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ILLIBERAL PROPAGANDA:

POLITICAL DISCOURSE, MONOPOLIES OF KNOWLEDGE, AND GOVERNMENTALITY IN ORBAN'S HUNGARY

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Declaration

I, the undersigned Daniel Berg, hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis.

To the best of my knowledge this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgement has been made.

This thesis contains no material, which has been accepted as part of the requirements of any other academic degree or non-degree program, in English or in any other language.

This is a true copy of the thesis, including final revisions.

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Abstract

Propaganda is a ubiquitous theme in modern politics. This thesis presents a case study of the propaganda techniques used by Hungary's ruling party, Fidesz, with an aim of exploring a proposed model of propaganda, illiberal propaganda. The nature of propaganda and illiberal democracies is discussed, as though propaganda is present in virtually all political systems, its use is constrained by regime type and political actualities on the ground. Drawing on critical and Marxist theory, the author argues that the Governmentality of illiberal regimes focuses on building a monopoly on knowledge not only in the political sphere, but also across society, in a concentrated effort to shape citizens' governability and manufacture consent for policies through epistemic control. The case study of illiberal propaganda in Hungary argues that this technique is predicated on three conceptual pillars: reactionism, nationalism and populism. A review of Hungary's epistemic landscape is provided, along with an analysis five examples of Fidesz propaganda. The Kötcse speech of 2009, the national consultation of 2011, the Yearly Evaluation of 2012, the "illiberal democracy" speech of 2014, and the poster campaigns of 2015 to 2017 are analyzed using insights from discourse analysis and Jowett and O'Donnell's 10-step division of propaganda analysis.

“When one with honeyed words but evil mind

Persuades the mob, great woes befall the state.”

– Euripides, *Orestes*

"The whole aim of practical politics is to keep the populace alarmed (and hence clamorous to be led to safety) by menacing it with an endless series of hobgoblins, all of them imaginary."

– H. L. Mencken

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INTRODUCTION

Context

Propaganda is a ubiquitous theme in modern politics. The 20th century was in many ways its golden age, as the advent of mass communication, the spread of education and literacy, and the permeation of political conflict through all layers of society established propaganda as a potent political tool. In the early part of the century, nationalist movements and both sides of belligerents in the Great War used propaganda to rally support for their respective causes. Propaganda was also deployed to devastating effect by the totalitarian regimes of the mid-century, manipulating entire populations to make unprecedented sacrifices and commit horrendous atrocities in the name of Fascism and Stalinism. Subsequently, the Cold War also saw the use of propaganda by both of the superpowers in a concentrated effort to win more hearts and minds than their opponent.

At the dawn of the 21st century, the terror attacks of September 11th and the resulting conflicts in the Middle East were also framed through the use of propaganda by the Bush administration and Islamic fundamentalists alike. Near the end of the second decade of the century, propaganda still has a prominent place in politics. In the US, the results of the 2016 presidential election were tainted by the prevalence of "fake news" and suspected foreign intervention. The use of sophisticated propaganda and disinformation tactics was also suspected in several European elections in early 2017, notably in the Netherlands, Austria and France. Further, democratic and authoritarian governments alike continue to use propaganda, albeit with varying intensity and by different means, to consolidate support or maintain their hold on power. While the age of

all-encompassing mass ideologies has passed, the emergence of the networked society offers new and subtle tools for propagandists, supplemented by a century of experience. The extensive history of propaganda and recent developments combined ensure the subject's continued prominence in the field of political communication studies, and further technological advances in mass communication will likely continue to do so for the foreseeable future.

Thesis Structure and Relevance

The following thesis presents a case study of the propaganda techniques used by Hungary's ruling party, Fidesz, with an aim of exploring a proposed model of propaganda, illiberal propaganda. The thesis opens with a review of some of the definitions of propaganda as developed in the propaganda studies literature, and with particular regard to issues surrounding the normative and epistemological dimensions of propaganda. Second, the nature of illiberal democracies is discussed, as while propaganda is present in virtually all political systems, its use is constrained by regime type and political actualities on the ground. The author explores the dichotomy between liberal and illiberal democracies, the distinctions between illiberal, authoritarian and totalitarian regimes, and the political communication favored by illiberal governments. Finally, the review of relevant literature concludes with a discussion of some applicable insights from critical theory. The work of Gramsci, Althusser, and Foucault are used to conceptualize how illiberal regimes exert epistemic control. Borrowing a term from Innis, the author argues that these regimes work to construct a monopoly on knowledge not only in the political sphere, but also across society, in a concentrated effort to shape their citizens' governability and manufacture consent for their policies through epistemic control.

The second half of the thesis features an analysis of selected examples of Fidesz propaganda from 2009 to 2017, opening with an overview of the three pillars of illiberal propaganda and Hungary's epistemic landscape. The author argues that Fidesz developed and continues to mobilize an intricate and highly effective propaganda machine, predicated on reactionary nationalist populism. Further, the thesis aims to demonstrate the ways in which Fidesz is working to establish an effective monopoly on knowledge in Hungary through exerting control over the media and other political, scientific, cultural and educational institutions. The distinctive nature and relative complexity of the Hungarian language means that as a case, it is underrepresented in English academic literature, particularly with regards to discourse analysis and other text-driven methods. Nevertheless, the author maintains that the model of illiberal propaganda proposed could be applied, with slight modification, to the activities of similar regimes in Belarus, Russia, Turkey, or Poland, as well as further afield.

Research Question and Methodology

The central point of inquiry is how illiberal governments shape the governability of their citizens and manufacture consent for their policies through a mixture of traditional propaganda techniques, modern political communication tools, and the exercise of a monopoly on knowledge. In the specific case of Hungary, the thesis focuses on how Viktor Orbán's regime communicates its identity through the use of propaganda, the types of narratives commonly employed by Fidesz, and the strategic and epistemic purposes of the party's propaganda efforts. Five examples of Fidesz propaganda are analyzed to demonstrate the central ideological elements underpinning the Fidesz propaganda machine. The texts are first evaluated individually, applying insights from

discourse analysis to demonstrate how they use the rhetoric of reactionism, nationalism, and populism. They are then analyzed in aggregate according to Jowett and O'Donnell's 10-step plan of propaganda analysis, reproduced below.

10 Divisions for Propaganda Analysis

1. The ideology and purpose of the propaganda campaign
2. The context in which the propaganda occurs
3. Identification of the propagandist
4. The structure of the propaganda organization
5. The target audience
6. Media utilization techniques
7. Special techniques to maximize effect
8. Audience reaction to various techniques
9. Counterpropaganda, if present
10. Effects and Evaluation

(Jowett and O'Donnell 2006, 270).

PART 1: LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1. *Propaganda Defined*

Propaganda is a common subject of study in the field of political communication, yet the concept is vast, and many varying definitions appear in the literature. This is complicated by the many subtypes of propaganda, as well as changing perceptions through history and depending on national context. The term is also often saddled with negative implications. For many, the mere mention of propaganda immediately brings to mind lies, fabrications, and untruths, or dystopian visions of vast machineries dedicated

to churning out disinformation and manipulating the masses into abject compliance. While this is a commonly held stereotype, political communication need not be monolithic or even patently false to qualify as propaganda. In reality, propaganda is designed like many other political communication campaigns, though successful propaganda requires creativity, an intimate knowledge of the appropriate techniques, and a finger on the pulse of the society it targets. Definitions of propaganda can be divided into negative, neutral, and positive, an the same texts can be described as one or the other by applying a different standard for what qualifies as propaganda. It is thus advisable to outline a definitional framework and delimit the concept before proceeding further.

As an initial point of departure, one can begin with the neutral definition of Jowett and O'Donnell, which approaches propaganda as a distinct form of communication, and more specifically as a "subcategory of persuasion" (Jowett and O'Donnell 7). In this light, propaganda is "the deliberate, systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct behavior to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist" (*Ibid.*). The first criterion for propaganda mentioned is that it must be deliberate and systematic, which implies that it cannot happen by accident, but always by design, and that it is conducted according to some overarching rationale. Second, the goal of propaganda is not only to influence how the public perceives an issue, but also to fundamentally alter cognitive processes. The ultimate aim is to provoke a specific response or change in behavior. Lastly, there is the criterion that the invoked response unfolds in line with the propagandist's intent, which implies a desired, predetermined trajectory and end goal. In sum, propaganda always has a clear purpose and process, and

it alters not only how the recipient of its messages sees that world, but also how they interact with it.

The description of propaganda as a subcategory of persuasion is also of interest. According to the Jowett/O'Donnell purpose model of propaganda, persuasion is a response-shaping, response-reinforcing, response-changing communication process. Its purpose is "to promote [the] mutual fulfillment of needs" of the sender and receiver. The purpose of information, on the other hand, is to "share ideas, explain and instruct," with the primary goal of "to promote mutual understanding". In this model, propaganda is situated between information and persuasion, and is designed to "control information flow, manage public opinion, and manipulate behavior patterns." Ultimately, its aim is to promote the objectives of the sender, but not necessarily in the best interest of the receiver. (Jowett and O'Donnell 29).

Jowett and O'Donnell refer to several particular forms of propaganda, categorized by function. The three main forms are white, gray and black propaganda. These three forms are distinguished by "an acknowledgment of source and its accuracy of information" (Jowett and O'Donnell 16). White propaganda is "presented in a manner that attempts to convince the audience that the sender is the 'good guy' with the best ideas and political ideology" (*Ibid*.). Public information campaigns, nation branding, and stump speeches are often white propaganda. Black propaganda refers to "when a source is concealed or credited to a false authority and spreads lies, fabrications, and deceptions" (Jowett and O'Donnell 17). Examples include the propaganda methods and messages perfected by totalitarian regimes such as the Third Reich, and the disinformation campaigns favored by the Soviet Union during the Cold War. Gray propaganda is the

median of the two, when "the source may or may not be correctly identified, and the accuracy of the information is uncertain" (Jowett and O'Donnell 20). Gray propaganda is the hardest to pin down. It often hews closer to either white or black propaganda. A prominent example from the Cold War is the work of Radio Free Europe, which broadcast anti-communist messages beyond the Iron Curtain. Ostensibly a private enterprise, it was actually funded by the US government (Turner 2007, 11).

The Jowett and O'Donnell definition is clear about the process of propaganda and its constituent elements, as well as its place in communication theory. However, it leaves aside – albeit by design – the normative and epistemic elements of propaganda for the sake of clarity. These two elements are of considerable importance when analyzing propaganda as a political phenomenon. Shaping perceptions and manipulating cognitions could also generally describe education or advertising, while the desired intent of the propagandist is by itself inadequate to argue that propaganda is harmful, unethical, or damaging to rational thought or the quality of a democracy.

Trying to arrive at a comprehensive definition of propaganda that accounts for its ethical dimensions, the philosopher Randal Marlin proposes:

> **Propaganda** = (def.) The organized attempt through communication to affect belief or action or inculcate attitudes in a large audience in ways that circumvent or suppress an individual's adequately informed, rational, reflective judgment. (Marlin 2013, 12)

Like Jowett and O'Donnell, Marlin focuses on propaganda as a directed, systematic set of appeals carefully presented to sway the opinions of not just one individual, but entire masses. An important addition is the second part, which highlights the way propaganda circumvents and suppresses informed, rational, and reflective judgment. This aspect of highlights how propaganda not only channels individuals' existing cognitive

processes and shapes them to a desired end, but also works to alter their core values so they fall in line with the aims of the propagandist. This leads to fundamental shifts in behavior and attitudes, leading to decisions based on exogenous influence as opposed to rational choice, clearly troubling from the perspective of individual autonomy and personal freedom.

Marlin acknowledges the debt he owes to two of his predecessors, George Orwell and Jacques Ellul. The former is known for his well-deserved place in modern English literature. Orwell wrote in detail about the manipulation of language and its dangers in his essay, “Politics and the English Language”, along with other similar works. The latter was an early and prominent pioneer of propaganda studies. Ellul’s magisterial work, *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes*, is still a foundational text of the field five decades later. Any informed discussion of propaganda would be incomplete without reference to the duo.

Orwell helped establish propaganda as a subject of interest in the popular consciousness, through his essays on language and politics, and with the publication of his iconic novel, *1984*. A main takeaway of the author’s work on language is that due to sloppy, inexact usage, willful negligence and change over time, language no longer conveys the ideas it purports to represent. This observation holds particular relevance in an age of social media and Twitter politics. *1984* is a vivid and disturbing portrait of a society completely beholden to propaganda, a thinly veiled lampooning of Soviet Russia.

In his essay, “Politics and the English Language", Orwell is particularly critical of political writing, which in his view is generally of poor quality, overly reliant on mechanistic repetition and vague, stilted metaphors. This is significant in the context of

propaganda because as Orwell observes, "if thought corrupts language, language can also corrupt thought" (Orwell 1968, 127-40). In his view, political writers and their ilk use a whole lot of fancy, evocative words while saying nothing of value, leading to an overall deterioration of public discourse and the death of rational debate. Irresponsible use or deliberate manipulate of language is a threat to liberal democratic society precisely because it erodes citizens' ability to think critically. This line of reasoning is taken to its natural – if hyperbolic – conclusion in *1984*. The totalitarian one-state government in the novel has completely colonized language and openly uses speech as a mechanism of control. In this society, words are weapons, lies are truth, peace is war, and any who disagree with the limited vocabulary of permitted usage set out by the government's Newspeak commits a thoughtcrime. *1984* is fiction, but it highlights many of the potentially troubling associations between language – specifically, its misuse and manipulation – and thought, issues prominent in a discussion of the ethical and epistemic aspects propaganda.

Jacques Ellul describes propaganda as decidedly modern technique, governed by scientific considerations and insights and rules drawn from social science disciplines like psychology and sociology (Ellul 1973, 4). He argues that propaganda is analytical, statistical, and precisely tuned to achieve the maximum effect possible, which makes it all the more dangerous. The difference between modern and classical propaganda lies, according to Ellul, in both purpose and process:

> The aim of modern propaganda is no longer to modify ideas, but to provoke action. It is no longer to change adherence to a doctrine, but to make the individual cling irrationally to a process of action. It is no longer to lead to a choice, but to loosen the reflexes. It is no longer to transform an opinion, but to arouse an active and mythical belief. (*Ibid.* 25)

In terms of external characteristics, propaganda addresses the masses, of which the individual is only ever be a component part. It must also be totalizing, in that it must control all available mediums and account for each medium's strengths and weaknesses; it must be continuous, dominating the entirety of the information sphere and doing so over an extended period; and finally, it must be organized, both in delivery and design (Ellul 6-33). In regards to internal characteristics, to be effective it must be cognizant of the psychological terrain of a given society; it must account for fundamental currents trends; it must be phrased and contrived as to be timely; and it tends to perform better when avoiding outright falsehoods (*Ibid.* 33-57).

Ellul also distinguishes between four paired categories of propaganda: political and sociological propaganda, the propaganda of agitation and integration, vertical and horizontal propaganda, and rational and irrational propaganda.

The main focus of the present discussion, political propaganda, "involves techniques of influence employed by a government, a party, an administration, a pressure group, with a view to changing the behavior of the public" (*Ibid.* 62). Sociological propaganda is a more nebulous concept; less rooted in political organizations and more in the general culture of a society. It can be reflected in arts and entertainment, religion, literature, advertising, and the general *zeitgeist*. Sociological propaganda is not deliberate but self-reinforcing and spontaneous, though political propagandists will often turn the language of sociological propaganda to service their own deliberate designs.

Agitative propaganda is "subversive propaganda…led by a party seeking to destroy the government or the established order," favored by revolutionaries and governments that wish to "galvanize energies to mobilize the entire nation for war" or

inspire support for some other drastic or radical action (*Ibid.* 72). According to Ellul, this type of propaganda requires massive exertions and sacrifice from the population, and is thus unsustainable in the long term. He groups the propaganda of Mao, Lenin and Hitler into this category, and argues it is most useful in manipulating the lower classes and the uneducated. Integrative propaganda, on the other hand, is described as the

> propaganda of conformity… [a] self-reproducing propaganda that seeks to obtain stable behavior, to adapt the individual to his everyday life, to reshape his thoughts and behavior in terms of the permanent social setting. (*Ibid.* 75)

Ellul associates integrative propaganda with the modern period along with Western civilization. He notes that it is more effective when targeted at better-educated segments of society. His most prominent examples of integrative propaganda are the techniques applied in the Soviet Union after Lenin's death and the consolidation of the '30s, as well as the propaganda used by the United States during the Cold War, which put patriotism and the ideal of freedom above national origin, political affinity, or creed. Ellul further notes that revolutionary and radical movements that form governments will have to slowly transition from agitative to integrative propaganda, a difficult and drawn-out process (*Ibid.* 78).

Vertical and horizontal propaganda refers to the origin of the propaganda. As the names imply, the former is a top-down process, useful for proponents of agitative propaganda, while the latter is propagated by a group or societal unit which is ostensibly equal in status and power, and particularly useful for integration propaganda (*Ibid.* 81). Vertical propaganda is most effective when applied by a charismatic leader figure, while horizontal propaganda is predicated on social cohesion and peer-group connections.

The last pair of categories in Ellul's typology is irrational and rational propaganda, which touches directly on the epistemic dimensions of propaganda. The common perception of propaganda is of irrational propaganda, characterized by logical fallacies, appeals to pathos over ethos, and deliberate misrepresentations of the truth. Rational propaganda is more subtle, and is characterized by the use of statistics, facts, figures and other seemingly valid evidence, but carefully curated and presented to reflect the propagandists' purpose.

There are many other existing definitions of propaganda in the literature, but between the work of Jowett and O'Donnell, Marlin and Ellul, the pertinent dimensions of the neutral and negative definitions are well represented. The views of the author align most closely with Cunningham's normatively charged position on propaganda:

> Because of propaganda's systematic mistreatment of truth and information and their procedural safeguards, its virtually imperceptible erosion of individual capability and social freedom, and its unnerving magnitude…it is simply myopic to regard [it] as an ethically neutral state of affairs. (Cunningham 2002,205)

As mentioned above, there are also positive definitions of propaganda, such as the ones advanced by early public relations professionals like Bernays and Lee, as well as Harold Laswell, who took a distinctly utilitarian view of propaganda. A detailed look at these is omitted here because they are somewhat anachronistic, in many cases predating the Second World War, and also because their focus is more on advertising, public relations and public opinion than political propaganda. Similarly, Noam Chomsky's work on propaganda is not discussed, as it is a mainly a critique of the contemporary media environment of the United States.

In its most insidious form, propaganda deploys sophisticated techniques with messages that offer compelling narratives and comprehensive worldviews, eroding citizens' ability to think and judge rationally. When put into the service of political goals, it is a highly potent tool for generating consent and even enthusiasm for particular policies. Yet propaganda is socially constructed and embedded in specific cultural and political contexts, so when discussing specific cases, it is critical to account for these variances. In the following section, the author explores the concept of illiberal democracy, with the aim of highlighting the identifying characteristic of these regimes and the effects they have on political discourse.

1.2. *Illiberal Democracy Defined*

Much has been written lately of the apparent crisis of liberal democracy. In academic, policymaking, and diplomatic circles alike, the heady optimism that accompanied the third wave of democratization has been supplanted by a creeping existential dread over the uncertain future of Western liberal democracy. The increasing prevalence of a number of so-called "illiberal democracies" is a significant contributing factor to this unease. But what exactly is an illiberal democracy? Where is the line between liberal and illiberal democracy, and between illiberal democracy and authoritarianism? And finally, in terms of political communication, what are the distinguishing qualities of these regimes?

In democratization literature, regime types are traditionally divided into three categories: democratic, authoritarian and totalitarian. Yet as Linz and Stepan remarked, "the existing tripartite regime classification has not only become less useful to democratic theorists and practitioners…it has also become and obstacle" (Linz and Stepan 1996, 39).

The question then arises of how to define regimes which are not full autocracies or totalitarian states, but do not qualify as full democracies, or at best can only be called defective democracies?

Since the end of the Cold War, scholars have worked diligently to broaden traditional regime typologies so as to account for different degrees of democracy and authoritarianism. This endeavor has led to the proliferation of a number of terms for regimes that occupy the "gray area" between these two poles, collectively called "democracy-with-adjectives" or "autocracy-with-adjectives" (Altundal 2016).

Some notable examples are illiberal democracy (Zakaria 1997), empty or low-intensity democracy (Diamond 1999), hollow democracy (Gagon 2013), hybrid regime (Diamond 2002), dictablanda and democradura (Karl 1995), and electoral or competitive authoritarianism (Levitsky and Way 2009). In the following discussion, the author will use illiberal democracy, for two reasons.

First, while similar in many regards, other related terms have different contextual elements based on the particular case in question. For instance, Diamond uses competitive authoritarianism in describing several Latin American countries, but unlike their Western counterparts, it is arguable if these were ever full democracies, or if they simply transitioned from hardline authoritarian regimes to ones with the trappings of democratic systems. Second, the central focus of the thesis is the case of Hungary. Prime Minister Viktor Orban has personally described his governing vision as an illiberal democracy, provoking outrage from leaders of other European states. For those focused on political discourse, language is key. The main theme of the present inquiry is how Fidesz constructs its image through the use of propaganda. With this in mind, it seems

appropriate to take Orban at his word and categorize Hungary as an example of an illiberal democracy. But what exactly is an illiberal democracy?

The dominant paradigm of postmodern Western politics is liberal democracy. After the collapse of the USSR seemed to signal the "end of history" (Fukuyama 1989), this system of governance seemed to many the last and best model of government. Yet despite the optimism that accompanied third wave democratization, the often-bitter experience of the next decades showed that these democratic transitions were at times unsustainable in the long-term, prone as they were to democratic backsliding, or even more troublingly, reversible, leading to the rise of a variety of defective democracies, one of which is illiberal democracies. Fareed Zakaria used this term prominently in a much-discussed essay published soon after the end of the Cold War. At the outset, he the highlights the two component parts of liberal democracy: democratic decision-making as represented by competitive, fair, open elections; and constitutional liberalism, meaning the protection of individual rights and freedoms within a rule of law framework (Zakaria 1997).

Illiberal democracies are regimes that retain some elements of the former (though often in a diminished or defective capacity), while rejecting or repressing the values associated with the latter. Illiberal democracies will hold elections, often as regularly as liberal democracies, but while these elections may be procedurally sound -- meaning no outright election rigging, coercion of voters or similar abuses – they will often favor the ruling party over potential challengers. Similarly, while these regimes may pay lip service to the rights of their citizens, they will often infringe on these rights or even hold them in complete disregard. Zakaria argues that this is problematic because "democracy without

constitutional liberalism [produces] centralized regimes, the erosion of liberty, ethnic competition, conflict, and war" *(Ibid.*). Further, the values often associated with modern conceptions of liberalism, such as an emphasis on pluralism and acceptance or a dedication to social justice, are also viewed with distaste or rejected outright by illiberal regimes.

It is important to distinguish illiberal democracies from authoritarian and totalitarian regimes as much as from full democracies. Following Linz's typology, totalitarian regimes are characterized by "an ideology, a single mass party…and concentrated power in an individual and his collaborators or a small group that is not accountable to any large constituency and cannot be dislodged from power by institutionalized, peaceful means" (Linz 2000, 67). Authoritarian regimes, on the other hand, are defined as

> political systems with [limited] political pluralism, without elaborate and guiding ideology, but with distinctive mentalities, without extensive or intensive political mobilization…and at which a leader or occasionally a small group exercises power within formally ill-defined limits, but actually quite predictable ones. (*Ibid*.159)

In illiberal democracies, there is always at least the surface appearance of political pluralism, with regular, multiparty elections, some form of representative legislative body that meets regularly, an ostensibly independent judiciary, and other democratic institutions. Despite the existence of these institutions, they are often beholden to state interests, controlled by elites loyal to the governing party, or insufficiently autonomous to act as true checks and balances on power. This aligns with a recent definition which characterizes illiberal democracies as regimes where "civil and political rights are not

guaranteed, [and] although they exist *de jure,* constitutional principles do not *de facto* work properly or have less effect on the government" (Altundal 2016, 10).

Altundal follows Merkel's concept of embedded democracy, which measures democracy across five dimensions: electoral regime, political liberties, civil rights, horizontal accountability, and effective power to govern (Merkel 2004, 37). Civil rights are a damaged or missing attribute in illiberal democracies, and political rights are also often defective in these regimes (Altundal 2016, 12). According to Merkel, the former is comprised of the rule of law, or "the principle that the state is bound to uphold its laws effectively and to act according to clearly defined prerogatives", and constitutional rights, which "protect the individual against the state executive and against acts of the legislator that infringe on an individual's freedom" (Merkel 2004, 39). Negative freedoms that enshrine the rights of life, liberty and property, individual autonomy, and an impartial, rational state are core tenets of classical liberalism, so it is not surprising that these areas of political life are most threatened in illiberal democracies.

A clear delineation of the concept of illiberal democracy allows an examination of how these regimes utilize political communication to cement their authority and perpetuate their power. While totalitarian and authoritarian regimes exercise rigid control over mediums of communication, illiberal regimes do so in less overt ways, primarily through regulation of content, consolidation of control and pressure applied via state-friendly oligarchs and obsequious editors (Hague and Harrop 2007, 139). Charismatic leaders in illiberal regimes can exploit the appearance of a pluralist media to target content at their supporters and launch attacks on their rivals with impunity, while

avoiding claims of censorship or manipulation. Simon describes such leaders as "democratators", and outlines their preferred method of media control:

> Deprived of an ideological basis for state control, [the democratators] have adapted to a new global reality. Instead of relying on brute force and direct control, they use stealth, manipulations, and subterfuge [to] hide their policies behind a democratic façade [and] manage critical expression through diverse measures such as national security prosecutions, punitive tax audits, manipulation of government advertising, and seemingly reasonable [content restrictions]. (Simon 2015, 27)

Democratators come in all stripes and situate themselves across the entire political spectrum (from extreme right to extreme left) according to personal preference, but their methods are remarkably consistent. Their main interest is to maintain the illusion of democracy while using underhanded political communication techniques to advance their agenda, consolidate their support base, enrapture their supporters, and discredit the opposition. Since they control the legislative mechanism of the state and eschew violence and outright repression, their actions have the veneer of legality. Regular elections ensure that they can also claim legitimacy and a democratic mandate, despite the fact that these elections are often heavily weighed in their favor through the strategic deployment of propaganda and debilitating restrictions on their opponents' access to media. Democratators preserve their media dominance through placing major television channels, newspapers, and radio stations in the hands of stromans and sympathizers, and pump public funds into these ventures through government advertising. The only medium democratators have yet to sufficiently conquer is the Internet, but they are quickly adapting with the use of fake news, disinformation, and the employment of a veritable army of paid content producers, known in netspeak as "trolls".

Political life in an illiberal democracy takes place on a carefully constructed stage set, mimicking the appearance of a true democracy but devoid of the substance. Democratators play the role of the director. The actors on the stage, the citizens, seem to move and act freely, but in truth they have no real agency: their options are limited by predetermined factors. Most everything they see and hear is constrained by the director's choices, realized through the work of crony media and propagandists, who act as stage managers. The play itself may be improvisatory in nature, and some parts are given greater leeway to improvise to keep up appearances, but those who step too far out of character are quickly whisked off the stage, and often their fellow players are none the wiser.

The preceding overview of the technique of propaganda and the nature of illiberal democracies allows for a more nuanced discussion of how propaganda is applied in such regimes. Before turning to a practical case study of illiberal propaganda, however, some relevant insights from Western Marxism and critical theory are touched on, with the aim of fleshing out the concepts of epistemic control and monopolies of knowledge, foundational elements of illiberal propaganda.

1.3. *Epistemic Control, Governmentality and Monopolies of Knowledge*

Of the commonly applied frameworks of political philosophy, Marxism and Marxist-inspired perspectives lend themselves best to the analysis of the social and cultural dimensions of politics. While Marx himself focused primarily on the economic aspects of political life, his successors in academia, particularly Western and Neo-Marxists, laid the groundwork for a rich body of work that examines the intricate relationships between knowledge, ideology, culture and power. The writings of Antonio Gramsci and Louis

Althusser on hegemony and ideological state apparatuses, along with the theories of Michel Foucault on power-knowledge, discourse and Governmentality, have much to offer students of propaganda. They are of particular interest for those who wish to examine how propaganda forms knowledge and channels communication to perpetuate and preserve power relations in a given society.

Antonio Gramsci dealt extensively with the concept of hegemony in his essays written while imprisoned by Mussolini's Fascists. In classic Marxist theory, the superstructure refers to the political, social and cultural factors of human society, which serve to perpetuate the economic conditions that make up the base, composed of the means and relations of production (Marx 1977). Gramsci expanded on Marx, in what he called "the philosophy of praxis", by dividing the superstructure further into two levels, political society and civil society (Gramsci 1971, 12). The former is the traditional domain of state power: the military, police, judiciary, and similar institutions. The latter symbolizes how the elite exercises power throughout a given society based on the "consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the [dominant group]" (*Ibid.*).

This concept of cultural hegemony articulates the tangible power of thoughts and words in the political sphere. For Gramsci, the pen may not be mightier than the sword in all instances, but it is just as necessary. The stability of power structures is expressly dependent on the viability of the ideas championed by the elite, and how well these ideas are conveyed to the masses. Gramsci's work also touches on a concept that would be developed further by Foucault, the significance of discourse as a mechanism of control, as he argued,

> a hegemonic class held state power…through its ability to [have] successfully articulated or expressed in a coherent, unified fashion the most essential elements in the ideological discourses of the subordinate classes in civil society (Ramos 1982).

Althusser would further expand on Gramsci's idea of cultural hegemony. Like his predecessor, Althusser makes a distinction between what he terms the (Repressive) State Apparatus, which includes all aspects and organs of government, and Ideological State Apparatuses, which include private institutions like the media, schools, family, political parties, literature, the arts, and so forth. While the former operates primarily through violence, the latter operates primarily through ideology (Althusser 1970, 146). Ideological State Apparatuses are key to epistemic control, because they are the methods by which the state propagates and perpetuates its ideology. The (Repressive) State Apparatus serves as the enforcement arm of the state, but it is only one half of the power dynamic in political society. According to Althusser, "no class can hold State power over a long period of time without at the same time exercising its hegemony over and in the State Ideological Apparatuses" (*Ibid*.) Divorced from the Marxist preoccupation with class struggle, the implication remains that the elites in a society must assert themselves both in the private and public sphere, and control or at least influence public discourse if they hope to maintain their power in the long term. The best tool for this is propaganda, a technique of epistemic control geared to consciously constructing discourse in a given society.

Michel Foucault revolutionized the way social scientist examined discourse and the power of discursive formations. Foucault wrote about a wide range of subjects, but the exploration of the dynamics of power in society was central to most of his work. While he did not define himself as a Marxist, and tended to reject such labels, including the one

he was branded with most often, that of "post-structuralist". The most pertinent aspects of the Foucaldian oevuer to the study of propaganda are his thoughts on the relationship between power and knowledge and the related concept of Governmentality.

Foucault saw power not as a rigid, top-down structure. Instead, he argued that power relations permeated all aspects of society, and that the production of power is essentially a discursive process. In the Foucauldian worldview, power is linked directly to truth and knowledge. Power is channeled and reinforced through "regimes of truth" and through disciplinary processes, which transforms individuals into subjects:

> Each society has its regime of truth, its "general politics" of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true (Foucault 1984, 73).

Following Foucault, propaganda can be conceived as a technique of epistemic control. Power and knowledge are two sides of the same coin, a realization that lies at the heart of propaganda. Propaganda shapes discourse, setting boundaries for what can and cannot be said, and accordingly, what can and cannot be conceived in a given discursive setting. The skilled propagandist acknowledges, as Foucault did, that power is socially constructed and constituted through discourse.

Those who wish to sway the masses must not only shape what they think, but how they think. Propaganda is a technique predicated on promoting the state's preferred regimes of truth at the expense of all others. It is not enough to convince the masses that Jews are parasites, for instance, or that the Five Year Plan is working. To be effective, propaganda must remove the option of any alternative so completely; embed the government's regime of truth so fully, control discourse so holistically, that its subjects

never think to question it premises. The thoughts that perhaps Jews are just like everyone else, or that there was ever any doubt about the success of the Five Year Plan, are simply not viable in this discursive setting.

By dominating and shaping discourse through propaganda, governments promote one canonical version of the truth: an official, state-sanctioned regime of truth. It does not matter if its claims made are objectively, rationally true or not. If the propagandist is effective, the discursive power of propaganda conditions the subject to accept fully its claims, and reject any that are antithetical. In this sense, propaganda is a technique of rationalization, which touches on another Foucaldian concept, that of Governmentality.

Foucault never gave a concise definition of Governmentality, but described it as "the conduct of conduct" and "governmental rationality", meaning

> a way or system of thinking about the nature of the practice of government (who can govern; what governing is; what or who is governed), capable of making some form of that activity thinkable and practicable both to its practitioners and to those upon whom it was practiced. (Gordon 1991, 2).

Governmentality is the rationalization of the processes of government, and propaganda is a technique through which this rationale is encoded, transmitted, and conveyed to its subjects, the citizens. This goes beyond the formal procedure of government (how leaders are elected, laws are passed, decisions are made, and so forth), to the core reasoning behind the processes. Through propaganda, the state can frame its policies into a discursive formation, which justifies and perpetuates its power in the social and political sphere. While Gramsci explored the nature of cultural hegemony and Althusser described Ideological State Apparatuses as the tools for achieving and maintaining this hegemony, Foucault expanded these concepts through the linkage of power and knowledge. In the Foucauldian sense, power is diffuse through all of society, and while the state and other

actors that wield power do use coercion and repression, a large part of their hold on power is discursive in nature. Discourse establishes and reifies power, and by suffusing all layers of social life, it turns subjects into unwitting but willing partners in their own subjectification.

Having discussed the significance of linkages between power, knowledge, and truth through the lens of Marxist and critical theory, the question arises of how to temporally influence and control such abstract domains. One possible approach is developing the concept of a monopoly on knowledge put forward by the Canadian communication theorist Harold Innis.

Innis does not supply a specific definition of the term, but broadly speaking, it is an application of the economic concept of a monopoly to the field of knowledge, which includes the disciplines of literature, media, and science, as well as data and statistics (Heyer 2003, 76). In a sweeping overview of communication through history, Innis attributes the success of the great empires of Antiquity to their ability to exercise a monopoly on knowledge, which he linked to the development of writing, a prerequisite for developing such monopolies. He argued that the

> "[manipulative power] of mechanized mass communication…had so debased our intellectual and civic culture that freedom and democracy were in danger of becoming illusions useful for little more than upholding commercial and political elites" (Noble 1999, 35).

When considering the political discourse of illiberal regimes, Innis' warning seems eerily prescient. In a liberal democratic society, knowledge is produced freely and disseminated by a number of institutions; those Althusser termed the Ideological State

Apparatuses. Illiberal regimes crave consensus and control, so free inquiry and critical debate is anathema to their stability. The deliberate, systematic use of propaganda and the centralization of discursive power are favored methods of these regimes for ensuring epistemic control.

Illiberal regimes aim to construct a monopoly of knowledge so they can control the process of knowledge production and dissemination, tapping into the inherent power potential of discourse. Gramsci would have seen this as a manifestation of cultural hegemony, while Foucault would have recognized epistemic control and the development of monopolies on knowledge as key components of illiberal Governmentality. While Foucault was a frequent critic of Western liberal democracy, he would have likely recognized the dangerous implications of subordinating all knowledge-producing institutions to the service of one overarching discourse designed to serve state interests.

Having established a conceptual framework for propaganda and illiberal democracy based on the relevant literature, and supplemented with insights from critical theory, the author now turns to an analysis of a practical case, that of Hungary, which touches on these issues.

PART 2: A CASE STUDY OF FIDESZ PROPAGANDA

2.1. *Hungary's Epistemic Landscape*

In many ways the archetypical illiberal state, Orbán Viktor's Hungary serves as an apt demonstration of propaganda in illiberal democracies, and of how these regimes use epistemic control to build monopolies of knowledge and cement their power through discourse. Hungary's government has drawn censure from a wide range of international observers due to a perceived trend of democratic backsliding, and the role propaganda

plays in this particular dynamic is of special interest. While the proposed model of illiberal propaganda is not unique to Hungary, the country has been a bellwether of the wave of populist illiberalism that has washed over the West in recent years, making it an inviting subject for propaganda analysts. Before turning to the five texts selected to represent a cross section of Hungarian state propaganda, a brief overview of Hungary's epistemic landscape is required. The state of Hungarian media is first examined to demonstrate the attempts by Fidesz to establish a monopoly of knowledge, before turning to three ideological pillars that underpin the party's discourse.

After the 2010 national election, Fidesz moved quickly to consolidate its control over the media sphere. One of its first acts was to overhaul media regulations "in such a way as to cement for the long haul the dominance of the current ruling parties in the public domain" (Mérték 2015, 5). The most significant change to media law was the establishment of a media control body, which has the power to impose significant fines on any media organs that do not toe the party line under the banner of "offenses to public morality" (Human Rights Watch 2011).

In the six years since, the governing party and businesspeople with party affiliations have purchased newspapers, television channels, and radio stations, ensuring that most of the airwaves and print media is dominated by Fidesz. While the process is certainly opaque, a recent investigative report, which describes the government's propaganda effort as "political heavy-weaponry", estimates that the party and its allies have spent "tens of billions of forints" on building its national media empire (Rényi 2017). Freedom House has tracked the gradual decline of the freedom of press in Hungary since 2010. In six years, the country's free press ranking has shifted from "Free"

to “Partly Free”. Currently, Freedom House ranks Hungary 44 out of 100 in press freedom, with 0 signifying most free and 100 signifying least free. The scores for press freedom, legal environment, political environment, and economic environment have all deteriorated accordingly. Freedom House country reports for Hungary between 2010 and 2017 express concern about the politically motivated closure of newspapers, the calculated takeover of media by pro-government owners, the controversial reform of freedom of information laws, a difficult financial environment for independent media, and an atmosphere of censorship and self-censorship in public broadcasting (Freedom House 2010-2017).

In October 2016, for instance, the center-left newspaper *Népszabadság*, which was often critical of Fidesz, was closed, purportedly for economic reasons. The newspaper’s staff alleged government pressure on the paper (BBC 2016). The government rejected the claims of political interference. Nevertheless, shortly after the closure, Lőrinc Mészáros, a longtime associate of Orbán, purchased Mediaworks, the company that had published the paper. The company’s portfolio has now been reconfigured to focus on publishing local papers all over Hungary, which are a useful channel for communicating with rural voters in smaller towns and villages. Additionally, the government formed the Prime Minister’s Cabinet Office in 2015, which coordinates its propaganda messages under the direction of Antal Rogán. Another key figure in developing messaging is Árpad Habony, a Fidesz consultant with no official position.

Fidesz has also made moves to dominate discourse and silence critical voices in other epistemic domains. In the field of education, the government rewrote the humanities curriculum for primary and secondary education, and nationalized the

textbook publishing industry, proceeding to publish history textbooks with a pro-government bias and narratives skewed to paint the party in a "flattering light" (Deutsche Welle 2016). In the spring of 2017, it also passed legislation that was widely perceived as a political attack on Central European University, an American higher education institution disliked by Orban for its associations with Hungarian-American financier George Soros and for its promotion of values associated with open society. Soon after the CEU law, the parliament also passed a law restricting the operation of civil society groups, requiring those that received funding from abroad to identify themselves on their webpages and in their communication as foreign-funded. The party has also colonized intellectual life, supporting and promoting the work of a select group of supportive cultural institutions, and a collection of "court intellectuals" such as the historian Mária Schmidt and Zsolt Bayer.

Having established a near-monopoly on knowledge in Hungary, Fidesz is able to exert considerable epistemic control over a large portion of the population. The well-oiled propaganda machinery designed by the party allows it to dominate virtually all public discourse, control the flow of information. This stranglehold is used to generate consent for its policies and mobilize its voters, as well as to attack its opponents and critics. The Fidesz communication strategy and messaging is founded on three interconnected pillars -- reactionism, nationalism, and populism -- which are outlined in the following section.

2.2. *The Three Pillars of Illiberal Propaganda*

The last seven years in power has given Fidesz plenty of opportunity to fine-tune its propaganda efforts. These messages are centered on the three related conceptual

pillars of reactionism, nationalism, and populism, which are consistent themes in Fidesz communication.

Reactionism is a hardline revisionist strain of conservatism, with an emphasis on returning to a rose-colored, mythical vision of the past. Reactionism is not "not simply a conservative preference for things as they are…but a passionate loathing of the status quo and a desire to return to the past in one emotionally cathartic revolt" (Sullivan 2017). The reactionary decries the decadence of modern times and the tide of progress, and wishes to return to what they describe as a simpler, purer, golden age. Reactionary movements have risen as a response to many of the conflicts and vicissitudes of European history, including the Protestant Reformation, the French Revolution, and during the interwar period. Today, reactionism is encapsulated in the process of Brexit, in the rhetoric of right-wing populist like Marine Le Pen and Geert Wilders, and the evocation of the imperial past in Russia and Turkey.

Orbán's particular brand of reactionism rejects both the occupation of Hungary by Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union alike, as well as what he perceives as the failed regime change of the 1990s. Its template for Hungary's golden age is the post-WWI Kingdom of Hungary when a soft-authoritarian, Christian nationalist government ruled the county under Regent Miklós Horthy. The Hungarian Fundamental Law specifically states that the government traces the continuity of its democracy and constitutional order to before the occupation, and does not recognize the period between 1944 and 1990 as part of Hungarian history. Another passage expresses the need for Hungary's spiritual renewal and the vow to "make Hungary great again," all classic calling cards of reactionary rhetoric (Fundamental Law 2011).

The law is rife with nationalist and Christian imagery, and accordingly, nationalism is the second pillar of illiberal propaganda. Benedict Andersen described the nation as an imagined community, and one of the goals of illiberal propaganda is to imagine and promote a cohesive national identity. By using nationalist symbols and appeals to patriotism, illiberal propaganda promotes a conservative and majoritarian brand of nationalism. The nationalist prizes tradition and heritage, and illiberal propaganda use a distinct "blood and soil" rhetoric, mounting a fierce defense of national sovereignty and autonomous self-determination. This is reflected in Orbán's positioning of Hungary as a Christian nation with a glorious thousand year history, his crusade against the aloof technocrats of Brussels, and such political posturing as granting citizenship to ethnic Hungarians living in Romania, Slovakia, Ukraine and other areas that belonged to Hungary before its territory was significantly reduced under the Treaty of Trianon after the First World War.

The final conceptual pillar of illiberal propaganda is populism, and populists often drawn on reactionary and nationalist political philosophy to fuel their messages. The core concepts of populism are the distinctions between "the people, the elite, and the general will" (Mudde 2017). Populist leaders position themselves as champions of the common people and representatives of their will against their enemies, the malignant elite. As the voice of the amorphous "people", they embody and speak with the authority of a mandate drawn on the general will. Mudde remarks that European populists often combine populism with "two other ideologies: authoritarianism and nativism," which are conceptually related to the pillars of reactionism and nativism. Since populists characterize themselves as protecting the people against harmful foreign influence and

the depredations of elites, they conceive of the nation as a homogenous mass. In this Manichean conception of society, there is only the body of the people, as represented by the populist leader, and their enemies, the elite, who are in turn aided by traitorous, foreign-hearted aliens and discontents. Illiberal regimes the world over apply the rhetoric of populism to legitimize their actions under the banner of popular sovereignty and advance a unitary vision of society.

Having outlined the three pillars of illiberal propaganda, the author now turns to five Hungarian examples, with the aim of demonstrating these elements at work. The five texts are first discussed individually based on the discipline of discourse analysis, and then in aggregate following Jowett and O'Donnell's 10-step plan for propaganda analysis.

2.3. *Text I: The Kötcse Speech, 2009*

The speech given by Viktor Orbán before the 2010 elections to a group of supporters at Kötcse is in many ways a verbal expression of his political manifesto. Entitled "Preserving the Hungarian Quality of Existence," the speech outlines Orbán's vision and aims if Fidesz wins the elections. Divided into sections on culture, the elite's role in constructing culture, civic unity, and similar topics, it is an early example of the reactionary nationalist populism that would be come the hallmark of Fidesz propaganda.

The speech opens with a promise to usher in a new era, and a critique of the perceived failures of what Orban describes as "the culture forming elite" (Orbán 2010). In his view, the Hungarian elite of the post-regime change era failed to formulate a convincing narrative to guide the country, and the crisis of the country's economic and cultural is caused by a lack of a cohesive value system. In Orbán's view, "the values offered by the neoliberal elite have led Hungary to failure, [to] defeat in various areas of

economy and public life," (*Ibid.)*. This failure in turn has ushered in what he sees as a new era. The responsibility of the new governing power in this discourse becomes the grounding of Hungarian social life on a new foundation, which must reject the "social liberal" ideology of the previous elite, discredited as it was by their mistakes. Orbán sees this breakdown of the elite as a "great opportunity [and at once] a great risk" (*Ibid.*). The opportunity comes in the form of the left's identity crisis, which offers a chance to create a new political elite and community, based on Christian, conservative, and Hungarian values.

Orbán emphasizes that the differences between the right and left are not political in nature, but normative, as the two sides believe in diametrically opposing values. The solution he proposes for this is the rejection of dualist field of power, divided between the opposition and government, in favor of establishing what he describes as a "central arena of power" (*Ibid*.). The goal of this central arena of power is to establish a system for "the next fifteen-twenty years" that can represent the nation (*Ibid*.). According to Orbán, debating values and philosophy is the job of the elite, not the job of politicians, who should instead focus on governing and advancing the national interest. Because of the failures of the selfish neoliberal elite since the regime change, Hungarian society has been akin to a rudderless ship, and Orbán's central arena of power is how he proposes to fix this sorry state of affairs.

The Kötcse speech draws heavily on populist rhetoric, as demonstrated by its preoccupation with the misdeeds and failures of the elite, and on its messianic, "us versus them" message. It features passing references to nationalist and reactionary values, particularly in its conception of the Hungarian value system and the call to arms to open a

new era based on traditional values, but its primary purpose is agitative. The speech can also be classified an example of white propaganda, as it aims to posture Fidesz as a conservative civic coalition with a more convincing morality and purpose than the immoral neoliberal elite, which has squandered the chances offered by the regime change. The results of the election, which Fidesz won with a hitherto unprecedented two-thirds majority, seemed to validate Orbán's vision In Fidesz discourse, it is still referred to as a "voting booth revolution", and is the primary justification for the legitimacy of wide-ranging changes enacted by the government to date.

2.4. *Text II: The National Consultation on the New Constitution, 2011*

When in power, populists favor national referendums and consultations to highlight and reiterate that they are the duly chosen representatives of the people. In 2011, the Fidesz government proceeded to use its two-thirds majority to alter the Hungarian Constitution. The second text analyzed is the "National Consultation: Questions About the New Constitution," which was sent out to Hungarian voters before the adoption of the new constitution. Curiously, the questions do not touch on whether the voters support the creation of a new constitution, but rather on a set of highly technical questions regarding the content of the new constitution.

The first question asks if it the new constitution should express not only the rights of Hungarian citizens, but also their duties, including in regards to work, education, and the national defense. This is a subtle reference to nationalist rhetoric, signified by the emphasis on duties to the nation. The third question asks whether the constitution should protect "mutually accepted social values (work, home, family, order, and health)," as well as human rights. This question has a distinct populist bent, evoking the traditional,

conservative conceptions of the listed concept. Its vague wording also allows for a conveniently subjective interpretation of what such protections entail on a policy level. Questions 8 to 10 also play on nationalist themes: question 8 asks if the new constitution should "express national unity with Hungarians living beyond the border", while questions 9 to 10 concern themselves with the protection of Hungarian land, national resources, and quintessentially Hungarian natural resources, termed "hungarikums".

The second section of the consultation focuses on social issues. Most of the questions revolve around quality of life, such as additional protections for senior citizens; to what extent the government can regulate public utilities, if the government should provide jobs to the homeless instead of welfare benefits, whether those with children should receive additional retirement funding, and so on. The third section is similar in scope, with a focus on fiscal policy, such as questions about tax exemptions for working senior citizens, whether families with children should receives social subsidies for purchasing automobiles, tax exemptions for companies that "create jobs," and so forth.

The majority of these questions concern veiled proposals for pork barrel spending and government benefits, a favored strategy of populists who wish to maintain the support of their voters. Cast as a consultation based on empirical research and policy considerations, it is a good example of rational propaganda. Since the Fidesz government came to power, it has utilized a series of national consultations, and the wording of questions has been similarly skewed and devoid of details, allowing for a claim to popular support without committing to any actual substantive changes in policy.

2.5. *Text III: Yearly Evaluation speech, 2012*

Viktor Orbán is fond of giving long, complex speeches as part of his yearly evaluations. Often they have less to do with taking stock of the accomplishments of the

past or outlining the challenges of the future, and more with advancing the latest discourses favored by the government. The third text analyzed is his yearly evaluation for 2012.

The speech was rich with symbolism, both in terms of setting and content (Field 2015). Orbán spoke on a stage bedecked with Hungarian flags, leaning on a podium bearing the government slogan "Hungary is getting stronger". Appropriately, he started with a flag reference, stating,

> All can see that our flag is flying high. All can see that we are a civic national community based on Christian democratic values and [our guiding principle] is a civic Hungary. (*Ibid.*)

Orbán continued the speech with strong appeals to nationalism, emphasizing the importance of national interest, as well as the need to subordinate individual ambition individual and group interests to service of the nation (*Ibid.*). He also condemned the failures of what he termed "liberal multiculturalism" specifically, and liberalism generally. He argued that this philosophy couldn't give sufficient answers for the problems of the 21st century, seeing a nationally motivated politics as a more promising alternative. Finally, Orbán suggested that by moving away from liberalism and rejecting political correctness, Hungary is pioneering a new form of national politics that will serve as an example for the other countries in Eastern Europe (*Ibid.*).

This text has elements drawn from each of the three pillars of illiberal propaganda. It is reactionary because it rejects multiculturalism, liberalism, and humanitarianism, along with other values associated with the modern European political philosophy, as impractical or sentimental conceits. Further, it evokes a nationalist concept of geopolitics that seems more at home in the 19th century than the 21st. There are many

references to national interests, pride in the nation, and national service, as well as Christian values and a Christian democratic national identity. It also features trenchant critiques of pan-Europeanism, European integration, and the European project as a whole. Finally, it is populist in its condemnation of elites, both political and financial; in the emphasis on national sovereignty and Hungarian solutions to Hungarian problems; in the use of migrants and other foreign elements as a threat to the integrity of the people as a whole; and in its exhortation to dismiss neoliberal economics and "choose the future" (*Ibid.*). In all its aspects, this text perfectly encapsulates the three pillars of illiberal propaganda.

2.6. *Text IV: "Illiberal Democracy" speech, 2014*

The fourth and penultimate text analyzed is perhaps the best known of Orbán's speeches. His critics often highlight it as the ultimate expression of Fidesz conceptually distancing itself from Western liberal democracy. The speech is one in a series that Orbán regularly gives at a Fidesz summer gathering in Tusnádfürdő, a town located in the Székely Land region of Romania. The speech was delivered in the wake of the Fidesz victory in the 2014 national elections. This election was made all the more interesting because the party barely managed to secure another two-thirds majority, and Orbán acknowledges that the only reason it was able to do so was due to the votes of ethnic Hungarians living outside Hungary.

Orbán begins his speech by suggesting that the regime change is no longer a convenient point of reference for political life in the postmodern world. Instead, he positions Fidesz as the true regime changers in Hungarian politics and describes the 2008 financial crisis as the originator of the new era of regime change. The excesses of neoliberal economics and the moral deficiencies of liberalism caused the crisis itself, and

thus, according to Orbán, and thus the duty of politicians in the post-crisis era becomes to "find the form of government, which is most capable of making a nation successful" (Orbán 2014). This thought segues into the speech's main thesis: namely, that Western-style liberal democracy has failed, and the most promising states in the world are not Western, liberal, or necessarily democracies, but nonetheless, successful. Orbán specifically mentions Singapore, China, India, Russia and Turkey as examples of these successes, and congratulates the Fidesz community for having the foresight to reject liberalism. The future of governance, he expounds, is illiberal:

> We have known three forms of organizing government: the nation-state, the liberal state, and the welfare state. The question is, what comes next? The Hungarian answer is that this is the era of the work-based state…we must part ways with the liberal principles of social organization, methods, and overall, the liberal concept of society (*Ibid*.)

In his view, the past failures of Hungary were due to adherence to a liberal worldview, advanced by elites more beholden to liberalism than the national interest. The new society of Hungary, according to Orbán, is communitarian and nationally minded, and therefore illiberal. One should accept the stigma of the illiberal label because this concept only has negative connotations based in Western European "dogma and ideology", and the rejection of these values is a prerequisite of Hungary's success on the national stage. Orbán concludes by painting an apocalyptic vision of liberal democracy's uncertain future in the world, and to rail against the European Union, which he sees as attacking Hungary based on misguided value judgments rooted in this failing political philosophy.

The illiberal democracy speech is also a typical rhetorical expression of the three pillars. One may ask how the speech is reactionary, as Orbán seems to talk of establishing a new model of governance? When examining the argument more closely, however, it is

clear that Orbán's proposed vision is not substantially different from the semi-democracies that predate the liberal state and were commonplace at the start of the last century. If liberalism is the central paradigm of modern Western politics, than its rejection is not a novel innovation, but a revisionist argument for a return to the past. Orbán is essentially making an argument for a return to the nation state, where God and country are placed above the freedom of the individual, and accordingly, the national interest also outweighs the interests of the individual. Instead of the chaos of multiculturalism, he argues for a distinctly Hungarian national identity, and nationalist solutions to global problems. Finally, it is populist because of the appeals to a work-based society composed of the people, justified by a popular mandate and in defiance of the liberal elites running the European Union.

2.7. *Text V: Poster Campaigns, 2015-2017*

The final text examined in this section is a series of poster campaigns ordered by the Hungarian government in relation to the European migrant crisis of 2015. The posters can be grouped into two categories based on messaging. One set is addressed at migrants coming to Hungary, while the other is critical of Brussels and more generally, the European Union's migration policies. Both sets feature large, minimalist posters on display throughout the country with pointed messages. The first set was aimed at migrants, although the text was in Hungarian, with such messages as "If you come to Hungary, you have to respect our laws," "If you come to Hungary, you must respect our culture," and "If you come to Hungary, you can't take the jobs of Hungarians" (Medvegy 2015). The second set, which came out a year later, responded to European Union criticism of Hungary's refusal to allow migrants to enter. It featured a text box at the top

that read “Did you know”? This headline was followed by messages including “Since the start of the migrant crisis, molestation of women has grown by leaps and bounds,” “Brussels wants to settle a city’s worth of migrants in Hungary,” and “The Paris attacks were carried out by migrants”. The posters were accompanied by a national consultation that asked questions about the EU migrant quotas and migration in general.

The poster campaigns are a prime example of the way Fidesz stokes nationalist xenophobia and creates enemy figures to unite its supporters. As such, they are instances of agitation propaganda, irrational propaganda and black propaganda, as they use us versus them rhetoric, source of the information is not revealed, and they include patent falsehoods. The poster campaigns were the most traditional forms of propaganda deployed by Fidesz. A great deal of public funds was used to place the posters in virtually all cities, towns and settlements in Hungary, and it was not uncommon to see dozens in the same town. Their ubiquity ensured that they achieved a high-rate of constant penetration, as one did not need access to a television, radio or any other technology to view them. Further, the juxtaposition of the Hungarian people against their enemies, the EU and the migrants, is redolent of populist rhetoric, which is one of the pillars of illiberal propaganda.

Having discussed five examples of propaganda deployed by Fidesz since it has been in government, the texts are now analyzed in aggregate using the Jowett and O’Donell 10-step division of propaganda analysis.

2.8. *Propaganda Analysis*

1. The ideology and purpose of the propaganda campaign

The ideology of Fidesz propaganda is characterized by the adherence to the three pillars of illiberal propaganda, reactionism, nationalism, and populism. Fidesz propaganda is reactionary because it posits a return to an idealized vision of Hungary as a homogenous, conservative Christian nation that ostensibly existed before the Nazi occupation and the era of Soviet rule. It is nationalist, because it deploys nationalist symbols and rhetoric, aiming to construct and promote a strict interpretation of Hungarian national identity that should be shared universally by all Hungarians. It is populist because it features strong evocations of "the people", portraying Fidesz as their sole and ultimate representative, and frames its narratives in a populist worldview based on the rejection of elites and a motivation of the general will. Fidesz propaganda is directed at supporters of the party, and no rational arguments are made to convince those who may disagree with its messages. As agitative propaganda, it aims to mobilize and gain political capital from outrage against the enemies of the people, whether migrants, Brussels, or some other entity represents these enemies at any given time. In its capacity as integrative propaganda, it aims to create an in-group of Fidesz supporters, who represent the Hungarian nation, and any who disagree with the values of this group are seen as foreign-hearted outsiders.

2. The context in which the propaganda occurs

Fidesz propaganda occurs in the closed system of Hungary's epistemic landscape. By constructing a monopoly on knowledge through the takeover of key institutions, including media organs, schools, civil society and cultural centers, among others, the

party works to exercise constant epistemic control over Hungarian society, which is also a key attribute of its approach to Governmentality. Due to this pervasive epistemic control, there are few commonly available alternative viewpoints, which also makes Fidesz propaganada highly effective.

3. Identification of the propagandist

Fidesz propaganda is disseminated through the media organs controlled by the party. It is formulated by influential praetorians of the regime, including Antal Rogán (government communication), Arpád Habony (media), Lőrinc Mészáros (newspapers and radio), and Andy Vajna (television). Foreign consultants, like the company GEB International, run by George E. Birnbaum and Arthur J. Finkelstein, help mold Fidesz's political message. The Prime Minister, Viktor Orbán, is directly involved in determining the message due to his personal approach to leadership and as the ideological head of the party. He often gives speeches and interviews, which outline the overall message behind the party's propaganda efforts.

4. The structure of the propaganda organization

Fidesz propaganda is primarily deployed through government communications and client media. The Prime Minister's Cabinet Office is the main body responsible for political communication, but each government ministry also follows the overall guidelines set for government messaging. A network of party-friendly owners oversees the operation of client media and ensures the government's messages are incorporated into content.

5. The target audience

The primary target audience of Fidesz propaganda is its own supporter base. Party propaganda rarely features convincing or evidence based argumentation, as it is geared toward voter retention and mobilization of the supporter base, rather than gaining new

voters. Recently, Fidesz propaganda has skewed to the right, which indicates that it also targets voters of the far-right party Jobbik, which is one of Fidesz's main rivals.

6. Media utilization techniques

Fidesz propaganda utilizes simple but effective media techniques such as sensationalistic "news" stories, blatant emotional appeals, fear mongering and the creation of enemies, and consistent repetition. Due to the near-monopoly of knowledge enjoyed by the party, it can deploy its messages on a wide variety of platforms, including television, radio, and in print media. It does not enjoy such rigid control over the Internet, but is working to acquire more websites and news portals, the most recent example being the site Origo.

7. Special techniques to maximize effect

Fidesz propaganda's hallmark is that it controls most channels of communication in Hungary, and permeates all layers of society. Other than this focus on epistemic control, the techniques deployed by Fidesz run the gamut of traditional propaganda techniques, which allows for maximization of effect.

8. Audience reaction to various techniques

Fidesz propaganda is highly effective in retaining voter support among its base, as indicated by the consistent electoral victories of the party. It is less effective in switching party loyalty of opposition voters or gaining new voters, but due to Hungary's gerrymandered electoral system and political environment, this is sufficient to keep the party in power and to maintain its majority in the parliament.

9. Counterpropaganda, if present

There is little counterpropaganda present in Hungary due to Fidesz domination of the epistemic environment. A few independent media organs do exist, but their audience is mostly limited to the opposition. Restrictive media regulations combined with generous

funding of government friendly media and a sophisticated propaganda machinery work in concert to drown out most opposing voices effectively.

10. Effects and Evaluation

Fidesz propaganda is highly effective in retaining support of the party's traditional voter base. The speeches of Viktor Orbán serve as a platform for promoting the prime minister's personal image, and he remains very popular in the circle of Fidesz voters. The propaganda favored by the party is also effective in discrediting the opposition and shifting the blame for the ill effects of government politics on third parties, particularly the European Union. The creation of enemy groups, which shifts according to the prevailing political atmosphere, helps agitate in favor of the government and against opposition to its policies. Enemy groups to date have prominently included the opposition, migrants, the European Union, and most recently, the person of George Soros. Fidesz propaganda deploys messages based on the three pillars of illiberal propaganda through a countrywide network of propaganda organs. Without significant reform of the media environment or a concentrated effort by other stakeholders, such as the opposition parties and civil society, it is doubtful that the Fidesz stranglehold on Hungary's epistemic environment can be broken. The main takeaway is that unless effectively countered through such initiatives, Fidesz will continue to enjoy and expand its near-monopoly of knowledge in Hungary and control political and public discourse in the country.

CONCLUSIONS

In the second decade of the 21st century, propaganda remains a potent tool for mobilizing support and manufacturing consent for government policies. The effectiveness of propaganda techniques is largely determined by political environment and social

context. Illiberal democracies, increasingly on the rise due to the challenge offered to liberal democracy by their compelling narratives and seductive worldview, use sophisticated propaganda techniques to influence the governability of their citizens. The Governmentality of illiberal regimes is characterized by the centralization of power and control, which in the context of political communication is dependent on exercising epistemic control and building monopolies of knowledge. These regimes exert considerable resources to ensure the advancement of their discourses and to discredit and restrict the emergence of alternatives. Conceptually, the main elements of illiberal propaganda are reactionism, nationalism, and populism. These three elements work in concert to offer a vision of an idealized golden age, construct a cohesive national identity, and consolidate support by claims to speak for the people and to protect them from uncaring elites. The propaganda machinery and systems of epistemic control utilized by the Orbán regime in Hungary are typical of these processes, and demonstrate the effectiveness of illiberal propaganda techniques. To develop effective measures against such techniques, further research on illiberal propaganda is desirable and highly necessary.

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