HITLER’S WAY OF PROPAGANDA

Abstract

The notion of “propaganda” turned up for the first time in Europe in the year of 1622 when the Pope XV. Gregory decided to establish a subsidiary institution to the church called “Sacra Congregatio Christiana Nomini Propaganda” so as to spread the teachings of Catholicism and also struggle against the harmful effects of Protestant church in a more efficient way. Forasmuch as numerous definitions, applications and academic studies have been done in this respect from then on, the framework of the notion have broadened step by step. The most distinguished examples of the concept on the practical level are Lenin’s and Hitler’s techniques of propaganda. They both made a greater theoretical and practical contribution to the notion than anybody else in history to make it go ahead and also to be more popular and applicable all over the world. Adolf Hitler’s techniques of propaganda include some elements from Lenin’s way of propaganda since he lived after V. I. Lenin’s era. Despite lots of negative meanings have been loaded onto the notion of propaganda from those times, it has always been the most influential means especially in the political arena at the same time.

Keywords: Propaganda, Hitler’s way of propaganda, politics
HİTLER TÜRÜ PROPAGANDA

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Anahtar kelimeler: Propaganda, Hitler türü propaganda, politika

1. INTRODUCTION

The notion of propaganda which can be described as a “technique” obviously goes back to old ages of humanity.

When human beings began to live in groups in the ancient ages, some persons who had the ability of leadership tried to influence the individuals in the group to gain power and sustain it as long as possible. The activities they did may be described as “propaganda”.

The perfect order and glimmering show in Roman legions, grandeur and mistery of the pyramids and wooden columns decorated with totems in some tribes can be defined as deeds of propaganda in order to magnify mystical content of the leadership, to reinforce individuals’ affiliation to the group and to strengthen the sense of being united as a community. Arranged stories of barbarity, brutality and cruelty so as to exculpate and glorify his own community or nation and to degrade the enemy and break the moral strength of it were all techniques of propaganda in those times. One of the most concrete and impressive examples of propaganda appeared on the scene of the world at the beginning of the 20th century. It was Hitler’s story in Germany. Joseph Goebbels, the ministry of propaganda of the day, is as nearly famous as Adolf Hitler in this striking example in which Nazis used propaganda as an efficient weapon of fascism (www.marxist.com).

Like many other concepts, propaganda can not be taken in hand and discussed as an independent structure. It is obviously and strictly related to especially sociology, psychology and public relations.

This work was done by means of literature review and it is expected to be a good source for everyone who carries out research in this respect.

1. WHAT IS PROPAGANDA?

Propaganda is a technique rather than science. But it is a modern technique. That is, it is based on one or more branches of science. It moves with them, shares in their successes and bears witness to their failures. The time is past when propaganda was a matter of individual
inspiration, personal subtlety, or the use of unsophisticated tricks. Now science has entered propaganda. First of all, modern propaganda is based on scientific analyses of psychology and sociology (Ellul, 1973: 3).

Born as a modern technique in France of Napoleon, propaganda is a tool in the service of politics, which knew a climax during the Second World War, to be later used widely and successfully in the Gulf War. Today propaganda, halfway between science and art, has to be used by governments - even by China - to support their positions in the international arena in order to guide public opinion and build consensus (or confusing: counter-propaganda); the recent example is the story of Ukraine (Marsili, 2015: 2).

In modern world, the term “propaganda” involves some negative connotations, too. Generally, to say something is “propaganda” is to say that it is the output of some interest group or organization that is pushing a particular viewpoint in a way designed to promote it to a mass audience. One aspect of propaganda is that, by its very nature, it is designed to reach and influence a mass audience, and as such it is a kind of technique that must appeal successfully to the emotions, commitments and enthusiasms of the crowd to win acceptance for a conclusion...

The fact that propaganda is an "appeal to the people" as a type of argumentation makes it inherently suspicious to logicians. To claim that an argument is propaganda, or is part of a discourse that may be described as propaganda, is a common way of criticizing arguments, or of evaluating them in a negative way that suggests that the argument is not based on reliable evidence or rational argumentation, so that it may be rejected as logically unconvincing to a rational person (Walton, 1997: 386).

Now it does seem to be true that propaganda uses, or is even based on the argumentum ad populum, because it does address a mass audience, it does try to persuade the mass audience to accept a conclusion based on premises that are popularly or widely accepted, and it does typically work by exciting the emotions and enthusiasms of the crowds (Walton, 1997: 390). In this context, propaganda can have an effect on the masses who lack any culture. For instance the Leninist propaganda directed at the Russian peasantry and the Maoist propaganda directed at the Chinese peasantry. But these propaganda methods are basically the creation of conditioned reflexes on the one hand, and the slow creation of the necessary cultural base on the other. To illustrate the creation of the conditioned reflex: After several months of propaganda in Honan in 1928, children at play would call their opponents “Imperialists” (Ellul, 1973: 111-112).

Propaganda is also an inevitable form and part of political life in terms of public relations everywhere. It should be treated primarily as a form of political language “which functions to create meanings that serve to sustain or alter relations of domination (Burnett, 1989: 128).

2. ADOLF HITLER AS AN ENCHANTING LEADER AND A GREAT ORATOR

When he was thirty years old, Hitler confessed: “I don’t think I could have spoken to 20 people without being at a loss for words” (Binion, 1979: 2).

However, he strangely changed and developed himself for his great goals in time. He became the supreme example of a speaker at last.

His power over the people was partly due to his extraordinary talent as an orator. “His speeches were an instrument of political intoxication that inspired a degree of fervor in his listeners that seems to defy definition and explanation. Hitler was a master at the use of the spoken word and a genius at the art of manipulating mass propaganda for his political ends. His uncanny ability to appeal to the subconscious and irrational needs of his audience and to solicit the desired response made him a formidable political figure (Hart, 2007: 82).
Hitler knew rhetoric was the key to his success. His amazing and awful career was built on his rhetorical skill (Thonssen et al., 1970: 6). Hitler scholars seem unanimous in recognizing his speaking skill. His claim in 1939 was probably correct, “I am conscious that I have no equal in the art of swaying the masses” (Fisher, 1995: 141). The power which has always started the greatest religious and political avalanches in history rolling has from time immemorial been the magic power of the spoken word, and that alone. I know that fewer people are won over by the written word than by the spoken word and that every great movement on this earth owes its growth to speakers and not to great writers (Hitler, 1924: 1-76), and Hitler was speaking to the common man. So Hitler’s prose lacks the eloquence of Lenin, but Lenin wrote for the intellectuals, not the common man. The difference is between a thinker and a doer (Hitler, 2009: 15-28). Once Hitler declared, “Everything I have accomplished I owe to persuasion.” Kershaw said, “When it came to preparing his speeches, which he composed himself, he would withdraw into his room and could work deep into the night several evenings running, occupying three secretaries taking dictation straight into the typewriters before carefully correcting the drafts” (Kershaw, 1998: 535) because he accepted Aristotle’s axiom that the audience is “the end or object of the speech” (Thonssen et al., 1970: 65), and thought that the broad masses of people can be moved and swayed only by the power of speech” (Hitler, 1943: 106-107). He was condescending toward masses, especially women. He said “To convince women by reasoned argument is always impossible” (Hitler, 2000: 414). The extensive system of propaganda the Nazis put into place garnered and kept the support of women across Germany. Their portrayal changed from 1933 as the “Mother of the Country” to “worker” for the Nazi cause in the context of the Second World War (Moch, 2011: 1-2). “In short Hitler knew his people. Despite all those humiliations and insults, they were still applauding him.” Werner Maser explains (Maser, 1971: 258).

He was an amazing evil. It can be clearly seen in all the books and articles that have been published about him so far.

Joachim Fest writes in his biography of Hitler, “History records no phenomenon like him. No one else produced such incredible accelerations in the pace of history” (Fest, 1973: 3). According to Rosenbaum, Hitler was an evil incarnate. He says that a fitting epitaph for Hitler would be: “Because Adolf Hitler lived, 50 million people died.” As a British historian and biographer of Hitler, Alan Bullock asks an interesting question about him, “If Hitler isn’t evil who is?” (Rosenbaum, 1998: 86). As it is understood clearly, telling about Adolf Hitler requires a fairly strong language. His historical effects were tremendous (Kershaw, 1998: xx). In contrary to all of his negative sides, Hitler was also indispensable for his people and political party. He had built the Nazi party from seven members in 1919 to the largest political party in Germany in 1932. Historian Robert Waite writes, “Hitler was Nazidom. Seldom in the history of western civilization has so much depended on one man’s personality. He created his own political theory and a government that could not exist without him” (Waite, 1993: 3).

3. MAIN TECHNIQUES OF HITLER’S WAY OF PROPAGANDA

Campaigning across Germany in free parliamentary elections against candidates from six established parties, Hitler led the Nazis from 12 seats in the 647 seats German Parliament in 1928 (800,000 votes) to 107 seats (6.4 million votes) in 1930. According to German historian Eberhard Jäckel, “This was the greatest increase ever gained by a party from one election to the next in German history” (Jäckel, 1984: 16). Particularly after winning the majority of the seats in the Reichstag in the general elections of 1932, Hitler constructed a pragmatic Machiavelian
rhetorical theory of five storey for propaganda: “Scapegoating”, “lying”, “black-and-white reasoning”, “repetition”, and “emotional appeal” or in other words “passion over reason in public” through the mass media. This structure is the summary of his way of propaganda.

4.a) Find a scapegoat and edit strong lies on it.

As it is known well, one of the principles of Joseph Goebbels’ way of propaganda was that the propaganda must have facilitated the displacement of aggression by specifying the targets for hatred. It was necessary to indict one sole enemy to march against one sole enemy (Dob, 2008: 440). The jewish community was only a useful enemy so as to unite and clamp the supporters around the party strongly. Hundreds of of lies were told about the Jews for the ultimate purpose of a great dictatorship. According to Joseph Goebbels, “A lie repeated often enough becomes the truth” or “A hundred times repeated lie is the truth” (Barović, 2015: 177).

The Jews and communists were both the same in Hitler’s eyes. He declared, “80% of the Soviet leaders are Jews” (Kershaw, 1998: 42). Explains Klaus Fisher, “Anti-Semitism, in fact, was the oxygen of Hitler’s political life. Anti-Semitism was the hate that fueled the Nazi Movement” (Fisher, 1995: 89). Writes Waite, anti-Semitism “was as important to Hitler as economics was to Marx” (Waite, 1977: 362). In fact, Hitler scapegoated the Jews strategically. In 1926 he told an associate, “anti-Semitism is a useful revolutionary expedient. My Jews are a valuable hostage given to me by the Democracies. You will see how little time we need to upset the ideas of the whole world simply by attacking Judaism. Anti-Semitism is beyond question the most important weapon in my propaganda arsenal and I use it with almost deadly efficiency” (Rausching, 1939: 233). From then on, the Jews were singled out as the scapegoat for many of Germany's problems and for any of the Nazi party's failures. Anti-Semitism became the key tool in the party's efforts to unite the German people (Nelson, 1933: 2). Hence, violent anti-Semitism permeated the pages of the newspapers and magazines (Welch, 1993: 13). Once Hitler said: “Conscience is a Jewish invention like circumcision. My task is to free men from the dirty and degrading ideas of conscience and morality” (Waite, 1977: 16).

All Germany’s recent troubles could be blamed on these groups. The German people had been stabbed in the back following World War I, it was claimed, and their domestic fortunes had been ruined by the actions of groups such as the Communists and, above all, the Jewish people. The Jews were singled out as the scapegoat for many of Germany's problems and for any of the Nazi party's failures. Anti-Semitism became the key tool in the party's efforts to unite the German people (Nelson, 1933: 1-2).

4.b) Form a “black-and-white reasoning” in the mind of the society

Hitler’s patriotic rhetoric was a mechanical way of thinking for him. In a preface to “Hitler’s Table Talk”, British historian H. R. Trevor Roper describes Hitler’s opinion of the German people: “Dickschadel” (thick skulled), “Querschadel” (mentally fouled up) and “Dumm Köpfe” (dumb, stupid) (Hitler, 2000: xxiii). Moreover he did not conceal his contempt for his people. He told 200,000 cheering Berliners in 1926, “The broad masses are blind and stupid and don’t know what they are doing. They are primitive in attitude” (Kershaw, 1998: 287). Thus, one of his rhetorical theories also emphasizes one sided, black-and-white, all-or-nothing reasoning in later times because he thought that the thinking of the people was not complicated but very simple and all of one piece. Their thinking does not have multiple shadings. It has positive and negative, love or hate, right or wrong, truth or lie but never half this way and half that way” (Hitler, 1943: 183). Objective propaganda is foolish for Hitler. Once he said: “The primary task of propaganda is not to make an objective study of the truth, in so far as it favors the enemy, and
then set it before the masses with ‘academic’ fairness. The task of propaganda is to serve our own rights, always and unflinchingly’” (Hitler, 1943: 182).

4.c) Repeat the same lies systematically and intensively for a long time through a fully controlled mass media

Hitler believed that the masses, for whom he had little respect, could easily be won over through regular exposure to propaganda in schools, towns and the workplace, and in their leisure pursuits. The ministry established separate chambers to oversee the work of the press, radio, theatre, music, the creative arts and film (Todd and Waller, 2011: 83). The characteristic of Hitler’s visual propaganda was combined with visual arts and politics, such as political rallies, posters, caricatures, photos and advertisements. In particular, art was an area that Hitler’s particular interested in. Earlier in his life he had attempted to earn his living cost as an artist (Bie, 2016: 1). The ministry controlled the press through censorship and by allowing the Nazi publishing house, Eher Verlag, to buy up private newspapers until by 1939 it controlled two-thirds of the press. A German news agency regulated the supply of news and Goebbels held a daily press conference with editors to ensure the right messages arrived in print. Editors were held responsible for their papers and were liable for prosecution if they published unapproved material (Todd and Waller, 2011: 83). If a news editor did not go along with the orders, he lost his job, and could not get another in the information business. One must to be a registered “journalist” or “writer” to write for print media (Gabriele, 1993: 17-60). Independent newspapers and radios were silenced under that heavy pressure and an official Reich broadcasting organization was established instead of them all. The minister of propaganda casted a greater importance to the radio. So he wanted a public radio with the name of Volksempfänger to be established. Thus the radio started to broadcast in the most remote villages of Germany a short while later (Goebbels, 1933: 1). By 1934, Germany had the largest number of radios per capita in the world (Koonz, 2005: 94). During a radio exhibition in Berlin in August 1933 J. Goebbels claimed “It would not have been possible for us to take power or to use it in the ways we have without the radio” (Adena et al., 2013: 2). Adolf Hitler did not accept anybody else uncover his lies. So he tried to control all mass media with a great pressure since another side of Hitler’s distorted personality was his total inability to tell the truth. Hitler was a natural and compulsive liar. In some cases, his lies were so much a part of him that he did not know that they were lies. His political performance was based on lies and deception, including self-deception. “In Hitler’s case, a lie is not akin to drinking a hated medicine, but rather like consuming a tasty beverage imbibed in one gulp to quench [one’s] thirst” (Gershoni, 2014: 13). Probably from this point of view, Hitler agrees with Sigmund Freud, who wrote in 1924, the same year Hitler wrote Mein Kampf, “The orator who wishes to sway a crowd must exaggerate, and he must repeat the same thing again and again” (Toland, 1976: 221). Hence, Hitlerian propaganda was in great measure founded on Freud’s theory of repression and libido (Ellul, 1973: 5). He practically focused on slow, constant impregnation in essence. It creates convictions and compliance through imperceptible influences that are effective only by continuous repetition (Ellul, 1973: 17-18). As a matter of fact, his disdain for the audience is also well-known. Therefore his rhetorical theory says: “The receptivity of the masses is very limited; their intelligence is small, but their power of forgetting is enormous. Consequently, all effective propaganda must harp on a few slogans until the last member of the public understands what you want him to understand by your slogan” (Hitler, 1943: 180). In this context, it was important to launch short, clear messages that are easy to remember. Thus, Goebbels sent the following slogans in the ether: “One nation, one state, one
leader”, “The Jews are our misfortune!”, “You are nothing, the people is everything” and so forth (Barovic, 2015: 179).

4.d) Establish a strong and sound emotional relationship with the public

Hitler never married or entered into a deep relationship with a woman. Rather, all of his emotional energy was channeled into “the National Socialist movement and the German nation.” Hitler “invested his soul” in the nation, which served as the 13 compensatory replacement for the wife he never had (Gershoni, 2014: 12-13). This case might have created or facilitated another part of Hitler’s way of propaganda, that is, the passion should always be over people’s reason. He also found out Ciceroonian maxim “Man is moved more by passion than by reason” in order to make it a part of his own rhetorical theory (Schwartz and Rycenga, 1965: 145). Accordingly, propaganda for the masses had to be simple, it had to concentrate on as few points as possible, which then had to be repeated many times, with emphasis on such emotional elements as love and hatred (Welch, 2002: 12). Just as Hitler said, “Persuasion must be aimed at the emotions and only to a very limited degree at the allegedly intellect because the overwhelming majority of the people are so feminine by nature and attitude that solid reasoning determines their thoughts and actions far less than emotions and feeling” (Hitler, 1943: 183). It carried through with a ruthless consistency a campaign of propaganda which appealed directly to the emotions rather than to the intellect and was reinforced at all levels by terror and violence (Welch, 2002: 18). In this way of propaganda, Hitler appealed to many university professors and college students. Bullock writes: “The majority of the professors gave their support to the regime” (Bullock, 1992: 325). His domestic popularity was being heard all over the world. In 1936 Winston Churchill said: “Hitler has restored Germany’s honor.” (Gilbert, 1991: 457).

4. CONCLUSION

In this work, Hitler’s type of propaganda was researched through literature review. As it is well-known in the academic and political circles all around the world, Hitler’s rhetorical skill was amazing and a key to all of his success in his political career. Adolf Hitler’s propaganda secrets have always been examined at full length with a great curiosity in those circles from the Nazi era on. A large number of books and academic articles have been written in this respect over time. Therefore, Hitler’s way of propaganda is considered as the main reference with regard to the concept of “propaganda” in all political and academic world today.

Hitler knew that he had to win democratic elections so as to gain the majority of the seats in the Reichstag. Hence he constructed a pragmatic rhetorical theory that emphasized “scapegoating”, “lying”, “repetition”, “black-and-white reasoning”, and “emotional appeal” on his audience.

Adolf Hitler died in 1945. However, the techniques of his rhetorical theory on propaganda is still well-known in academic circles. What is more, they are still commonly applied in political circles. Thereof, his theory of propaganda is going on to be a primary source for new researchers and politicians around the globe.

Here it is expected that this work will be a good source for everybody who will make an attempt to do a research or just to obtain information in this matter from now on.

REFERENCES


INTERNET REFERENCES