And the big question is, indeed, how to create and consolidate a total bond, such as total loyalty is, in an extremely atomized society where social hierarchies have been liquidated, class stratifications eradicated, and individual differences eliminated. It is precisely propaganda which is that instrument of power, a key element of the social engineering of the future totalitarian domination, through which social unity must be restored and history given a progressive direction of development. @3 To quote Hannah Arendt again: “Neither National Socialism nor Bolshevism has ever proclaimed a new form of government or asserted that its goals were reached with the seizure of power and the control of the state machinery. Their idea of domination was something that no state and no mere apparatus of violence can ever achieve, but only a movement that is constantly kept in motion: namely, the permanent domination of each single individual in each and every sphere of life. The seizure of power through the means of violence is never an end in itself but only the means to an end, and the seizure of power in any given country is only a welcome transitory stage but never the end of the movement. The practical goal of the movement is to organize as many people as possible within its framework and to set and keep them in motion” (Arendt, 1979, p. 326). And that is why, of course, it is necessary to have an efficient, flawlessly functioning propaganda machine that must back up and duplicate all structures of an entire totalitarian society, constantly producing false information and modeling the social world according to its own ideological canon, and thus, keeping its own population in a state of permanent mobilization.

The second function of totalitarian propaganda is to be the other face or the obverse of terror: the masses must be indoctrinated and attracted at any cost. Under conditions of constitutional government and freedom of expression, totalitarian movements struggling for power cannot resort to mass terror and, like the other parties, are compelled to win adherents and to appear plausible to those who are not yet completely isolated from all other sources of information. However – and this is a fact of exceptional importance – in totalitarian countries, although propaganda and terror are two sides of the same coin, in reality the relationship between them is ambivalent.@4 As Hannah Arendt claims: “Wherever totalitarianism possesses absolute control, it replaces propaganda with indoctrination and uses violence not so much to frighten people (this is done only in the initial stages when political opposition still exists) as to realize constantly its ideological doctrines and its practical lies” (Arendt, 1979, p. 341). The social difference between indoctrination and propaganda is obvious: they are not merely two interlinked phases in the development of total domination, but whereas propaganda is meant to attract ever more supporters of the mass movement, the strategic goal of indoctrination is to intensively, comprehensively and constantly reaffirm the loyalty of the party’s members to its ideology. For example, totalitarianism would not be satisfied merely to assert, despite the existence of contrary facts that unemployment does not exist; it would abolish unemployment benefits as an important part of its propaganda. In the 1930s it was officially announced in Soviet Russia that unemployment had been ‘liquidated’ forever. As a result of this, all unemployment benefits were also ‘liquidated’. Not less significant is the fact that the refusal to acknowledge the existence of unemployment realized, albeit in a rather unexpected way, the old socialist adage that ‘he who does not work shall not eat’. Or, to take another example: when Stalin decided to rewrite the history of the Russian revolution of 1917, the propaganda of his new version consisted in destroying not just the older publications and documents, but also their authors and readers: the publication in 1938 of a new official history of the Communist Party was the signal that the purge which had decimated a whole generation of Soviet intellectuals had come to an end. Similarly, the Nazis in the Eastern occupied territories at first used chiefly antisemitic propaganda to strengthen their control of the local population. They liquidated the larger part of the Polish intelligentsia not because of its opposition, but because according to their doctrine the Poles had no intellect, and when they planned the liquidation they did not intend to frighten anybody but to save ‘Germanic blood’.

In the third place, since totalitarian movements exist in a world which itself is nontotalitarian, they are forced to rely on and use propaganda as their weapon. But such propaganda always makes its appeals to spheres that are external to it – be it the nontotalitarian strata of the population in the country itself or nontotalitarian foreign countries. These external spheres to which totalitarian propaganda makes its appeals may vary greatly; even after the seizure of power it may be addressed precisely to those groups of its own population whose coordination was not followed by sufficient indoctrination. (In this respect Hitler’s speeches to his generals during the war are veritable propaganda models characterized mainly by the monstrous lies with which the Führer entertained his guests in an attempt to win them over).@5 These external spheres can also be represented by groups of supporters of the movement itself who are not yet ready to accept the true aims of the movement. Finally, the Führer’s inner circle and the members of the elite formations often regarded even party members as belonging to such external spheres, who needed propaganda because they still did not obey the party unconditionally. However, neither should we overestimate the importance of the propaganda lies – let us recall that Hitler was much more often completely sincere and brutally unequivocal in the definition of the movement’s true aims, but, since German society was unprepared for such consistency, it simply did not acknowledge them. Still, totalitarian domination used propaganda methods in its foreign policy or in its work with the supporters, supplying them with suitable material. But if totalitarian indoctrination at home comes into conflict with the propaganda line for consumption abroad (which happened in Russia during the war – not when Stalin had concluded his alliance with Hitler, but when the war with Hitler brought him into the camp of the democracies), the propaganda is explained at home as a ‘temporary tactical maneuver’. As far as possible, this distinction between ideological indoctrination for the initiated in the movement, who are no longer in need of propaganda, and pure propaganda for the outside world is already established in the period before the movement itself has seized political power. The relationship between propaganda and indoctrination usually depends upon the size of the movements on one hand, and upon outside pressure on the other. The smaller the movement, the more energy it will expend on purely propaganda goals. The greater the pressures on totalitarian regimes from the outside world – a pressure that cannot be ignored entirely even behind the Iron Curtain – the more actively will the ruling power-holders engage in propaganda. The most important point, however, is the following: the need for propaganda is always dictated by the outside world, while the movements themselves do not actually propagate but repeat and instill in the mass consciousness particular doctrines. Conversely, comprehensive indoctrination, inevitably coupled with terror, increases with the consolidation of the movements or the totalitarian governments’ isolation and immunity to external influence.

To sum up: there is no doubt that while propaganda is an inseparable part of ‘psychological warfare’, terror is much more. Why? Because totalitarian regimes continue using terror even after their psychological aims are achieved: what is most terrifying is that terror reigns over a population that is completely subdued. Where terror reigns supreme, as in concentration camps, propaganda and indoctrination disappear entirely. From this point of view, one may claim that in Nazi Germany propaganda was expressly prohibited in concentration camps.@6 In other words, propaganda is one and, moreover, the most important, instrument of totalitarianism in its relations with the nontotalitarian world, while terror, on the contrary, is the very essence of its form of government. The use of terror does not depend at all on minimal ‘subjective factors’, just as the existence of laws in a constitutionally governed country does not depend upon the number of people who transgress them.@7 According to the apt definition of a German publicist, mass terror played the role of ‘power propaganda’ – it made clear to the population at large that the Nazis had greater power than the authorities and that it was safer to be a member of some paramilitary organization than a loyal Republican. This impression was greatly strengthened by the specific way the totalitarian rulers in Germany used their political crimes. They always admitted them and, moreover, publicly, without ever apologizing for ‘some overzealousness’ – such apologies were made only to their sympathizers – and, in this way, impressed the population as being radically different from the leaders of other parties.

Now let us move to a lower level of sociological analysis in order to shift the focus from the structural characteristics and, by extent, instrumental modality of propaganda in totalitarian societies to its substantive peculiarities, that is, its efficiency and effectiveness as an instrument of power. In the first place, totalitarian propaganda is characterized less by direct threats against individuals than by the use of veiled, menacing hints against all who will not heed its doctrinal messages and, later, the mass murder of millions of innocent people. Communist propaganda systematically threatened people that they would miss the train of history, remain hopelessly behind their time, waste their lives, just as Nazi propaganda threatened them that they were living against the eternal laws of nature and being, that their blood would irreparably and mysteriously deteriorate. (The strong emphasis of totalitarian ideology on the ‘scientific’ nature of its assertions is comparable to some advertising techniques which are also addressed at the masses. And it is true that the advertising columns of every newspaper prove this ‘scientificality’ – every manufacturer uses facts, figures and data from ‘research’ laboratories to prove that his or hers is the ‘best soap in the world’.@8) However – and this is a fact of exceptional importance – this obsession of totalitarian movements with ‘scientific’ proofs disappears as soon as they seize power. For example, the Nazis dismissed even those scientists who were able to serve them, while the Bolsheviks used the reputation of their scientists for entirely unscientific purposes and forced them into the role of charlatans. But it seems there is nothing more to the frequently overrated similarities between mass propaganda and mass advertisement. Why? Because neither business people usually do not claim to have clairvoyant abilities, nor do they constantly declare how truly correct their predictions were. The ‘scientificality’ of totalitarian propaganda is characterized by its obsessive claim to rational prediction as opposed to the old-fashioned appeals such as ‘let’s go back to our beginnings’. The ideological roots – of socialism in one case and racism in the other – are most evident in the open pretensions of their representatives that they have discovered ‘the hidden forces’ that will lead to true prosperity through a chain of predestined facts, events and processes. And of course ‘absolute systems that make all the events of history depend on great first causes linked together by the chain of fate and thus succeed, so to speak, in banishing men from the history of the human race’ (in the words of Tocqueville, 1986, p. 62) naturally have great attractive and seductive power. There is no doubt, however, that the Nazi leadership actually believed in, and did not merely use as propaganda, doctrines of the following type: ‘The more accurately we recognize and observe the laws of nature and life, so much the more do we conform to the will of the Almighty. The more insight we have into the will of the Almighty, the greater will be our successes.’@9 It is completely obvious that if we change only a few words, the same two sentences will express the Lenin-Stalin creed, for example as follows: “The more accurately we recognize and observe the laws of human history and class struggle, so much the more do we conform to dialectic materialism. The morensight we have into dialectic materialism, the greater will be our success.” And this is an eloquent illustration of the Bolshevik notion of ‘correct leadership’.

In the second place, totalitarian propaganda raised ideological scientificality and its technical methods of making statements in the form of predictions to a height of efficiency of method and absurdity of content because, demagogically speaking, the safest way to avoid any dispute whatsoever is to release an argument from the control of the present and to say that only the future will reveal its true merits. In fact, however, totalitarian ideologies neither invented nor were the only ones to use this grand stratagem. Scientificality of mass propaganda has indeed been employed on such a large scale in modern politics that totalitarianism turns out to be simply the last stage in a process during which „science has become an idol that will magically cure the evils of existence and transform the nature of man“ (Arendt, 1979, p. 346). And indeed, scientificality is connected to the rise of the masses: the ‘collectivism of masses’ was welcomed by those who hoped that the natural laws of historical development would eventually put an end to the unpredictability of people’s individual actions. The well-known positivist thesis that the future could become scientifically predictable rests on the conviction that interest is an all-pervasive force in history and that objective laws of power can be discovered. But it was precisely totalitarianism which, for the first time in history, tried to actually ‘transform the nature of man’. Unlike totalitarianism, the classical ideologies implicitly or explicitly assume that human nature is unchangeable, that history is a chain of objective circumstances and that the human reactions to them and interest, rightly understood, may lead to a change of circumstances, but not to a change of the human essence. In addition, it is presupposed that ‘scientism’ in politics is aimed at securing human welfare: a notion that is completely unacceptable to totalitarianism. The success of totalitarian propaganda is rooted less in its demagoguery than in the recognition of the fact that interest as a collective force can play a role only if there is a stable social body that provides the necessary transmission belts between the individual and the community. Among the masses, most of whom no longer constitute a social body and who therefore present a veritable chaos of individual acts, it is impossible to conduct an effective propaganda based on pure interest. The fanaticism of members of totalitarian movements, which is essentially different also from the most fervent loyalty of members of ordinary parties, comes precisely from the lack of self-interest of masses who are ready to sacrifice themselves. The Nazis have proved that one can lead a whole people into war with the slogan ‘or else we shall all die’ (a slogan which the war propaganda of 1914 would have avoided with the utmost care), and, moreover not in a period of chronic want, mass unemployment, or frustrated national ambitions. The same spirit showed itself also during the last months of a war that was obviously lost, when Nazi propaganda systematically consoled an already badly frightened population with the promise that the Führer ‘in his wisdom had prepared an easy death for the German people by gassing them in case of defeat’ (Arendt, 1979, p. 348).

In the third place, totalitarian movements use socialism and racism by emptying them of their utilitarian content@10 – the age-old interests of a particular class or nation. The form of infallible prediction in which these concepts were presented is more important than their content. Absolute infallibility has become the main attribute of the leader of the masses: he can neither err nor ever be wrong.@11 What is more, the thesis regarding the leader’s infallibility is based less on superior intelligence than on the ability to correctly interpret the age-old forces of history and nature, where it is completely impossible to prove the inconsistency, thwarting or failure of these interpretations, which will show and demonstrate their verity themselves in the long run. Once in power, the leaders of the masses have only one concern which overrules all utilitarian considerations – to make their predictions come true. (At the end of the war, the Nazis did not hesitate to use the concentrated force of their still intact organization to bring about as complete a destruction of Germany as possible, in order to make true their prediction that the German people would be ruined in case of defeat.) The propaganda effect of infallibility, the incredible success of their assumed role of knowledgeable interpreters of predictable natural forces, has developed in totalitarian rulers the habit of announcing their political intentions in the form of prophecies.@12 What is most important is the following: both Nazism and communism attained the same objective – the extermination of ‘the Jewish race’ or of the ‘dying classes’ is fitted into a historical process in which man only does or suffers what, according to immutable laws, is bound to happen anyway. Once the victims have been executed, the ‘prophecy’ becomes a retrospective alibi: what happened had already been predicted.@13 It does not matter whether the ‘laws of history’ spell the doom of particular classes and their representatives, or whether the ‘laws of nature’ exterminate all those elements – Jews, Gypsies, Eastern subhumans or the incurably sick who are not fit to live anyway. This particular method, like the other stratagems used by totalitarian propaganda, becomes publicly transparent only after the movement has seized power. Then all debate about the truth or falsity of the predictions made by totalitarian rulers becomes as absurd as arguing with a potential murderer about whether his future victim is dead or alive – since he can promptly prove that his statement is correct by killing the person in question. In such a situation, there is only one valid argument: to promptly rescue the person whose death is predicted. Before the leaders of the masses seize the power to fit reality to their lies, their propaganda is marked by its extreme contempt for all facts as such,@14 because in their view every fact depends entirely on the power of the person who can fabricate it. In other words, the method of infallible prediction, more than any other totalitarian propaganda device, betrays its ultimate goal – that of conquering the world, because only in a world completely under his control could the totalitarian ruler make all his prophecies come true. The language of prophetic scientificality corresponds to the vital needs of masses who have lost their home in the world and are prepared to submit themselves to eternal, omnipotent forces which by themselves can take the human being, carried by the raging waves, to the shores of safety. “We shape the life of our people and our legislation according to the verdicts of genetics,” the Nazis declared, just as the Bolsheviks assured their followers that economic forces have the power of a verdict of history; they thereby promised eternal victory regardless of ‘temporary’ defeats and failures in specific enterprises. Why? Because masses, in contrast to classes, want victory and success in the most abstract sense. They are not bound together by those specific collective interests which are recognized as essential to their survival as a group and collectively asserted in the face of the vicissitudes of history. More important to them is not the political cause that may be victorious, or the particular enterprise that may be a success, but the victory of no matter what cause, and success in no matter what enterprise.

In the fourth place, totalitarian propaganda perfects the techniques of mass propaganda, but it neither invents them nor originates their themes. According to Hannah Arendt: “These were prepared for them by fifty years of the rise of imperialism and disintegration of the nation-state, when the mob entered the scene of European politics. Like the earlier mob leaders, the spokesmen for totalitarian movements possessed an unerring instinct for anything that ordinary party propaganda or public opinion did not care or dare to touch. Everything hidden, everything passed over in silence, became of major significance, regardless of its own intrinsic importance. The mob really believed that truth was whatever respectable society had hypocritically passed over, or covered up with corruption” (Arendt, 1979, p. 351). Thus, it turned out that “mysteriousness as such became the first criterion for the choice of topics”: the origin of mystery did not matter – it could lie in a reasonable, politically comprehensible desire to keep a particular fact or event secret; or in the conspiratory need of revolutionary groups, as in the case of various terrorist organizations; or in the structure of societies whose original secret content had long since become well known and where only the formal ritual still retained the former mystery; or in age-old superstitions which had woven legends around certain ethnic groups. There is no doubt that the Nazis were unsurpassed in the selection of such topics for mass propaganda, but over time the communists also learned the trick, although they relied less on traditional mysteries and preferred their own inventions: from the mid-thirties onwards, one mysterious world conspiracy followed another in Bolshevik propaganda, starting with the plot of the Trotskyites, followed by the rule of the 300 families, to the criminal global machinations of world imperialism.@15 The results of this type of propaganda reveal one of the main characteristics of modern masses. They do not believe in anything visible, in the reality of their own experience. They do not trust their senses but only their imaginations, which may be caught by anything so long as it has universal pretensions and logical consistency. What convinces the masses are not facts, even if they are made-up so as to seem consistent, but only the consistency of the system of which they are presumably part. Repetition, whose role is somewhat overrated because of the common belief that the masses are not particularly capable of grasping and remembering, is important only insofar as it convinces them of consistency in time. What the masses categorically refuse to recognize, however, is the fortuitousness that pervades reality; they are predisposed to ideologies of all sorts because they explain facts as mere manifestations of hidden ‘natural’ laws and thus eliminate coincidences by inventing an all-embracing omnipotence – the eternal original source of everything that happens. Totalitarian propaganda thrives on this escape from facts into ideology, from reality into fiction, from coincidence into consistency. However – and this conclusion is extremely important – the main shortcoming of totalitarian propaganda is its incapacity to fulfill the longing of the masses for a completely consistent, comprehensible, and predictable world without seriously conflicting with common sense. Thus, for example, if all the ‘confessions’ of political opponents in the Soviet Union are phrased in the same language and admit the same motives, the masses which are hungry for logical consistency will accept the fiction as supreme proof of their truthfulness, whereas to people who have common sense it is precisely this consistency which is unnatural and proves that they are a fabrication. Figuratively speaking, the masses demand constant repetition of a story about miracles, while to those with common sense such a legend is only a tale that differs from the truth. In other words, although it is true that the masses are obsessed by a desire to escape from reality because they have remained essentially homeless and can no longer bear its accidental, unfathomable aspects, it is also true that their longing for fiction has some connection with the capacity of the human mind to reject mere coincidence and replace it with structural consistency. The masses’ escape from reality is a verdict against the world in which they are forced to live and in which they cannot exist, because it is governed foremost by coincidence and human beings must constantly transform chaotic conditions into a man-made ideal pattern of relative consistency. The revolt of the masses against ‘realism’, common sense, and all ‘the plausibilities’ of the world was the result of their atomization, of their loss of social status along with which they lost all their communal relationships created by everyday life. In their situation of spiritual homelessness, a measured insight into the interdependence of the accidental and the predictable, the arbitrary and the necessary, cannot operate. And totalitarian propaganda can outrageously insult common sense only where common sense has lost its validity. Before the alternative of facing anarchic growth and total decay or bowing down before the rigid, fantastically and thoroughly fictitious consistency of an ideology, the masses will probably always choose the latter and be ready to pay for their choice with individual sacrifices – and this not because they are stupid or depraved, but because in the general disaster this escape grants them a minimum of self-respect. Thus, it turns out that whereas Nazi propaganda perfected the art of exploiting precisely this longing of the masses for consistency, Bolshevik clearly methods demonstrated, as in a laboratory, its impact on the isolated mass individual.@16 Undoubtedly, such an artificially fabricated insanity is possible only in a totalitarian world. Then, however, it is part of the propaganda apparatus of the totalitarian regimes to which confessions are certainly not indispensable for punishment. ‘Confessions’ were a specialty of Bolshevik propaganda just as much as the curious pedantry of legalizing crimes by retrospective and retroactive legislation was a specific characteristic of Nazi propaganda. The aim in both cases was the same: achieving consistency.

In the fifth place, before they seize power and reorder the world according to their own ideological doctrines, totalitarian movements conjure up a lying world of consistency which is more adequate to the needs of the human mind than reality itself – a world in which, through sheer imagination, uprooted human masses can feel at home and are spared the never-ending shocks that real life and real experiences deal to human beings and their expectations. The force possessed by totalitarian propaganda – before the movements have the power to drop iron curtains to prevent anyone’s disturbing, even by the slightest hint of reality, the gruesome quiet of their entirely imaginary world – lies in its ability to isolate the masses from the real world. The only signs of the real world that reach the masses which are not integrated or are rejected by propaganda are, so to speak, its ‘lacunae’; the questions it does not care to discuss openly, or the rumours it does not dare to contradict because they hit, although in an exaggerated and deformed way, some sore spot. From these sore spots the lies of totalitarian propaganda derive some truthfulness and real experience, which they need in order to bridge the vast gulf between reality and fiction. Only terror could rely on pure fiction, but even the terror-sustained lying fictions of totalitarian regimes are not entirely arbitrary, although they are usually cruder, more impudent, but also more original than those of the movements. (It takes power, not merely skillful propaganda, to circulate a revised history of the Russian revolution in which the name of Leo Trotsky, commander-in-chief of the Red Army, is not even mentioned.) On the other hand, the lies of the movements are much subtler; they attach themselves to every aspect of social and political life that is hidden from the public eye. They succeed best where the official authorities have surrounded themselves with an atmosphere of secrecy. In the eyes of the masses, such lies turn into superior ‘realism’ because they touch upon real conditions whose existence is indeed being hidden. Revelations of scandals in high society, of corruption of politicians, of lobbyist interventions, of criminal acts, everything that belongs to yellow journalism, becomes in their hands a much more serious weapon than pure sensation. In the case of Nazi propaganda, its most efficient fiction was the story of a Jewish world conspiracy. Antisemitic propaganda had been commonly used by demagogues ever since the end of the nineteenth century, and was widespread in the German-speaking countries of the 1920s. The more consistently a discussion of the topic of the Jews was avoided by all political parties and public opinion, the more convinced the mob became that the real power was in Jewish hands, and that the Jewish question was the symbol for the hypocrisy and dishonesty of the whole system.@17 The common notion of *the Jew* as the incarnation of evil is usually explained with superstitions from the Middle Ages, but is actually closely connected with the more recent ambiguous role which Jews played in European society since their emancipation. One thing is certain: in the postwar period Jews had become more prominent than ever before. Conversely, the problem for the Jews themselves was that their negative reputation and suspicions about them grew in inverse proportion to their real influence in the hierarchy of power. Every decrease in the stability and force of the nation-states was a direct blow to Jewish positions. The partially successful conquest of the state by the nation made it impossible for the government machine to maintain its position above all classes and parties, and thereby nullified the value of any alliances with the Jewish groups of the population, who were supposed to stay outside the structures of society and to be indifferent to party politics. In an atmosphere rife with antisemitism, Nazi propaganda approached the subject in a radically different, efficient and perfected way. Still, as Hannah Arendt (1979, pp. 355-356) has proved, not one Nazi slogan was new – not even Hitler’s shrewd picture of a class struggle caused by the Jewish capitalist who exploits his workers, while at the same time his brother in the factory courtyard incites them to strike. The only new element was that the Nazi party demanded proof of non-Jewish descent for membership and that it remained, Gottfried Feder’s programme@18 notwithstanding, extremely vague about the actual measures to be taken against Jews once it came to power. The Nazis placed the Jewish issue at the centre of their propaganda in the sense that antisemitism was no longer a question of attitudes towards a distinct minority, or a subject exclusively of national politics, but the intimate concern of every individual in his or her personal existence. No one whose “family tree” was not in order could be a member of the Nazi party, and the higher the rank in the Nazi hierarchy, the farther back the family tree had to be traced.@19 By the same token, though less consistently, Bolshevism changed the Marxist doctrine of the inevitable final victory of the proletariat by organizing its members as ‘born proletarians’ and making other class origins shameful, scandalous, inadmissible, and ultimately – probihited and punishable.

So, Nazi propaganda, concentrated on “the global Jewish conspiracy to rule the world”, was ingenious enough to transform antisemitism into a principle of self-definition, and thus to separate it from the sphere of the ordinary and fluctuating everyday opinions. It used the persuasion of mass propaganda only as a preparatory step and never overestimated its lasting influence, whether in oratory or in print. (I must note here that the forms of power that come from ordinary demagogy are unstable and could disappear instantly if a particular organization does not support propaganda with violence. The more an organization’s public influence grows, the less the impact of the traditional media of mass information.) This gave the masses of dispersed, undefinable, unstable and futile individuals a means of self-definition and identification which not only restored some of the self-respect they had formerly derived from their place and role in society, but also created a peculiar kind of spurious stability which made them ideal candidates for an organization. Through this type of propaganda, the movement could present itself as an extension of the mass meeting and rationalize the futile self-confidence and hysterical certainty that it instilled in the isolated individuals of an atomized society. According to the Nazi ideology: “The mass-meeting is the strongest form of propaganda because each individual feels more self-confident and more powerful in the unity of a mass. The enthusiasm of the moment becomes a principle and a spiritual attitude through organization and systematic training and discipline” (Arendt, 1979, p. 357, quoting Eugen Hadamovsky). (Here one must add that from the very beginning, the Nazis were prudent enough never to use slogans such as democracy, republic, or monarchy, which indicated a specific form of government.@20 It is as though, in this one matter, they had always known that they would be entirely original. Every discussion about the actual form of their future government could be dismissed as empty talk about mere formalities – the state, according to Hitler, was only a means for the conservation of the race, as the state, according to Bolshevik propaganda, was only an instrument in the class struggle.@21) Hence the famous Nazi slogan: ‘Right is what is good for the German people’. In other words, Nazi propaganda discovered in ‘the supranational because intensely national Jew’ the forerunner of the German master of the world and assured the masses that “the nations that have been the first to see through the Jew and have been the first to fight him are going to take his place in the domination of the world” (Goebbels, quoted in Arendt, 1979, p. 360).@22 The fiction of an already existing Jewish world domination was meant to pave the way for a future German world domination. In this way, Nazi propaganda presented world conquest as a practical possibility; this implied that the whole affair was only a question of inspired and shrewd know-how, and that the only opponent that stood in the way of a German victory over the entire world was a small people, the Jews, who ruled it without possessing mechanisms of violence – an opponent that could very easily be removed, once their secret was discovered and their method emulated strictly and on a larger scale. Nazi propaganda concentrated all these new and promising prospects in one concept: *Volksgemeinschaft* (People’s community). This new community, a central experiment realized in the Nazi movement in the pretotalitarian conditions, was based on the absolute equality of all Germans, an equality which, however, was not of rights but of nature, and their absolute difference from all other people.@23 After the Nazis came to power, this concept gradually lost its importance and gave way to a general contempt for the German people, on the one hand,@24, and a great eagerness, on the other, to enlarge their own ranks from ‘Aryans’ of other nations: an additional idea from the earlier period of Nazi propaganda.@25 In practice, the *Volksgemeinschaft* was the key and systematic propagandistic preparation for the future ‘Aryan’ racial society. To a certain extent, it was also the Nazis’ attempt to counter the communist promise of a classless society. Here we see a fact of exceptional importance: if we disregard the ideological context, the propaganda appeal of the one over the other is obvious. Although both ideologies promised to eliminate all social differences, the classless society had the obvious connotation that everybody would be leveled to the status of a factory worker, while the *Volksgemeinschaft*, with its connotation of conspiracy for world conquest, held out a strong hope that every German could eventually become a true capitalist. The *Volksgemeinschaft*, however, had an even greater advantage – namely, that its establishment did not have to wait for some future historical moment and did not depend upon an objective social situation: it could be realized immediately, here and now, in the fictitious world of the totalitarian movement.

To sum up: The true goal of totalitarian propaganda is not to persuade people of the advantages of a particular ideology but to organize the “accumulation of power *without* the possession of the means of violence”, as Hannah Arendt (1993) has proven convincingly. For this purpose, any originality in ideological content would only be an unnecessary obstacle. It is no coincidence that the two totalitarian movements of the twentieth century, so ‘innovative’ in methods of government and ‘ingenious’ in forms of organization, did not preach a new teaching, did not introduce a doctrine which was not already popular. Not the passing successes of demagogy win the masses, but the visible reality and power of a ‘living organization’; the living organization of the movement is contrasted with the ‘dead mechanism’ of the bureaucratic party. (Hitler owed his position in the party not to his brilliant gifts as a mass orator but to the fact that he misled his opponents into underestimating him as a simple demagogue; Stalin was eventually able to defeat the greatest orator of the Russian Revolution, Leo Trotsky.) What distinguishes the totalitarian rulers is, above all, the single-minded purposefulness with which they choose those elements from existing ideologies which are best fitted to become the fundaments of another, entirely fictitious world. The fiction of the Jewish world conspiracy was as adequate as the fiction of a Trotskyite conspiracy, for both contained an element of plausibility – the covert influence of the Jews in the past, and the struggle for power between Stalin and Trotsky – which not even the whole fictitious world of totalitarianism can safely do without. Their art consists in using, and at the same time transcending, the elements of reality, of verifiable experiences, in the chosen fiction, and in generalizing them into regions which then are definitely removed from all possible control by any individual experience. With the help of such generalizations, totalitarian ideology establishes a world fit to compete with the real one, whose main handicap is that it is not logical, consistent, and organized. The consistency of the fiction and strictness of the organization make it possible for the generalization eventually to survive the explosion of more specific lies: the power of the Jews after their helpless slaughter, and the treacherous global conspiracy of the Trotskyites. The stubbornness with which totalitarian rulers have clung to their original lies in the face of absurdity is more than superstitious gratitude to what turned the trick and cannot be explained by the psychology of the liar whose very success may make him his own last victim. Once these propaganda slogans have become part of the ‘living organization’, they cannot be eliminated without wrecking the whole structure. An arguable matter, such as where there was a Jewish world conspiracy or not, was transformed by totalitarian propaganda into the chief element of the Nazi reality – the Nazis *acted* as though the world were indeed dominated by the Jews and needed a counterconspiracy to defend itself. Racism for them was no longer a debatable theory of dubious scientific value, but was being realized every day in the functioning hierarchy of a political organization in whose framework it would have been very ‘unrealistic’ to question it. Similarly, Bolshevism no longer needed to prove the existence of class struggle, internationalism, and the dependence of the welfare of the proletariat on the welfare of the Soviet Union – the functioning organization of the Comintern was more convincing than any ideological argument.

So, the fundamental reason for the superiority of totalitarian propaganda over the propaganda of other parties and movements is that its content, at least for the members of the movement, is no longer an objective issue about which people may have opinions, but has become as real and untouchable an element in their lives as a natural given. Organizing life in its entirety according to the precepts of a particular ideology is possible solely and only under a totalitarian regime. In Nazi Germany, questioning the validity of antisemitism when nothing mattered but race origin, when a career depended upon an ‘Aryan’ physiognomy (it is well known that Himmler used to select the applicants for the *SS* solely from photographs) and the amount of food upon the number of one’s Jewish grandparents, was like questioning the existence of the world. The advantages of a propaganda that constantly ‘adds the power and force of organization’ (Hadamovsky, quoted in Arendt, 1979, p. 363)@26 to the unreliable voice of argument, and thereby realizes, on the spur of the moment, whatever it says, are more eloquent than any arguments. Foolproof against arguments based on a reality which the movements promised to change, against a counterpropaganda disqualified by the mere fact that it belongs to or defends a world which the helpless masses will not accept, it can be disproved only by another, a stronger or better, reality. In sum, it is only in the moment of defeat that the inherent weaknesses of totalitarian propaganda become visible. Without the force of the movement, its members cease at once to believe in the dogma to which, until yesterday, they swore their personal allegiance and for which they were ready to sacrifice their lives. The moment the movement, that is, the fictitious world which sheltered them, is destroyed, the masses revert to their old status of isolated individuals who either happily accept a new function in a changed world or sink back into their old desperate superfluousness. The members of totalitarian movements, radically exalted as long as the movement exists, will not follow the example of religious fanatics and die the death of martyrs. Rather they will quietly give up the movement as a bad bet and look around for another promising fiction that can gain enough strength to establish a new mass movement.@27

We will now move our analysis from propaganda as a classic instrument of power used by totalitarian regimes to propaganda as an immanent functional moment of the postcommunist public sphere. Of course, such a comparative analysis does not dismiss the generally held view that a number of elements of contemporary anti-liberal propaganda are functioning also in the public sphere of the old European and American democracies. We will try to conceptualize the social continuity and social discontinuity between the two phenomena which, as we well know, emerged and function in ‘incommensurable’ historical contexts.

The social continuity between those two kinds of propaganda can be revealed best through the common characteristics of the different ‘ideological pictures of the world’ constructed by them – the one being, undeniably, total, monolithic and self-contained, the other heterogeneous, conspiratorial and rationalized, containing within itself incommensurable and mutually exclusive contents which construct, in a relatively easy and universally accessible way, a seemingly homogeneous and complete social reality. Multifactorial explanations, generalized conclusions or complex interpretations are not necessary here. In the first place – and this is an analogous mechanism between the two kinds of propaganda – the ideologies constructed by them are capable of explaining absolutely everything, from a global event to a national fact to the most trivial occurrence, by deducing it from a single premise. Thus, what we see is an iron necessity, strict consistency and conclusive completion of the absolute logical explanation about ‘the true state of affairs’. In the second place, ideologies are known for their claim to be scientific – they try to combine the scientific approach with the conclusions of philosophical reflections and pretend to be scientific philosophy. The word ‘ideology’ presupposes that an idea may be accepted as the subject of scientific research, where the suffix *-logy* indicates nothing but a body of scientific statements on the subject-idea in question. But if that is so, then every ideology should be regarded as a quasi-science and a quasi-philosophy, for it rejects the fundamental principles both of science and of philosophy. In the third place, the very name of every ideology signifies its essence almost literally – the logic of a particular idea. Its subject matter is history, to which the ‘idea’ is applied, and the result is not a body of scientific statements about something that *is*, but revelation of a process that is in constant flux. In every ideology, events follow ‘the law’ in their development and present a logical exposition of its own ‘idea’. Ideologies claim that they know the mysteries of the whole historical process – the secrets of the past, the problems of the present, the uncertainties of the future – thanks to the logic inherent in their respective ideas. In the fourth place, ultimately no ideology is interested in ‘the mystery of being’ insofar as it claims that it reveals being completely, thoroughly. Essentially, all ideologies are historical and deal with the origin, development and decline, the rise and fall of cultures, even when they try to explain history by some ‘law of nature or of society’. The word ‘race’ in racism (the word ‘class’ in communism) does not signify a cognitive interest in human races (in social classes) as a field of scientific research, but the ‘idea’ by which the course of history is explained as a consistent and objective process. In the fifth place, the ‘idea’ inherent in one or another ideology is no longer some metaphysical essence or regulating principle, but has turned into a means of interpreting events. To an ideology, history does not appear in the light of an idea (which would mean that history is viewed as a specific realization of some ideal eternity which itself lies beyond the limits of progressive motion), but as something that can be calculated with the help of this idea. Such a function of the ‘idea’ follows from its own ‘logic’, according to which any movement that is a consequence of the idea itself does not need external factors to set it into motion. Racism is actually the belief that there is a motion inherent in the very idea of race, just as communism is convinced that there is a motion inherent in the very concept of class.

To sum up: Every ideology (a key proposition that is valid in full for the totalitarian doctrines, but only in part for the classical ones – liberalism, conservatism, or socialism) supposes or presumes that the course of history and its logical process correspond to each other, which means that whatever happens is invariably predetermined by the logic of one ‘idea’. However, the only possible movement within the framework of such logic is the process of consistent deduction of conclusions from a given premise. Dialectical logic, which basically follows a thesis–antithesis–synthesis pattern where the synthesis becomes the thesis for the next cycle, is not different in principle, once an idealogy accepts it. The first thesis becomes the premise and its for ideological interpretations lies in the possibility of using this dialectical method to explain all factual contradictions as interlinked stages of one identical, consistent movement. Once logic as an immanent movement of thought, not as a mechanism for control of thinking, is applied to an idea, this idea is transformed into a premise. The ideological explanations of the world performed this operation long before it demonstrated its fruitfulness for totalitarian reasoning. The purely negative coercion of logic – the exclusion of all contradictions – became ‘productive’ when, by drawing conclusions as ordinary ‘direct’ arguments, it initiated a whole series of reflections that had to be forced upon the mind. This process of drawing arguments could be interrupted neither by a new idea (which would have been another premise with different consequences), nor by a newly acquired experience. Ideologies assume that a single idea is sufficient to explain the entire course of events in the development from an absolute premise, and that no experience can teach anything because everything is interpreted within the framework of this consistent process of deduction. The danger in exchanging the necessary inconclusiveness of philosophical thought for the total interpretation of an ideology consists less in the potential risk of falling for some widespread and uncritical assumption than in exchanging the freedom inherent in the human capacity to think for the straitjacket of logic with which one can force oneself almost as violently as one is forced by outside powers. The ideologies of the nineteenth century are not in themselves totalitarian, and although racism and communism became the most significant and widespread ideologies of the twentieth century they were not, at least in principle, more totalitarian than the others. Why? Because their popularity was due to the fact that the elements of the accumulated historical experience on which they were originally based – the interracial struggle for world domination, and the class struggle in nation-states – were politically more important than the basic components of the other ideologies; in other words, all ideologies contain elements of totalitarianism which, however, are fully developed only by totalitarian movements, and this creates the deceptive impression that only racism and communism are in fact totalitarian. The truth, however, is that the real character of the different ideologies was revealed only by the place held by the respective ideology in the apparatus of totalitarian domination. Viewed from such a perspective, we can identify and point out three generalized elements that are characteristic of all ideological thinking – be it conservative or liberal, socialist or anarchist, totalitarian or anti-democratic.

Above all, in striving for total interpretation of the world, ideologies tend to explain not what is, but what becomes, what is born and passes away. They invariably focus on the element of motion, that is to say, on history in the traditional sense of the word. Ideologies are always oriented towards history, even when, as in the case of racism, they seemingly proceed from natural premises, because here nature serves merely to explain historical matters; the latter are, in turn, reduced to matters of natural development. The claim to total explanation promises to reveal the essence of all historical events, it promises a total interpretation of the past, a total knowledge of the present, and a reliable prediction of the future.

Next, ideological thinking becomes independent of all experience of being, because it cannot learn anything new from it even if it is a question of something that has just come to pass and is not established yet. Hence ideological thinking becomes emancipated from the reality that we perceive with our five senses, and stubbornly insists that behind the whole perceptible world there is a ‘truer’ reality that governs it but which we can become aware of only by a ‘sixth sense’. This sixth sense is provided by the ideology, by the specific ideas inculcated by, for example, the educational institutions, established above all the purpose of training ‘political soldiers’ – be they Nazi or Bolshevik. The propaganda of the totalitarian movement, in turn, also serves to emancipate thought from experience and reality. It always strives to inject a secret meaning into every social event and to suspect a secret intent behind every political act. Once they have seized power, the totalitarian movements proceed to change reality in accordance with their ideological claims. The idea of the enemy is replaced by the concept of conspiracy, and this creates a mentality in which reality is no longer experienced and understood in its own terms but is automatically assumed to signify something else.

Finally, since ideologies do not have the power to transform reality, they achieve this emancipation of thought from experience through certain technical methods. Ideological thinking orders facts into an absolute logical sequence, starting from an axiomatically accepted premise and deducing everything else from it – that is, it proceeds with a consistency that is not to be found in the realm of reality. The deducing may proceed logically or dialectically, but in both cases it involves a consistent process of argumentation which, because it thinks in terms of a process, is supposed to be able to reveal the movement of the suprahuman, natural or historical processes. The essence is revealed by the mind’s imitating, logically or dialectically, the laws of ‘scientifically’ established movements with which through the process of imitation it becomes fully integrated. Ideological argumentation, which is always a kind of deduction, corresponds to the two components of all ideologies – movement and emancipation from reality and experience: first, because its thought movement does not spring from experience but is self-generated, and, secondly, because it transforms the one and only element taken from real experience into an axiomatic premise, leaving the entire subsequent argumentation process completely isolated from any experienced events. Once it has established its premise, its point of departure, stops taking experience into account and drawing its resources from reality.

Here we will make a final move: Which are the focal points of difference-repetition that make (in)commensurable the discursive strategies and, of course, the forms of ideological programming of totalitarian and anti-democratic propaganda? First, the anti-democratic discourse in Bulgaria is wholly and deeply rooted in an ideological matrix whose main organizational and subordinating principle is a particular ‘conspiratorial logic’; a logic that constantly produces various kinds of ‘abuses of power’, that is, hidden manipulations – covert promotion of foreign and hostile interests in Bulgarian society – by Bulgarian politicians. And, of course, the power-holders in Bulgaria are represented in the unenviable role of ‘puppets’ whose political moves are essentially predetermined because they are imperatively dependent on the intents of ‘villains/puppet-masters’. Hence also their wretched fates of exploited and disintegrated ‘victims’ who, however, have another discursive function, too: to be ‘antagonists’ in an anti-national and anti-social scenario. Unlike the totalitarian ‘iron’ necessity centred around ‘a global conspiracy to rule the world’ – whose logic is universal, global and final – what we see in Bulgaria is an ‘alogical’ conspiratorial logic which is constructed not through strict consistency but through simple associations, elementary analogies and contextual shifts, including through interchangeability of role repertoires. This account for a constant focus and key resource of the discursive strategy of anti-democratic propaganda in Bulgaria: it is centred on all those risks, dangers and threats – at the national, regional and international level – which come from the contradictory past, pass like lightning through the present, and presage the unenviable-miserable future of the ‘homeland’. Consequently, anti-democratic propaganda always points out a hidden and dangerous villain/conspirator (antagonist) who initiates an inevitable apocalyptic scenario – this is precisely how it creates social panic, which is actually its true strategic goal; social panic, in turn, fosters an environment where anyone who opposes the conspiratorial villain – the one most often and categorically pointed out as such an agent of opposition to the US and the West is the Kremlin upon the annexation of Crimea, where the annexation stops being an ‘annexation’ and becomes an act of worthy resistance – implicitly or indirectly becomes a protagonist (‘saviour’). Such a procedure results in a ‘strange syllogysm’: those who carry out an aggressive act against the international legal order (who brutally annex the territory of a foreign country and actively initiate a ‘civil war’ in some of its regions) are acting rightly and worthily because, by transgressing the international legal order, they are in fact standing up against and opposing the global villain (the US/the West). Their action is fair, historically justified and morally just because it is directed ‘against the villain’ and, from this point of view, the nature or content of this action no longer matters.

Second, the ideological matrix of the anti-democratic discourse functions also through an automatic inductive mechanism: it focuses on a particular, specific event, drawing from it a series of generalized conclusions that are deducible only from each other, which reconfirm ‘the extremely bad plight of the country’. The event in question (‘fact’, opinion, statement, or position) is superimposed, without specification and analysis, on a particular discursive figure (the crisis in Bulgaria, the hegemony of the US, the aggressiveness of NATO, the collapse of the EU, the rise of Russia, and other discursive figures of this sort, most of them being mutually inferential), thereby directly interlinking an isolated fact, unrelated to other facts, and a maximally generalized discursive figure: the thus created anonymous monster (single fact/discursive rule) now has the discursive status of an axiomatic premise that serves as the basis for a progressive circular logical movement which erases all factual contradictions and has a universal pretension. In fact, however, what we have here and now is an inverted causality: the idea, an idea whose significance is over-emphasized – in this particular case, ‘the critical situation in Bulgaria’ – is represented not as the end result of a controlled reasoning process but as an unproblematic starting point. Hence also the total lack of self-critical reflection of propagandistic thinking, and its radical detachment from the actual processes in social reality.

Third, unlike the totalitarian discourse, which has a ‘positive’ horizon, anti-democratic propaganda in Bulgaria is above all negative, subversive and devaluing; it does not seek to organize the progressive movement of the masses towards an ultimate goal, it aims to publicly discredit every political opponent who is not just ideologically different but also allegedly socially inadequate, intellectually ‘imbecile’ and morally ‘corrupt’. Such opponents must be pointed out, condemned, disgraced and ultimately discredited as hypocritical, manipulative, or unscrupulous foreign lackeys/traitors, and gradually excluded, but strategically – foreover – from public presence. The intense functioning of this mechanism is facilitated also by the invariably overemphasized presence of ‘objective’ expert and ‘competent’ citizen opinions – through an endless repetition of constant epithets, they give extra weight to the final political verdict: throughout his term in office, the media image of President Rosen Plevneliev was invariably and negatively constructed as that of a “non-autonomous, inconsequential politician without decisive importance”, while the main characteristics of Prime minister Boyko Borisov’s media image are “that he is serving his masters from the West; that in order to serve them successfully, he is inconsistent and justifies his inconsistency by lying; that he brazenly does not hide his lies because he is a ‘simple guy of the people’, relying on the fact that both the people and he is simple, so the people ‘will always undertstand him’; that, consequently, he is a vulgar politician; that he is successful despite his vulgarity because he ‘has political acumen’; that because of his acumen he can behave shrewdly but not intelligently…” (Vatsov et al., 2017, p. 103).

Fourth, the ‘emancipation from experience and reality’, characteristic of all ideological thinking, and the consequent complete retreat into a realm of mutually deducing and justifying ideas, is realized in anti-democratic propaganda in Bulgaria in a specific way. Here, of course, the totalitarian split of the world between a ‘real’ and a ‘fictitious’ one, and hence the strict consistency of fiction in contrast to the complete disorganization of reality, is presupposed, but in a peculiar way: contemporary anti-democratic propaganda in Bulgaria does not offer some new ‘doctrine’ that pretends to have strict and provable consistency, nor does it directly build an apparatus of totalitarian power through which to introduce ‘total order’ into reality. What, then, is the fiction of consistency that it promotes? We have already described it in part: it offers the conspiracy figure as a basic and most simple explanatory scheme for the world – everything can be explained by a conspiracy, such explanations are easy, simple, elementary; they do not require detailed knowledge and complex analysis; anyone can ‘think’ in terms of conspiracies, and conspiratorial explanations are contagious. Through such explanations, however, another important substitution is carried out, a substitution associated with a primitive intuition of contemporary people: namely, that *everyone ultimately acts according to his or her own interest*. This is the main ‘proposition’ of the new propaganda, which lends consistency to its messages however contradictory and chaotic they may be. And if there is indeed any ideology in it, then this ideology is the cynical ideology of ‘interest’. In fact, anti-democratic propaganda in Bulgaria is legitimating anew the concept of ‘unilateral interest’ (be it individual, group, party, popular or state interest) as the basic and invariable one and, through this concept, it is de-legitimating all general moral and legal norms of liberal democracy. Actually, the conspiracy figure serves exactly for achieving this goal: anyone who insists on basic principles beyond unilateral interst – on respect for and protection of human rights, on the separation of powers, on the territorial inviolability of states, etc. – is represented as a liar/deceiver who is covertly, surreptitiously and dishonestly promoting his or her own homogeneous interest; according to the conspiratorial logic, the liberal-democratic principles, norms and rules are nothing but a smokescreen for promoting covert interests, through which the age-old interests of the weaker (of ‘the people’) are violated. Hence the ‘exposing’ of covert interests, intensified by the tabloidization of contemporary Bulgarian media, becomes a main figure for discrediting political and economic opponents. Thus, the discursive focus falls on those invisible, subversive and retrograde forces that covertly synchronize and lend meaning to the seemingly random and unconnected factual, evental and processual occurrences. Consequently, these occurrences are transformed, through the simple conspiratorial grammar, into a ‘short story’ which clearly points out the antagonist and the protagonist, and thereby seems completely logical, no matter that the different short stories produced by this grammar are mutually contradictory. In addition, this simple conspiratorial grammar acquires a peculiar ‘logical character’ when it is transposed to the geopolitical level – then the short story of the present day, but also of history, begins to look very easily like an endless chain of geopolitical predeterminations with a very frightening, dramatic, or catastrophic end for Bulgaria: the total anachronicity of the world order; the American global domination; NATO’s ‘insane’ policies; the total crisis of the European Union; the injustice of the sanctions against Russia; the hostile relations between Russia and Ukraine; the direct threats to Bulgaria’s national security; the real danger of a Third World War. What we see here is a technology that functions by borrowing key elements from reality which are abstracted from the realm of actual facts and transferred to the fictitious world where they are maximally generalized and conclusively detached from all experience. The simple, but seemingly consistent and logical figure of conspiracy enables anti-democratic propaganda to discursively present itself as social critique of the (neo)liberal philosophy, values and governance. It pretends that its own ‘metaphysical’ postulates will be the fundamental conditions of possibility for designing and conducting an effective leftist policy.

Fifth, anti-democratic propaganda in Bulgaria does not inform the public, report news and cover significant events; it cannot be ‘objective’ in the sense of thorough presentation of mutually exclusive views on a particular issue. On the contrary: its instruments are ideological messages in the form of pre-reflexive ‘suggestions’ aimed at influencing the mass consciousness – not by persuading the undecided public opinion, but by confirming and reconfirming already constructed sketchinesses of ‘self-evident’ ideas. These, however, are not so much the indoctrination practices characteristic of totalitarian propaganda (frightening the population by applying intense violence and constant realization of ideological clichés in reality) as massive, focused doctrinal inculcation, constant repetition and dogmatic instilling of ideological postulates. Anti-democratic propaganda in Bulgaria does not propagate some new, true and scientifically justified explanation of the world, nor does it construct some positive social project or offer some historically different doctrine; it manipulates, insofar as it suspects an ulterior motive or dishonest intent in every political act; it falsifies, for it always strives to inject a secret meaning into every real social event; in the final analysis, it is an ‘art of hypocritical lying’ because it is subversive with regard to the institutional foundations of the democratic order, trying to strip every value of worth, to invalidate every norm and to devalue every principle.

Sixth, prediction has a peculiar place and plays a peculiar role in anti-democratic discourse in Bulgaria. Unlike totalitarian propaganda, here we have not so much a complete attempt at scientific prediction mixed with clairvoyant and esoteric knowledge; a total pretension to ‘ideological scientificality’ despite the constant appeal to and integration of professional expert opinions for the purpose of reinforcing its power as the construction of a catastrophic consciousness built and maintained through a series of fatalistic prophecies about coming natural disasters, social turbulents and historic cataclysms. At the centre of such an apocalyptic ideology are discursive units like ‘crisis’, ‘danger’, ‘threat’, ‘collapse’, ‘destruction’ and ‘humiliation’, and on its horizon there always appear ‘conflict’, ‘war’ and ‘catastrophe’. Here ‘the end of history’ may come as early as tomorrow or the day after, while ‘the death of humanity’ sooner or later – sooner rather than later – is inevitable. There can never be any discussion as to whether such prophecies are true or false; they cannot be theoretically justified and logically proven, let alone factually, that is, empirically, verified. In other words, the method of infallible prediction as a central propaganda device used by totalitarian propaganda to achieve its ultimate goal – conquest and domination of the whole world, in which all prophecies will be made true – has acquired a new social meaning in anti-democratic propaganda. The ‘future of the world’ only at first sight seems to be full of multiple uncertainties, it is actually predetermined in two directions; but it is predetermined not because prophecy and reality are supposed to coincide in it, but because the ‘ideological scinetificality’ has already announced its absolute infallibility: either the age-old forces of history will bring about a radically new world order, or humanity will disappear forever from the face of the earth.

Seventh, the main technique used by Bulgarian anti-democratic propaganda is the endless repetition of negative messages which must be introduced, instilled and rooted into mass consciousness. The goal: reaffirmation of the logical consistency of the ideological ‘conclusions’ over time as an endless process on which everyday people rely as a prime source of their own thinking. And whereas totalitarian propaganda ‘explains’ social facts as elementary manifestations of natural or historical laws, denies accidental coincidences, inventing some all-encompassing power – the source of everything that happens – and flourishes on the basis of this escape from facticity into ideology, from reality into fiction, from the accidental into the consistent, then anti-democratic propaganda fabricates, without entering into insoluble contradictions with the facts of common sense, thorough ‘proofs of veracity’ that systematically devalue and totally reject the principles of liberal democracy, and above all the separation and mutual control of powers, and the supremacy and protection of individual rights. And it is indeed anti-institutional and anti-civic not just because it does not offer any positive messages about a ‘different’ social life, but also because it nihilistically undermines the basic public trust in the public institutions, political elite and civil society, and cynically subverts the value-normative foundations of democratic governance. But it is also Eurosceptic because it constantly produces and massively disseminates ‘deadly’ expectations/attitudes towards the European Union (inefficiency of the model, crisis of the institutions, failure of neoliberal governance, inter-state conflicts, insecurity, disintegration, bureaucratization, risks, terrorism, extremism, nationalism, populism, revanchism, migration, refugees, authoritarianism, fundamentalism, unemployment and poverty), and, in this way, turns it into the arch-enemy of Europe itself. But why is it pro-Russian, too? Because, its unified strategy is aimed, on the one hand, at Russia’s complete, irreversible and conclusive rehabilitation through intense destruction of its negative public image which demonizes and discredits Russia, and on the other, at the global political legitimation of the Russian alternative order of the world through accelerated construction of ‘the friendly face of the true Russia’ – a ‘reborn’, different, well-intentioned, civilized and tolerant country. And of course, anti-democratic propaganda is also mass propaganda, yet not because behind it there is a mass movement which has to be organized for the purpose of seizing political power, nor because it has already conquered, in ideological terms, ‘the popular masses’ which will at long last break their eternal chains and win their own intoxicating freedom, but because it is an instrument of power which divides Bulgarian society into two parts and generates conflicting contradictions between them, drawing an insurmountable dividing line between the ruling and the ruled, those who have power and those who do not, the winners and losers of the ‘transition’, the illegitimately enriched and the legitimately impoverished, oligarchic structures and deluded voters, organized crime and honest people, while striving to keep in a state of permanent partial mobilization that overwhelming majority of the Bulgarian population which is ‘cheated, wronged and oppressed’, and, exactly in this way, to radically and frighteningly oppose it the ‘rootless’, venal and corrupt Bulgarian elites.

Finally, could we equate anti-democratic and totalitarian propaganda from the point of view of their own strategies – not to persuade and to ultimately successfully and effectively convince the masses of the significant advantages of some ideologies, nor to form, through doctrinal inculcation, a an entire dogmatic consciousness, but to be organizational models for the accumulation of power *without* the possession of the means of violence? There is no doubt that in such a perspective, the two forms of propaganda are similar – they do not offer any originality in their discursive content, nor profess some new doctrine and introduce an ideology, that is not already more or less popular. By contrast, whereas totalitarian propaganda practically succeeded in winning the masses, organizing a mass movement and seizing political power, then anti-democratic propaganda – although it does not have an organizing potential, innovative methods of government and an alternative political model – intensely accumulates power by discrediting civil society and creating a cynical macro-environment, a key prerequisite for ‘modulating’ public opinion with the aim of reconsidering Bulgaria’s membership in the EU and NATO.

**NOTES**

1. The real impact of this motto, formulated by Heinrich Himmler himself, is indeed difficult to render. As Hannah Arendt (1979, pp. 324-325) points out, “Its German equivalent: *Meine Ehre heisst Treue* indicates an absolute devotion and obedience which transcends the meaning of mere discipline or personal faithfulness.”

2. “The success of totalitarian movements among the masses meant the end of two illusions of democratically ruled countries in general and of European nation-states and their party system in particular. The first was that the people in its majority had taken an active part in government and that each individual was in sympathy with one’s own or somebody else’s party. On the contrary, the movements showed that the politically neutral and indifferent masses could easily be the majority in a democratically ruled country, that therefore a democracy could function according to rules which are actively recognized by only a minority. The second democratic illusion exploded by the totalitarian movements was that these politically indifferent masses did not matter, that they were truly neutral and constituted no more than the inarticulate backward setting for the political life of the nation. Now they made apparent what no other organ of public opinion had ever been able to show, namely, that democratic government had rested as much on the silent approbation and tolerance of the indifferent and inarticulate sections of the people as on the articulate and visible institutions and organizations of the country” (Arendt, 1979, p. 312).

3. “Hitler stated in *Mein Kampf* … that it was better to have an antiquated program than to allow a discussion of program … Soon he was to proclaim publicly: “Once we take over the government, the program will come of itself. ... The first thing must be an inconceivable wave of propaganda. That is a political action which would have little to do with the other problems of the moment” (Arendt, 1979, p. 324).

4. As Hannah Arendt (1979, p. 341, fn. 1) points out, the standard ‘scientific’ explanation is that “terror without propaganda would lose most of its psychological effect, whereas propaganda without terror does not contain its full punch” … What is overlooked in these and similar statements, which mostly go around in circles, is the fact that not only political propaganda but the whole of modern mass publicity contains an element of threat; that terror, on the other hand, can be fully effective without propaganda, so long as it is only a question of conventional political terror of tyranny. Only when terror is intended to coerce not merely from without but, as it were, from within, when the political regime wants more than power, is terror in need of propaganda. In this sense the Nazi theorist, Eugen Hadamovsky, could say in *Propaganda und nationale Macht*, 1933: “Propaganda and violence are never contradictions. Use of violence can be part of the propaganda” (p. 22).

5. “In the summer of 1942, Hitler still talks about “[kicking] even the last Jew out of Europe” … and resettling the Jews in Siberia or Africa … or Madagascar, while in reality he had already decided on the “final solution” prior to the Russian invasion, probably in 1940, and ordered the gas ovens to be set up in the fall of 1941 … Himmler already knew in the spring of 1941 that “the Jews [must be] exterminated to the last man by the end of the war. This is the unequivocal desire and command of the Fuehrer” (Arendt, 1979, pp. 341-342, fn. 4).

6. “Education [in the concentration camps] consists of discipline, never of any kind of instruction on an ideological basis, for the prisoners have for the most part slave-like souls’ (Arendt, 1979, p. 344, fn. 7, quoting Heinrich Himmler).

7. “Terror as the counterpart of propaganda played a greater role in Nazism than in Communism. The Nazis did not strike at prominent figures as had been done in the earlier wave of political crimes in Germany (the murder of Rathenau and Erzberger); instead, by killing small socialist functionaries or influential members of opposing parties, they attempted to prove to the population the dangers involved in mere membership. This kind of mass terror, which still operated on a comparatively small scale, increased steadily because neither the police nor the courts seriously prosecuted political offenders” (Arendt, 1979, p. 344).

8. “It is also true that there is a certain element of violence in the imaginative exaggerations of publicity men, that behind the assertion that girls who do not use this particular brand of soap may go through life with pimples and without a husband, lies the wild dream of monopoly, the dream that one day the manufacturer of the ‘only soap that prevents pimples’ may have the power to deprive of husbands all girls who do not use his soap. Science in the instances of both business publicity and totalitarian propaganda is obviously only a surrogate for power” (Arendt, 1979, p. 345).

9. “Similar formulations can be found time and again in the pamphlet literature issued by the *SS* for the “ideological indoctrination” of its cadets. “The laws of nature are subject to an unchangeable will that cannot be influenced. Hence it is necessary to recognize these laws” … All these are nothing but variations of certain phrases taken from Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*, of which the following is quoted as the motto for the pamphlet just mentioned: “While man attempts to struggle against the iron logic of nature, he comes into conflict with the basic principles to which alone he owes his very existence as man” (Arendt, 1979, p. 346, fn. 10).

10. “Hitler based the superiority of ideological movements over political parties on the fact that ideologies (*Weltanschauungen*) always ‘proclaim their infallibility’ … The first pages of the official handbook for the Hitler Youth … consequently emphasize that all questions of *Weltanschauung*, formerly deemed ‘unrealistic’ and ‘ununderstandable,’ “have become so clear, simple and *definite* [my italics] that every comrade can understand them and co-operate in their solution” (Arendt, 1979, p.348, fn. 20).

11. “The first among the ‘pledges of the Party member,’ as enumerated in the *Organisationsbuch der NSDAP*, reads: “The Führer is always right.” Edition published in 1936, p. 8. But the *Dienstvorschrift für die P.O. der NSDAP*, 1932, p. 38, puts it this way: “Hitler’s decision is final!” Note the remarkable difference in phraseology. “Their claim to be infallible, [that] neither of them has ever sincerely admitted an error” is in this respect the decisive difference between Stalin and Trotsky on one hand, and Lenin on the other” (Arendt, 1979, p. 349, fn. 21).

12. “The most famous example is Hitler’s announcement to the German Reichstag in January, 1939: “I want today once again to make a prophecy: In case the Jewish financiers … succeed once more in hurling the peoples into a world war, the result will be … the annihilation of the Jewish race in Europe.”… Translated into nontotalitarian language, this meant: I intend to make war and I intend to kill the Jews of Europe. Similarly Stalin, in the great speech before the Central Committee of the Communist Party in 1930 in which he prepared the physical liquidation of intraparty right and left deviationists, described them as representatives of ‘dying classes.’ This definition not only gave the argument its specific sharpness but also announced, in totalitarian style, the physical destruction of those whose ‘dying out’ had just been prophesied” (Arendt, 1979, p. 349).

13. “In a speech he made in September, 1942, when the extermination of the Jews was in full swing, Hitler explicitly referred to his speech of January 30, 1939 (published as a booklet), and to the Reichstag session of September 1, 1939, when he had announced that “if Jewry should instigate an international world war to exterminate the Aryan peoples of Europe, not the Aryan peoples but Jewry will [rest of sentence drowned by applause]…” (Arendt, 1979, pp. 349-350, fn. 25).

14. Hannah Arendt (1979, p. 350) points out “Hitler’s ‘phenomenal untruthfulness,’ “the lack of demonstrable reality in nearly all his utterances,” his “indifference to facts which he does not regard as vitally important” … In almost identical terms, Khrushchev describes ‘Stalin’s reluctance to consider life’s realities’ and his indifference to ‘the real state of affairs’ … Stalin’s opinion of the importance of facts is best expressed in his periodic revisions of Russian history.”

15. “It is interesting to note that the Bolsheviks during the Stalin era somehow accumulated conspiracies, that the discovery of a new one did not mean they would discard the former. The Trotskyites conspiracy started around 1930, the 300 families were added during the Popular Front period, from 1935 onward, British imperialism became an actual conspiracy during the Stalin-Hitler alliance, the ‘American Secret Service’ followed soon after the close of the war; the last, Jewish cosmopolitanism, had an obvious and disquieting resemblance to Nazi propaganda” (Arendt, 1979, p. 351, fn. 29).

16. “The Soviet secret police, so eager to convince its victims of their guilt for crimes they never committed, and in many instances were in no position to commit, completely isolates and eliminates all real factors, so that the very logic, the very consistency of ‘the story’ contained in the prepared confession becomes overwhelming. In a situation where the dividing line between fiction and reality is blurred by the monstrosity and the inner consistency of the accusation, not only the strength of character to resist constant threats but great confidence in the existence of fellow human beings-relatives or friends or neighbors – who will never believe ‘the story’ are required to resist the temptation to yield to the mere abstract possibility of guilt” (Arendt, 1979, pp. 352-353).

17. “The actual content of postwar antisemitic propaganda was neither a monopoly of the Nazis nor particularly new and original. Lies about a Jewish world conspiracy had been current since the Dreyfus Affair and based themselves on the existing international interrelationship and interdependence of a Jewish people dispersed all over the world. Exaggerated notions of Jewish world power are even older; they can be traced back to the end of the eighteenth century, when the intimate connection between Jewish business and the nation-states had become visible” (Arendt, 1979, p. 354).

18. In practice, Gottfried Feder’s twenty-five points contained only standard measures demanded by all antisemitic groups in Germany: expulsion of naturalized Jews, and treatment of native Jews as aliens. By contrast, the antisemitic oratory of the Nazis was always much more radical, than their party’s programme.

19. *SS* applicants had to trace their ancestry back to 1750, while applicants for leading positions in the Nazi party were asked only three questions: 1. What have you done for the party? 2. Are you absolutely sound, physically, mentally, morally? 3. Is your family tree in order? It is characteristic for the affinity between the two totalitarian regimes that the elite and the police of the Bolsheviks (the *NKVD*) also demanded proof of ancestry from their members.

20. “In the isolated instances in which Hitler concerned himself with this question at all, he used to emphasize: “Incidentally, I am not the head of a state in the sense of a dictator or monarch, but I am a leader of the German people” … Hans Frank expresses himself in the same spirit: “The National Socialist Reich is not a dictatorial, let alone an arbitrary, regime. Rather, the National Socialist Reich rests on the mutual loyalty of the Führer and the People …” (Arendt, 1979, p. 357, fn. 39).

21. “Hitler repeated many times: “The state is only the means to an end. The end is: Conservation of race” … He also stressed that his movement “does not rest on the state idea, but is primarily based on the closed *Volksgemeinschaft*” [People’s community] … This, *mutatis mutandis*, is also the core of the complicated double talk which is Stalin’s so-called ‘state theory’: “We are in favor of the State dying out, and at the same time we stand for the strengthening of the dictatorship of the proletariat which represents the most powerful and mighty authority of all forms of State which have existed up to the present day. The highest possible development of the power of the State with the object of preparing the conditions for the dying out of the State; that is the Marxist formula …” (Arendt, 1979, pp. 357-358, fn. 40).

22. “This promise, implied in all antisemitic propaganda of the Nazi type, was prepared by Hitler’s ‘The most extreme contrast to the Aryan is the Jew’ (*Mein Kampf*, Book I, Chapter XI)” (Arendt, 1979, p. 360, fn. 49).

23. “Hitler’s early promise …, “I shall never recognize that other nations have the same right as the German,” became official doctrine: “The foundation of the national socialist outlook in life is the perception of the unlikeness of men …” (Arendt, 1979, p. 360, fn. 51).

24. “For instance, Hitler in 1923: “The German people consist for one third of heroes, for another third, of cowards, while the rest are traitors” … After the seizure of power this trend became more brutally outspoken. See, for instance, Goebbels in 1934: “Who are the people to criticize? Party members? No. The rest of the German people? They should consider themselves lucky to be still alive. It would be too much of a good thing altogether, if those who live at our mercy should be allowed to criticize.” … During the war Hitler declared: “I am nothing but a magnet, constantly moving across the German nation and extracting the steel from this people. And I have often stated that the time will come when all worth-while men in Germany are going to be in my camp. And those who will not be in my camp are worthless anyway” (Arendt, 1979, pp. 360-361, fn. 52).

25. “Himmler in a speech to *SS* leaders at Kharkov in April, 1943 …: “I very soon formed a Germanic *SS* in the various countries …” An early prepower indication of this non-national policy (*Reden*) was given by Hitler …: “We shall certainly also receive into the new master class representatives of other nations, *i.e.*, those who deserve it because of their participation in our fight” (Arendt, 1979, p. 361, fn. 53).

26. “For totalitarian purposes it is a mistake to propagate their ideology through teaching or persuasion. In the words of Robert Ley, it can be neither “taught” nor “learned,” but only “exercised” and “practiced …” (Arendt, 1979, p. 363, fn. 58).

27. “The experience of the Allies who vainly tried to locate one self-confessed and convinced Nazi among the German people, 90 per cent of whom probably had been sincere sympathizers at one time or another of Nazism, is not to be taken simply as a sign of human weakness or gross opportunism. Nazism as an ideology had been so fully ‘realized’ that its content ceased to exist as an independent set of doctrines, lost its intellectual existence, so to speak. This is the reason because of destruction of the reality therefore left almost nothing behind, least of all the fanaticism of believers” (Arendt, 1979, pp. 363-364).

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