

Propaganda Approaches in the 20th century



**TOWARDS A “DE-INCRIMINATION” OF
PROPAGANDA**

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Introduction



- Propaganda is a widely used term.
- It has been exercised as a method long before it was given the name “propaganda” and start being examined by scholars as a phenomenon in order to get analyzed.
- The issue of approaching propaganda has gone through several stages. **Following the rapid development of propagandistic applications, the scientific community focused on the study of the phenomenon in order to further analyze it.**

Why it wasn't analyzed until WW I?



- **WW I was the first mass application of propaganda**
- **Coincided with the appearance of means of mass communication**
- **Implemented in an extremely large scale for first time including whole nations (first use as actual policy making tool through mass media)**





- **propaganda seems to ground itself in three interrelated elements:**

the- at least- attempt to influence the human thought

the increased sophistication of the communications means available to promote propaganda messages

the increased understanding of the psychology of propaganda and the use of such behavioral findings

1. The conquer of the propagandist and the demonized propaganda



Propaganda is being approached as:

manipulation of psychological symbols, having unrecognizable by its “victims” aims

a method with secret sources and aims

a method exercised on a totally helpless audience (masses cannot resist propaganda)

the spread of untrustworthy beliefs

the dissemination of ideas without at the same time seeking to explain them

WHY?



These approaches of propaganda,

are developed right
after wartime periods

follow the early
theoretical approaches on
mass media power

draw their empirical data
from the methods implied
during these conflicts

are influenced by
behaviorism



- And regard propaganda as:
- **a naturally evil procedure,**
- **whose main aim is to delude and**
- **serve the selfish plans of the propagandists,**
- **considering propagandees as victims unable to escape their fate,**
- **presenting propaganda as a technique,**
- **which, when implied, has direct and immediate effects on wide publics.**

Characteristic definitions



- **“propaganda brings the pollution of the human soul, which is worse than the destruction of the body” (Lord Ponsonby)**
- **“propaganda is the attempt to change the personality and the behavior of persons using non scientific methods or aims of dubious value within a specific social and time period” (Leonard Doob)**
- **“Propaganda is the promotion of ideas, which is discreet- with one way or the other- as far as its sources, the interests meddled, the methods used, the disseminated content and the results on the “victims” are concerned” (Lumley)**
- **the demagogue, being dominant in the propaganda procedure, persuades the- weak and unable to resist- masses to conduct acts of destruction or to lead themselves to sacrifice (Le Bon)**
- **“every symbol, or sum of symbols influencing public opinion, belief, or action on issues considered critical” (Merton)**

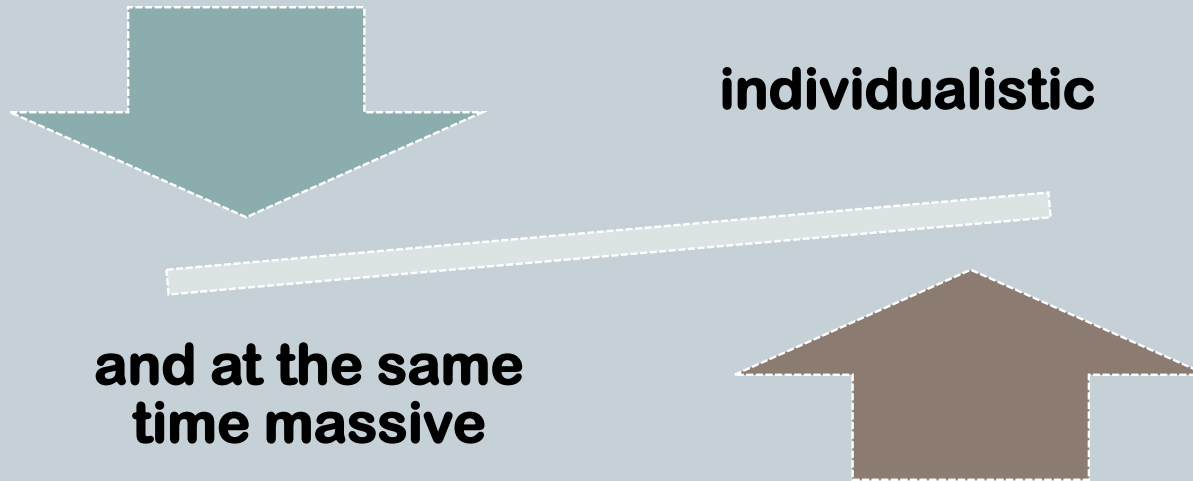
2. The- in some cases- negative social propaganda



- Propaganda as a method, from its planning through its implementation and assessment, is **being conducted within a specific social surrounding and in accordance to specific social parameters.**

Why so “social”?

- There are specific social preconditions that encourage propagandistic implications:



- an individualistic society has to be massive at the same time, because the first level of an individual's liberation is the decomposition of the small groups, which constitute the organic micro-groups of a broader society

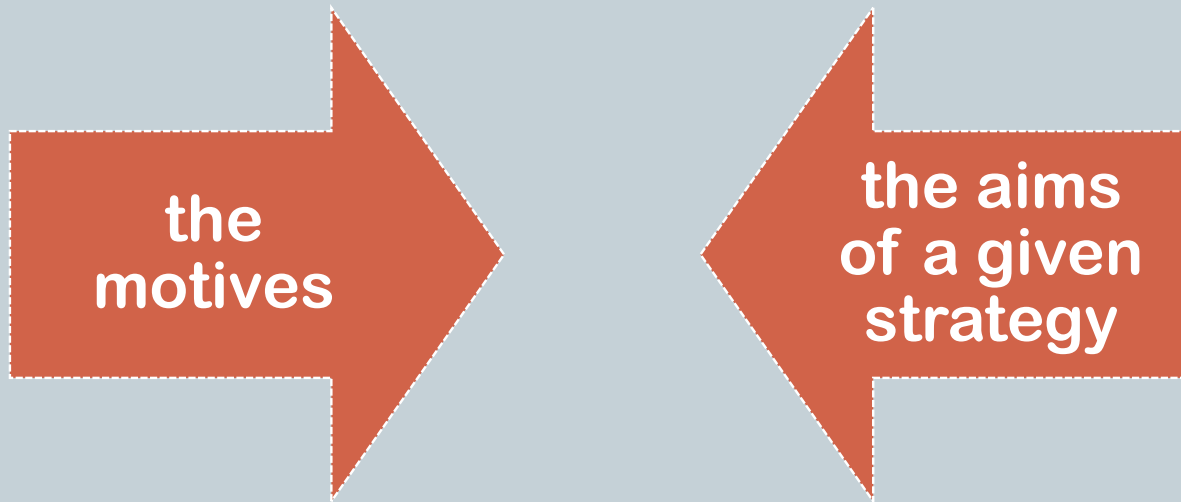


- **A society with significant population density, within which local structures and organizations remain weak and the individual becomes member of wide communities, being subjected to a specific psychological solidarity and uniformity of life style**
- **Key to the specific approaches is the characterization of propaganda as a social pressure method, underlining both the social structure of propaganda, as well as its negative essence.**

The moral dimension



- propaganda is considered as “the greatest danger for mankind” (Ellul), conquering the post-war consumer society, mainly because of:



- In many cases propaganda seeks to prevent its receivers from examining facts and data before accepting its doctrines.

Characteristic phrases



- “the methods used in order to influence actively or passively the acts of groups of people, which are- through psychological unity- members of a body” (Ellul)
- The content and control of propaganda are immediately connected to the social structure, reflecting criticizing and partly modifying it (Smith, Lasswell, Cassey)
- Modern man cannot grasp the size of the phenomenon. “Experience cannot reveal propaganda, because he lives within it”(Ellul)
- «propaganda is a technique of social pressure which tends to create psychological or social groups with a unified structure across the homogeneity of the affective and mental states of individuals under consideration»(Miotto)

3. Propaganda as communication-the propagandistic discourse



- Propaganda has embodied through the years, because of its historical implementations, many negative correlations, not existing originally in the ad hoc essence of it
- Characteristic examples are the propagandistic campaign of the Committee on Public Information (CPI) in the US during WW I and the propagandas of Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany



- Observing the definitions of propaganda, given to us by various scholars, we can see that propaganda as a term examined by scientists **doesn't necessarily mean deliberate deception**, a tincture it obtained- mostly- from the 1920s onwards
- Even though all definitions underline the attempt of influence- at least and- in favor of the propagandist, through the use of various means, a fact that constitutes the quintessence of propaganda tactics, **they don't necessarily connect it immediately with lies, deception and manipulation, in order to achieve its aims**



- **Mass media being extensions of social reality and basic tools of propaganda implementations play a major role in the formation of propaganda and the way it appears in contemporary societies**
- **That's why we can talk of propagandistic discourse, a socially embedded discourse including many different forms of propaganda, without necessarily referring to a single form.**



- **Basic characteristic of propagandistic discourse is the fact that in this discourse category belongs “the discourse of media and the mass culture, the advertisement, and the aesthetic objects”.**
- **In order to be persuasive for the receiver, propagandistic discourse “has to adopt itself in socially accepted behaviors and the vocabulary of social life”.**



- We don't need to resort to ethical judgments, whether propaganda is “good” or “bad”. We should **distantiate morality** from the procedures of propaganda, or incorporate it in the examination of its aims
- In an age of propaganda the only orientation our actions should have is towards recognizing it for what it actually is: a **method of persuasion**, which has become **part of our everyday life**.
- The interests implementing propaganda may agree or disagree to ours. If they agree, they become our value system, our truth. **That's why propaganda has to do with the sides.**

Fancy another definition?



- Having all that in mind we accept that propaganda is: **discourse and action, thought and implementation**. A deliberate process of thought, discourse and action or discourse as action, **exercised mainly through mass media**, aiming at influencing individuals or groups under certain social conditions, in order to adopt specific opinions, practices and behaviors.



- In order to study propaganda thoroughly:
- We should approach it using **epistemological** and **not moral** criteria, dealing with it in a neutral way.
- Central point to the motivations of the propagandist, contrary to coercion on one hand, and bribing on the other, is their **dependence on communication** rather than punishments or rewards.

Characteristic approaches



- **Basic characteristic of propagandistic discourse is the fact that in this discourse category belongs “the discourse of media and the mass culture, the advertisement, and the aesthetic objects” (Pleios)**
- **Propaganda constitutes a process of creation and communication of ideas, and for that reason it should have a neutral essence (Taylor)**
- **The most effective propaganda as it has developed through the centuries is the one based on events and persuasive arguments, rather than emotions (Taylor)**

Schematically



**Demonized
propaganda**

**Occasionally
“evil” social
propaganda**

**De-
incriminated
propaganda/
propaganda as
communication**