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Griffin, Roger

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The Legitimizing Role of Palingenetic Myth in Ideocracies

Roger Griffin

Roger Griffin, born 1948, is Professor in Modern History at Oxford Brookes University (UK), having obtained a BA (First) from Oxford University in Modern Languages (French and German) in 1970 and his DPhil from Oxford University in 1990. Since then he published over 100 publications on a wide range of phenomena relating to generic fascism. In May 2011 he was awarded the degree of Doctor Honoris Causa by the University of Leuven in recognition of his contribution to the international understanding of fascism, political religion, and racist extremism as responses to a secularizing modernity.

Abstract

Noch immer ist das Konzept des Totalitarismus stark mit der auf absolute Kontrolle der Gesellschaft abzielenden Zentralisierung von allumfassender Macht verbunden. Dieser Aufsatz beschäftigt sich mit einem Konzept des Totalitarismus, das zwar bereits ansatzweise von Friedrich und Brzezinski aufgegriffen, aber erst in den letzten zehn Jahren zunehmend bekannter wurde. Totalitarismus wird dabei als ein Experiment der Sozialkonstruktion verstanden. Es zielt darauf, um jeden Preis eine neue Gesellschaft zu erschaffen und eine anthropologische Revolution in Gang zu setzen. Angewandt auf die „Ideokratie" führt dies zu der Annahme, dass einige totalitäre Regime sich zeitweise nicht nur durch die Manipulation von Gedanken legitimiert haben, sondern auch durch eine Welle populistischer Begeisterung für die von den Machtträgern versprochene Aussicht auf eine neue Ära, die aus der alten Ordnung hervorgeht. Gewalttaten sind diesem „palingenetischen Mythos" nach weniger ein Mittel der barbarischen Zerstörung, sondern legitimieren sich vielmehr als Geburtswehen zur Etablierung einer neuen Ordnung. In diesem Beitrag wird diese populistische Begeisterung im Umkehrschluss mit dem Bestreben in Verbindung gebracht, den entzauberten und nihilistischen Tendenzen der Moderne übersinnliche Phänomene entgegenzusetzen.

I. Introduction: Ideocracy and Totalitarianism

This paper will explore the thesis that spontaneous, non-coerced popular enthusiasm for the revolutionary aspirations of an ideocracy, both before and after the seizure of power, has been crucial for the perceived legitimation of several major totalitarian movements and regimes in the modern age. For the purposes of this analysis, the connotations of the suffix -cracy are taken to be those of theocracy, autocracy, and ethnocracy, thus suggesting a political system dominated by the primacy of a particular idea (a totalizing vision or grand récit) of historical devel-

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opment which serves as the basis for realizing a new society, and even for founding a new historical era. This usage corresponds to how the term 'ideocracy' is used in the only Anglophone monograph on the topic to date, which defines it as "a political system whose activities are pursued in reference to the tenets of a monistic ideology",[1] a regime which directly contrasts with pluralistic democracy.

The main focus here will be the deeper psycho-cultural dynamics of political situations in which an elite consciously sets out to realize a "monistic", totalitarian world-view through social engineering, and not just through social coercion, to overcome the perceived failure, injustice, or decadence of a modern pluralistic society and at some point in the process of attempted realization of this project is able to count on a significant degree of popular support and consensus thanks to the mass-mobilizing power of its vision of the new order. The legitimacy that results is thus different both from the (in Weberian terms) "traditional" authority that underpins pre-modern religious societies and the "legal-rational" authority of liberal societies, but also from the enforced but inauthentic legitimation secured through the coercive terror and propaganda apparatus of authoritarian and totalitarian regimes which exercise a state monopoly over cultural production and political thought with no genuine popular base.

Despite this exclusive focus, it should be remembered that pluralistic liberalism can also develop ideocratic elements which repress pluralism and distort democratic processes and would be worth investigating in relationship to the issue of totalitarian legitimacy. The Jacobin vision of the French Revolution, McCarthyism, the domino effect model of the communist threat that led the US administration to escalate the Vietnam War while publically claiming to scale down the resources committed to it, Thatcherism, at its most aggressively anti-socialist, and the neo-Conservatism that led to the invasion of Iraq after 9/11 all suggest that neat distinctions between ideocratic and democratic societies cannot be drawn. However, the way ideocracy is being used here precludes the consideration of the abuse of power in a system of political pluralism. It also rules out authoritarian societies where ideology plays a minimal or purely instrumental, Machiavellian, or cosmetic role in dictating policies and the ruling elites pursue no utopian vision of social engineering beyond the elimination of the perceived enemies of social and political stability (which, according to the official ideology, can be represented by liberalism, communism, fascism, freedom of thought, capitalism, Judaism, religious pluralism etc). Such authoritarian regimes, examples of which are military dictatorships, personal dictatorships, and non-revolutionary conservative or communist dictatorships may produce elaborate rationalizations for their claim to absolute power over the individual and civil society, but lack the ambition to undertake the shaping of a new type of modern society and a "new man" according to an ideological blueprint which is symptomatic of a genuine ideocracy.

1 Jaroslaw Piekalkiewicz/Alfred Wayne Penn, The Politics of Ideocracy, New York 1995, p. 25.

It should also be pointed out that the basic premise of ideocracy, namely the possibility of a primacy of ideas in a political context, is a contested concept. Certainly many political scientists may agree with the sentiments of Romain Rolland who in his introduction to "Clérambault" (1921), first published in Swiss newspapers in December in 1917 at the height of the mutual slaughter of the First World War, states that "Humanity does not dare to massacre itself from interested motives. It is not proud of its interests, but it does pride itself on its ideas which are a thousand times more deadly."[2] Such an assertion, however, must remain deeply suspect to Marxists of all complexions even if Marx himself sometimes broke with the strictures of the materialist conception of history, for example, when he recognized that the legal institution of private property (a super-structural force) was the precondition for the development of capitalist economics and production (a structural force).[3] A number of other Marxist theorists can be cited to uphold an anti-determinist variant of Marxism, notably Walter Benjamin, Bertolt Brecht, Antonio Gramsci, Jacques Lacan, and all protagonists of voluntarist interpretations of the revolutionary process, not least Lenin himself who once declared "Politics must take precedence over economics. To argue otherwise is to forget the ABC of Marxism".[4]

This paper rejects both crudely materialist theories of history, but also Hegelian idealism and other forms of ideocentric approaches. It assumes instead a complex, dynamic, but non-dialectical and non-determinist relationship between the economic (structural) and ideological (super-structural) factors conditioning the evolution of history as well as among the social elites imposing the hegemony of certain political ideas and the subjects of an autocratic elite, who far from always being passive victims, may in some circumstances become its enthusiastic supporters and the protagonists of the historical transformation in their own right. This results in a fluctuating, irreducibly complex role played by ideology in establishing consensual legitimation, which can never be the product of the power of ideas in itself.

II. The Neglected Area of Populist Legitimation in Ideocracies

One unintended consequence of the Cold War climate in which much pioneering academic work on totalitarianism was carried out in the West was that totalitarianism became associated with the coerced consensus of closed, monocratic societies (National Socialist or Communist), in contrast to the (no less mythi-

2 http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Clerambault (1917) (accessed: 22.10.2011).
3 Cf. Karl Marx/Friedrich Engels (Ed.), Capital. A Critique of Political Economy, Hamburg 1867, vol. 1, chapter 3.
4 Vladimir Lenin, Once Again on the Trade Unions. In: Id., Collected Works, vol. 32, Moscow 1965, p. 70.

cized) "open", polycratic societies of the "Free World" where, (pace Noam Chomsky,[5] Herbert Marcuse[6] et al.), a consensus was allegedly not "manufactured" or imposed as a form of totalitarianism. Instead, a symbiotic relationship was assumed or claimed to exist between the policies of political elites and the "will of the people" expressed through its mandated representatives. Western academia in particular was largely "value free", a laissez-faire market of ideas mirroring the economic market. The image of ideocracies imposed through repression, propaganda, and terror purely for the purpose of retaining power, or as the prelude to world domination, found its most comprehensive, sophisticated, and at times cryptic, academic expression in Hannah Arendt's "The Origins of Totalitarianism" (1951) and was reinforced in the popular imagination by such classic fictional studies of the subject as Arthur Koestler's "Darkness at Noon" (1940), George Orwell's "1984" (1949), and Jean-Luc Goddard's "Alphaville: The Strange Adventure of Lemmy Caution" (1965). Even Emilio Gentile's post-Cold War definition of totalitarianism (2000), which breaks new ground in recognizing explicitly the revolutionary aspirations of totalitarianism, contains no allusion to the possibility of a spontaneous community of believers emerging under the new regime willing to contribute energetically and proactively to its realization. By stressing "domination" it remains a "governor's view of the prison":

"The term 'totalitarianism' can be taken as meaning an experiment in political domination undertaken by a revolutionary movement, with an integralist conception of politics that aspires toward a monopoly of power and that, after having secured power, whether by legal or illegal means, destroys or transforms the previous regime and constructs a new state based on a single-party regime with the chief objective of conquering society. That is, it seeks the subordination, integration, and homogenisation of the governed on the basis of the integral politicisation of existence, whether collective or individual, interpreted according to the categories, the myths, and the values of a palingenetic ideology institutionalised in the form of a political religion that aims to shape the individual and the masses through an anthropological revolution in order to regenerate the human being and create the new man who is dedicated in body and soul to the realisation of the revolutionary and imperialistic policies of the totalitarian party. The ultimate goal is to create a new civilisation along ultra-nationalist lines."[7]

The overdetermined academic concentration on a coerced rather than a spontaneous consensus in totalitarian societies has led to extensive studies of the imposition of ideology through apparatuses of social control and social engineering,

5 Cf. Edward Herman/Noam Chomsky, Manufacturing Consent, New York 1988.
6 Cf. Herbert Marcuse, One-Dimensional Man, Boston 1964.
7 Emilio Gentile/Robert Mallett, The Sacralisation of Politics. Definitions, Interpretations, and Reflections on the Question of Secular Religion and Totalitarianism. In: Totalitarian Movements and Political Religion, 1 (2000), pp. 18–55. Original emphasis.

and, in particular, through the use of an elaborate political religion, intensive verbal and non-verbal propaganda, and terror. Classics in this respect are Klaus Vondung's "Magie und Manipulation – Ideologischer Kult und politische Religion des Nationalsozialismus" (1971) and Emilio Gentile's "The Sacralization of Politics in Fascist Italy" (1996). This top-down approach to understanding the power of totalitarian ideology is applied even by such a groundbreaking and sophisticated exercise in comparative totalitarian studies as David Roberts' "The Totalitarian Experiment in the Twentieth-Century" (2006) and Michael Geyer and Sheila Fitzpatrick's Beyond Totalitarianism (2009), where periods of spontaneous populist enthusiasm for both the Nazi and the Soviet regimes are not foregrounded, and their deep-seated causes are not explored.[8]

In this paper the focus is different. The paper offers a generic conceptual framework set out with the hope of encouraging future research in comparative totalitarian studies to focus more effectively and productively on the way certain ideocracies can under certain conditions derive their legitimation (however temporary) spontaneously from the intrinsic power of their ideology to meet the specific psycho-cultural needs which have arisen from the process of modernization in certain segments of the population. It is a partial consensus that causes a significant percentage of its subjects to promote revolution or to "work towards the system"[9] rather than being or feeling repressed by it.

Such an approach deliberately departs from "The Politics of Ideocracy", which states in its opening chapter that "The legitimacy of an ideocratic political system [...] is derived from the monistic ideology which establishes a universal frame of reference for participants of the system". It goes on to assert that what sets ideocracies apart from all other political systems is that their legitimacy is derived "exclusively from the tenets of the ideology itself",[10] ignoring the crucial issue of the degree of subjective recognition, internalization, and resonance of that ideology within the "masses" (or explaining how a set of ideas can legitimize itself without human agency).

It should be stressed that this "prisoners' view of the prison" approach to legitimacy which concentrates on the populist embrace of an ideocracy is hardly new. Rather it is yet another example of "reinventing the wheel". It is often overlooked – especially in reductive summaries of the book on websites – that Friedrich and Brzezinski's classic text, "Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy" (1956) stresses that the "official ideology" of a totalitarian state is "focused and projected towards a perfect final state of mankind" (or rather an

8 Cf. Michael Geyer/Sheila Fitzpatrick (Ed.), Beyond Totalitarianism. Stalinism and Nazism Compared, Cambridge 2009.

9 An allusion to a concept deployed in Nazi studies which alludes to the charismatic power of Hitler to exercise power by being internalized within his followers so they acted spontaneously in accordance with his wishes. See Anthony McElligott/Tim Kirk/Ian Kershaw, Working towards the Führer. Essays in honour of Sir Ian Kershaw, Manchester 2003.

10 Piekalkiewicz/Penn, Politics of Ideocracy, p. 25.

elite segment of it) and thus contains "a chiliastic claim based on the radical rejection of the existing society and the conquest of the world for a new one".[11] The authors make it clear that they do not just conceive this as manipulative propaganda. They argue that genuine totalitarian projects centre on the creation of a "new man", and display "strongly Utopian elements", or "some kind of notion of a paradise on earth" which gives them "a pseudo-religious quality".These features elicit in "their less critical followers a depth of conviction and a fervour of devotion found only among persons inspired by a transcendent faith" to a point where the ideocratic goals act as what Marx described as "the opium of the people".[12] The conclusion to be drawn is that, though a populist consensus for ideocracies is rarely taken into account by human scientists, the pioneers of academic totalitarian studies themselves specifically stress that legitimation in such regimes may derive at least partly from the enthusiastic (less critical) or even fanatical (completely uncritical) belief of the supporters in their leaders' vision of the future and their policies to achieve it, whenever the official Utopia finds a deep psychological resonance in the masses.

This paper thus reverses the prevalent regime-centric perspective in totalitarian studies by concentrating on the potential of ideas to assume a powerful mythic force to mobilize spontaneous populist energies, especially in the revolutionary phase of overthrowing the old order and establishing a new totalitarian society. It suggests that the stereotypical image of totalitarianism in the "Free World" epitomized in "1984" has been derived from an excessive, if understandable, concentration on the enforced ideocracies of imposed, feigned, failed, or spent totalitarian revolutions. These either had no authentic ideological vitality to begin with, or have degenerated into bureaucratic autocracies drained of genuine populist energy to be manipulated and now bankrupt in the charismatic currency originally emanating from the leader and his vision of the future.

III. Modelling the Dynamics of Charismatic Ideologies

The implication of this reference to the leader's 'vision of the future' is that the Weberian concept of "charisma" should be extended from being treated exclusively as a property of personalities (or rather an interaction between "outstanding" individuals and the psychological needs of followers to project their fantasies onto them), to being treated also as a property of ideologies when they assume a powerful populist momentum by the belief that aggregations of individuals invest in them and the actions that flow from these beliefs. This process of a spontaneous, charismatic ideocratic legitimation of regime change can occur

11 Carl J. Friedrich/Zbigniew Brzezinski, Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy, Cambridge 1965 (1956), p. 22.
12 Ibid., p. 23.

without leadership as in the early phase of the French Revolution and in the 1989 anti-totalitarian revolutions in Europe where the idea of freedom from state communism acquired its own mass-mobilizing potency. In this context the key social theory is no longer Weber's concept of charismatic authority or even Durkheim's theory of "collective effervescence" laid out in "Elementary Forms of Religious Life" (1912) and eminently applicable to modern secular religions which aim to reverse anomie. Instead, it is Georges Sorel's analysis in "Reflexions on Violence" (1908) of the power of myths and utopias to unleash forces of social transformation. Far from being a value-free exercise in academic speculation, Sorel looked optimistically to the emergence of new mass-mobilizing myths in his era to act as the source of palingenetic populist forces capable of regenerating a bourgeois society he saw mired in moral torpor, complacency, materialism, and decadence.

It would be possible at this point to construct analytical tools from a reading of Nietzsche to flesh out the theory that some totalitarian regimes deliberately enlisted the psycho-dynamic energies generated by a spontaneous revolt against nihilism and the prospect of Western civilization petering out in a generation of mythless, passionless "last men" with irretrievably anomic, spiritually moribund lives. However, it would be even more profitable to widen the academic debate about ideocracies even further by introducing elements drawn from anthropological research into pre-modern movements of ideological renewal. By applying insights from the work of such experts as Clifford Geertz, Victor Turner, Mathieu Deflem, Anthony Wallace, and Peter Berger it is possible to construct a coherent model of the ideological dynamics of situations when the cohesion of both traditional and modern societies break down and give rise to a new society arising Phoenix-like from the ashes of the old on the basis of a new world view or value-system.[13] This line of enquiry leads to the formulation of heuristic concepts that arguably have a profound bearing on the understanding of twentieth century totalitarianism, allowing periods to be identified when ideocracy and populist revolutionary demands entered a temporary synergy.

Reduced to its bare bones, the composite theory that results from this excursion into neighbouring provinces of the human sciences suggests that one way a society can fail (or a symptom of its failure) is when the traditional myths and rituals which together constitute its nomos (total world-view and law) no longer provide a coherent sense of communal meaning, purpose, and reality. At this point they enter a liminoid state (experienced as crisis, chaos, anarchy, decadence, decline, or the end of time) which is resolved either by the collapse of that society, its absorption into another, more powerful culture, or its internal, endogenic renewal. This is brought about through a "revitalization movement" which provides a new collective source of existential legitimacy, psycho-social coherence, and nomic vitality. Characteristic of cultural regeneration is the emergence

13 I have attempted to perform this task in chapters 2–4 in: Roger Griffin, Modernism and Fascism. The Sense of a Beginning under Mussolini and Hitler, London 2006.

of a propheta (a charismatic leader) who embodies the vision of a new nomos (a new sect, new religion, new principle for making sense of and re-ordering society) as the basis of a new society (communitas). If the embodied nomos can attract enough followers during a nomic crisis to gain a critical mass of support, a secessionist movement or sect forms able to serve as the nucleus of a new society, though it may have to occupy new territory to establish the new religious-ritual community.

This process of renewal has been repeated countless times in innumerable unique permutations within human history to perpetuate communities in their constant process of renewal, of palingenesis. Indeed, every new religion can be seen as a largely spontaneous ideocracy born of a nomic crisis resolved through the formation of a new community centred on a new nomos embodied in a new propheta, a new scripture or a new oral narrative of the cosmos, and new rituals and observances.

It is clear from this approach that the propheta's charisma is intimately bound up with the dramatic process of social revitalization, of cultural death and rebirth, and the mythic power of the embryonic new nomos in which the new identity (embodied in a new man and woman) is crystallized. Each reborn society thus involves a process of ideological renewal and establishes the hegemony of a new ideocracy experienced not as an abstract theory or imposed moral code but as a lived reality, a total but not necessarily totalitarian, new order.

Once modern European history is approached from the vantage point of premodern revitalization movements new interpretive vistas will open up in totalitarian studies. The chronic ambivalence (Zygmunt Bauman), liquefaction (Zygmunt Bauman), and dis-embedding of reality (Anthony Giddens) under modernity, and the resulting liquefaction of its earlier solidity (Karl Marx, Marshall Berman) creates – at least for some – a permanent sense of decadence or nomic crisis and, hence, an apocalyptic sense of living constantly on the edge of history torn between fears of social breakdown and hopes for total renewal.[14] This subliminal predisposition to live life more meaningfully against a permanent backdrop of angst and anomie can turn into a severe sense of total collapse in times of objective, external socio-political crisis, which can make millions vulnerable to the lure of palingenetic myths of total renewal in moments of structural crisis.[15]

14 It is a thesis expounded at length in Peter Osborne, The Politics of Time. Modernity and the Avantgarde, London 1995. It is also explored in Don DeLillo's novel: Mao II, New York 1992.

15 Cf. Hermann Broch, The Sleepwalkers, New York 1964, first published as "Die Schlafwandler" in 1932 on the eve of Hitler's "seizure of power", is an exhaustive fictional treatment of this analysis of modernity.

IV. Modern(ist) Socio-political Renewal

It is on the basis of this line of argument that it is possible to identify the subterranean link between modernist art and architecture and a wide range of social and political reform movements which dominated European culture between 1880 and 1914 (when the Western intelligentsia were dominated by a subjective sense of cultural crisis experienced as decadence). The palingenetic climate was then intensified between 1914 and 1939 when, objectively, the liberal capitalist world could easily appear to be in a state of terminal collapse, signaling the end of civilization or inaugurating the birth of a new age. This ambivalent mood of catastrophe and the possibility of palingenesis were captured particulately in the first issue of the Austrian cultural review "Die Moderne" published in 1890. Its founder Hermann Bahr proclaimed:

"Es geht eine wilde Pein durch diese Zeit und der Schmerz ist nicht mehr erträglich. Der Schrei nach dem Heiland ist gemein und Gekreuzigte sind überall. Ist es das große Sterben das über die Welt gekommen? Es kann sein, dass wir am Ende sind, am Tode der erschöpften Menschheit, und das sind nur die letzten Krämpfe. Es kann sein, dass wir am Anfange sind, an der Geburt einer neuen Menschheit, und das sind nur die Lawinen des Frühlings. Wir steigen ins Göttliche oder wir stürzen, stürzen in Nacht und Vernichtung – aber Bleiben ist keines. Dass aus dem Leide das Heil kommen wird und die Gnade aus der Verzweiflung, dass es tagen wird nach dieser entsetzlichen Finsternis und dass die Kunst einkehren wird bei den Menschen – diese Auferstehung, glorreich und selig, das ist der Glaube der Moderne."[16]

The permanent liminoidality of modernity, which was palpable in cosmopolitan life by the 1880s, generated countless individual moods of apocalyptic despair and palingenetic hope , for what Walter Benjamin called "exploding the continuum"[17] which in turn fuelled revitalization movements in every sphere of cultural production, all expressing an existential longing for purification, a total new order, an overarching vision of reality, rebirth and new beginning. These movements included the "Deutsche Lebensreformbewegung" ("German Life Reform Movement"), vitalism, monism, naturism, rationalist architecture, theosophy, anthroposophy, Zionism, Freudianism, Jungianism, Nietzscheanism, youth movements, social hygiene and eugenics, and various types of organic nationalism, socialism, and political racism. They also included a whole array of new aesthetics and their corresponding "isms" (expressionism, fauvism, surrealism, dadaism etc).

All attempts to establish a new aesthetic in the quest for a higher spiritual truth – a quest epitomized in Wassily Kandinsky's "Concerning the Spiritual in Art"(1914) – are collectively known as "Modernism", a term generally restricted

16 Hermann Bahr, Editorial to the first issue of "Die Moderne", quoted in Robert Pynsent, Decadence and Innovation, London 1989, p. 156.

17 Cf. Walter Benjamin, On the Concept of History. In: Walter Benjamin, Gesammelten Schriften, Band I: 2, Frankfurt a. M. 1974, pp. 691–704.

to artistic phenomena. However in "Modernism and Fascism" I make a sustained case for seeing aesthetic modernism as simply the artistic manifestation of a welter of palingenetic movements of the period that can all be seen as idiosyncratic modern forms of a revitalization movement and, hence, as forms of social modernism. In this book I further distinguish between epiphanic modernism, where the dark clouds of anomie may break to reveal to the artist glimpses of deeper understanding or shafts of light may traverse the sky emanating from a higher level of "Being", and programmatic modernism, where the protagonists undertake the self-appointed mission to regenerate society through promoting healthy activities (e. g. hiking, calisthenics), or life-asserting forms of architecture, dance, or social mores. The Monte Verità community which thrived above Ascona on the Swiss shore of Lake Maggiore between 1900 and 1926 was a microcosm of the experiments with alternative life-styles that characterized genuine modernism (as opposed to its commodified travesties)[18] while also demonstrating the porous membranes that existed at the turn of the 20th century between various types of epiphanic and programmatic, artistic and social modernism.

V. The Establishment of Populist Ideocracy

The form of modernism which was to have the most profound – indeed catastrophic – impact on modern history to date was political modernism. The intensifying liminoidality generated by modernity in 19th century European history gradually turned patriotic nationalism into a force which under democratic and liberal institutional guises hosted powerful irrational organic myths about racial purity, and historical destiny in a number of countries. To this extent, the First World War can be seen as an explosion of repressed state and populist modernist energies directed towards nebulous aspirations to defend culture and identity from demonized enemy forces, which demanded countless blood sacrifices. Even in the most ostensibly democratized countries patriotism was temporarily totalitarianized by the ruling elites for the duration of the war, and the calls to fight for "God and country" (whatever the God or country) resonated with powerful palingenetic longings in the general public, and even among the combatant soldiers, many of whom continued to legitimate delusional chauvinist myths from below despite the horrors of combat.[19]

18 Cf. Robert Landmann, Ascona – Monte Verità. Auf der Suche nach dem Paradies (1930), Pancaldi 2000. For an overview see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monte_Verit%C3%A0; Monte Verita: Licht und Leben, http://www.emmet.de/hbveri.htm (accessed: 16.11.2011).

19 Essential reading on this are: Modris Eksteins, Rites of Spring, Boston 2000, and Modris Eksteins, Solar Dance: Genius, Forgery and the Crisis of Truth in the Modern Age, Toronto 2012.

It is absolutely consistent with this model that in the three European countries where attempts were made to establish palingenetic ideocracies, Soviet Russia, Fascist Italy, and Nazi Germany, the regimes achieved a high level of popular consensus as the solution to a general crisis not just of the state but of reality itself. After decades of socio-political tensions and crises punctuated by attempted anarchist and Marxist revolutionary assaults on the status quo, the Bolshevik revolution initially unleashed a flood of revolutionary fervour in the artistic and intellectual elites[20] and was supported by considerable popular enthusiasm, despite the enormous privations endured by the population. Fascist Italy was extensively legitimated by a cult of the duce and mass populist support for Fascism's programme of rapid modernization and the "nationalization of the masses" between 1928 and 1936. The charismatic energies were orchestrated and intensified but not created or merely inculcated by the elaborate displays of religious politics associated with "the cult of the Fasces",[21] a support that only evaporated once it was realized by 'ordinary people' that their country was inexorably being dragged into a major European war by the Axis.

It is within this context that it is worth considering the Third Reich as an ideocracy that for a number of years, namely from 1933 until Stalingrad (the Winter of 1942/1943), was both imposed through social control, propaganda, coercion, and terror while, simultaneously, generating enough authentic populist support to be legitimized through spontaneous charismatic energies. Marginalized electorally until the Wall Street Crash (1929), the ensuing socio-political crisis was acute enough to engender a deep nomic collapse, a general "sense-making crisis"[22] fuelled by deep-seated anxieties about national identity and a collective sense of national humiliation and impotence resulting from the catastrophic outcome of the World War, both of which precipitated a collective loss of hope for the future once the Depression struck. In an unfolding process, meticulously documented in the first volume of Ian Kershaw's biography of Hitler, "Hubris", Nazism was able to offer millions of existentially desperate individuals in the grip of profound anomie a total worldview, a new sense of belonging, a new nomos to believe in, and a new sacred canopy under which to live out their lives. A miraculous propheta had arisen who held the key to the future, whose Weltanschauung promised a new start in history, which would solve the nation's crisis, overcome the decadence of Western civilization, and free them from their own existential dilemmas.

Once in power, and for as long as its seemed to be fulfilling its promises of total regeneration, Nazism was able to establish itself for nearly a decade as an

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20 See Richard Stites, Revolutionary Dreams. Utopian Vision and Experimental Life in the Russian Revolution, New York 1989.

21 Cf. Gentile, Sacralisation.

22 Cf. Gerard Platt, Thoughts on a Theory of Collective Action. Language, Affect, and Ideology in Revolution. In: M. Albin (Ed.), New Directions in Psychohistory, Lexington 1980, pp. 69–94.

ideocracy legitimated – given its violence against internal enemies – to a disturbing extent by mass charismatic energies and widely diffused mythic palingenetic expectations projected onto the Führer. Nazi ideology thus became the base of a new communitas ("Volksgemeinschaft") bent on revitalizing and purifying German society by destroying the institutions and human incarnations of decadence, putting an end to the liminoidality of modernity through the establishment of a "new order" in Germany and Europe, and starting time again by instituting a healthy alternative modernity to both Liberal Capitalism and Communism. The first of these would be ruthlessly harnessed to the nation's needs and the second would be destroyed, along with all other human sources of ideological decay, cultural decadence, dysgenic breeding, and societal Zersetzung.

The basis of the legitimation of the Third Reich was therefore not just the violent usurpation of power and the destruction of pluralism by force, but the emergence of a palingenetic community[23] diffused throughout Germany which voluntarily "worked towards the Führer".[24] Inevitably, the project to create an organic, morally and physically reborn Volksgemeinschaft as the laboratory of the "new German man" and the "new German woman" was doomed to failure in the long run. Yet in the 1930s it was taken seriously by the regime and millions of previously liberal citizens, many of whom underwent a voluntary process of Nazification, which in many cases outlasted the war (in marked contrast to the general failure of Fascistization, even before 1943).

VI. The Nomic Dynamics of "Living" Ideocracies

The process by which a spontaneous elective affinity can arise between a significant segment of the population of an autocratic state and the totalizing ideology through which it seeks to mould the mindsets of the future inhabitants of the new order is illuminated by Luciano Pellicani's theory of "God's orphans".[25] In his neglected but important analysis of political fanaticism, "Revolutionary Apocalypse. Ideological Roots of Terrorism" (2001), published in Italian before 9/11, he analyses the situation of modern human beings caught in liminoid phases of culture, and who thus have a deep thirst for total Gnostic truths about the cosmos in a world spiritually ripped to shreds by the nomocidal impact of modernity. Since they cannot go back to the safe confines of traditional feudal

23 Cf. Roger Griffin, The Palingenetic Political Community. Rethinking the Legitimation of Totalitarian Regimes in Inter-war Europe. In: Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions, 3 (2002) 3, pp. 24–43.

24 Cf. McElligott/Kirk, Working.

25 Luciano Pellicani, Revolutionary Apocalypse. Ideological Roots of Terrorism, Westport, CO 2003, pp. 54–75.

life, nor forward to embrace the atomization and liquefaction of contemporary liberal society, some find themselves forced into the "Third Way" of an extreme utopianism. Exiled from the Divine Truth of pre-modern societies, they conjure up totalizing ideologies of revolutionary transformation shot through with apocalyptic visions of creative destruction, purging violence, and the extermination of demonized and dehumanized enemies as the precondition for the realization of the new order. Pellicani argues that this "Gnostic" syndrome of positive nihilism, and the Zealotic fanaticism it generates, was central to shaping the events of the Jacobin phase of the French Revolution, the Bolshevik Revolution, the Nazi Revolution, and early Maoism; in other studies he finds parallel processes at work in Islamist terrorism.

Once the lost souls of modernity become converts to a secular "Gnostic" and apocalyptic movement of total historical transformation, the World becomes mythicized and is split into a Manichaean universe of good and evil. Potential recruits all too easily succumb to the redemptive appeal of the metanarrative which convinces them they belong to a non-military army of "the just" engaged in a cosmic struggle against the damned, or the enemies of a "healthy" society. In the process, God's orphans metamorphise into "Promethean Builders of the Millennial Kingdom".[26] They undergo a process of what in my study of the socio-psychological dynamics of terrorism I have called "heroic doubling", formerly anomic individuals becoming transformed into cosmic warriors.[27] It is a process deeply akin to what some anomic individuals experienced when they participated in a Nazi rally, the "worm" of the atomized self metamorphosing into "a great dragon".[28] The fanatic that results from this process (familiar from the French Revolution as a "Jacobin") is the vital, living cell of an embodied ideocracy in its revolutionary or populist regime phase. At the core of his or her conversion lies not "brainwashing" by a charismatic leader or an ideocratic state but the powerful drive to find an identity which resolves the nomic crisis born of the combination of the nomocidal impact of modernity and combined with the disembedding impact of a socio-political situation. As Eric Hoffer put it in "The True Believer" (1951), a lucid study of extremist political movements which is unencumbered by academic qualifications or elaborate scholarly apparatus: "The true believer who is wholly assimilated into a compact collective body is no longer frustrated. He has found a new identity and a new life. He is one of the chosen, bolstered and protected by invincible powers, and destined to inherit the earth. His is a state of mind the very opposite of that of the frustrated individual;

26 Ibid., p. 63.

27 This aspect of the process of radicalisation is explored extensively in: Roger Griffin, Terrorist's Creed. Fanatical Violence and the Human Need for Meaning, London 2012, chapter 5.

28 This metaphor is used by Joseph Goebbels, Der Kampf um Berlin. Der Anfang, Munich 1932, p. 18. The phrase first occurs in volume two of Mein Kampf in the section "Erfolge des Marxismus durch Rede": Adolf Hitler, Mein Kampf, Munich 1943, p. 529.

yet he displays, with increased intensity, all the reactions which are symptomatic of inner tension and insecurity".[29]

If small in number, these latter-day "Jacobins" may become part of a self-appointed terrorist[30] or revolutionary vanguard, but particularly profound sense-making crises may produce enough "God's orphans" to form a critical mass of revolutionary zeal channelled into support for the installation or consolidation of the ideocracy. This happened in the Jacobin phase of the French Revolution, in the First World War (in the so-called "war fever" that broke out in some countries), the Bolshevik Revolution (at least until Lenin's death), the Fascist Revolution (but only after the regime had been established), in numerous liberation struggles (Algeria, Sri Lanka, Sikh), and the Iranian Revolution in its formative phase. It would be worth revisiting various phases of the Maoist Revolution to establish if there was any genuinely populist charismatic legitimation involved behind the orchestrated displays of mass fanaticism. In each case it is the dynamics of a revitalization movement which emerges in response to a nomic crisis that should be examined in order to help explain the power of the ideology, not just the brainwashing techniques of a coercive regime or the self-legitimizing component attributed to ideas in an ideocracy. Such an examination is called for whenever more is involved in legitimation than the meaningless legitimacy and simulated belief emanating from a regime's deployment of autocratic power and terror. What drives genuine totalitarian movements, after all, is not just the megalomania of the leaders but their followers' existential longing for a new nomos, for palingenesis: "[The true believers'] innermost craving is for a new life – a rebirth – or, failing this, a chance to acquire new elements of pride, confidence, hope, a sense of purpose and worth by identification with a holy cause. An active mass-movement offers them opportunities for both. If they join the movement as full converts they are reborn to a new life in its close-knit collective body, or if attracted as sympathizers they find elements of pride, confidence, and purpose by identifying with the efforts, achievements, and prospects of the movement."[31]

What legitimates an ideocracy from below is thousands or even millions of worms becoming magically transformed by charismatic social energies into zealous parts of the new socio-political dragon. The act of joining a totalitarian movement which fuels a revolution or provides support for an effective ideocracy "cures the frustrated, not by conferring on them an absolute truth or by remedying the difficulties and abuses which made their lives miserable, but by freeing them from their ineffectual selves – and it does this by enfolding and

29 Cf. Eric Hoffer, The True Believer. Thoughts on the Nature of Mass Movements, New York 1951, p. 126.

30 I have explored the implications of this syndrome for causing terrorism in Terrorist's Creed, chapter 5.

31 Hoffer, The True Believer, pp. 12–13.

absorbing them into a closely knit and exultant corporate whole".[32] It should be noted, however, that not all endogenous totalitarian regimes have emerged in modern history with significant populist legitimation. For example, the communist Hungarian state which resulted from Bela Kun's coup was overthrown before it had demonstrated its potential to harness legitimizing charismatic energies within the population or develop into a full-fledged ideocracy. Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge, on the other hand, intended to wipe out or terrorize into submission the existing population and to wait until a new youth grew up programmed through intensive secondary socialization to embody the dialect of the utopian national communism that he sought to realize. It thus made no attempt to impose an ideocracy on the current generation of Cambodians.

VII. Legitimacy in "Dead" Ideocracies

Even when utopianism is the life-blood of an ideocracy, the charismatic, dynamic, populist phase of legitimacy that results is essentially unsustainable as the brute facts that prevent the claimed Utopia being realized mount ever higher and the contradictions between rhetoric and reality become ever more undeniable to increasingly disenchanted eyes and ears. Moreover, it should be borne in mind that for a significant majority of the population the ideocracy has never resolved their personal sense-making crisis even at the time of revolutionary upheaval, let alone in the period of normalization under the resulting state. It should also be emphasized that not all human beings, even in the most anarchic of social dysfunctions, experience a nomic crisis since some are temperamentally more resistant to anomie than others even in intensely liminoid situations, and many more feel safely protected by another sacred canopy, whether it is religious faith, a rival political vision or intense personal relations. It is when populist legitimacy starts haemorrhaging from the system that the repressive techniques of totalitarian rule come into play. They enforce outward conformity, mass-produce feigned commitment, and suppress factionalism, opposition, dissent, and resistance. As true belief drains away, the coercive apparatus may take over the task of orchestrating propaganda, political religion, and the leader cult while escalating oppression in order to bridge the widening credibility gap between the regime's utopian aspirations and promises and its actual achievement. A close study of Baathist Iraq under Saddam Husain would put much-needed empirical flesh on this skeleton of abstraction. Orwell's "Animal Farm" (1945) is also a seminal fictional narrative that traces the rise and fall of a charismatic ideocracy.

Alternatively, the whole ideocratic regime may gradually decay into a banal daily hell of bureaucratic rationalization, fossilized utopianism, and routinized

32 Ibid., p. 41.

charisma, one where a rising tide of collective ennui drowns out the last vestiges of genuine enthusiasm, but most still feel compelled to admire the emperor's new clothes, even though they have become all too transparent. It is a situation magnificently portrayed in Aleksandr Zinoviev's dissident novel, "Yawning Heights" (1978). In contemporary China, revolutionary Maoism seems to have atrophied into a new form of Marxian-Confucian Capitalism overseen but no longer run by Big Brother. The terror machine is kept well oiled and fed with victims but discretely located away from the sky-scrapers, advertising billboards, and business hotels of capitalist socialism.[33] For over a billion human beings in China this has resulted in an existential reality of having to endure daily the tension between the collective nomos proclaimed by the ideocracy and a private anomie that officially does not exist. This dilemma has yet to find a novelist or a playwright who is accessible to non-Chinese writers. In the meantime, Ai Weiwei has made heroic efforts to use the visual arts to break the fetters of ideological tyranny and conformism and expose the "internal contradictions of socialism" to the West.[34]

Numerically more common than decayed, defunct endogenous ideocracies in the 20th century were the exogenous ideocratic regimes which were established with minimal or no domestic revolutionary struggle. Instead they were simply imposed by a totalitarian "mother" power in a sustained act of colonial force on an unwilling foreign "satellite" population and thus could never generate extensive domestic charismatic populist energies. Such regimes were forced by the logic of autocratic power in the age of the masses to stage elaborate displays of political religion and mount extensive campaigns of propaganda, indoctrination, and re-education which aped the outward form of charismatic legitimation, but without the substance. Certainly, there may have been a small percentage of indigenous true believers to keep the puppet regime going, but they were vastly outnumbered by the ranks of opportunists, careerists, and survivors prepared to outwardly convert to the ideocracy's world-view for cynical, egotistical, or survivalist motives. In such cases, it was the initial act of coercion followed by the normalization of the regime through the secondary socialization of a new generation that sustained its legitimacy, not a fluctuating tide of genuine ideological fervour and Gnostic longings for a new order and a new future. "Propaganda" under such ideocracies loses its original ingredient of faith and acquires its modern connotations of brainwashing and manipulation.

This model broadly applies to all Soviet satellite states. Classic case studies are provided by the GDR, Communist Czechoslovakia, and North Korea, which has developed into an elaborate imposed ideocracy of its own. Other examples are Romania under Ceausescu, Tibet under Chinese occupation, and all Nazi satellites formed during the Second World War and integrated willy-nilly into the

33 A paradox no more oxymoronic in essence than "constitutional monarchy" or "national socialism".

34 See Laura Murray Cree (Ed.), Ai Weiwei. Under Construction, Sydney 2009.

"Europäische Neuordnung". Each pseudo-charismatic regime creates deep existential dilemmas for all those subjects who find outward conformity does not satisfy their existential and nomic needs. They are often torn between the drive to rid themselves of false consciousness and bad faith by heroically devoting their lives to freedom, truth and, hence, to resistance at great personal risk, and the opposing need to survive materially (sometimes for the sake of loved ones) and to avoid physical pain This can lead to collaboration of varying degrees of intensity and inward commitment, with many apparent converts to the alien regime immigrating inwardly while outwardly complying with official beliefs to overcome the anguish of cognitive dissonance and to be able to function in everyday life. The plays of Václav Havel such as "Audience" (1975) written at the height of communist repression are testimonies to the intense, anguished inner lives generated by being forced to live under a "dead" ideocracy while clinging to humanist values.

VIII. Conclusion: Implications for the Study of Ideocracies

This paper has several implications for the comparative study of the dynamics of legitimation within totalitarian ideocracies. First, it suggests that a distinction is to be made for heuristic purposes between i) ideocracies which, due to being imposed on a society from within at the height of a liminoid crisis of society, are able to generate genuine currents of populist legitimacy by harnessing generalized longings to belong to a new nomic community, even several years after the establishment of the totalitarian regime (as in Fascist Italy); and ii) ideocracies imposed from without by an imperialist or colonial power, hence lacking the preconditions for an extensive populist base, or ideocracies whose popular reservoirs of genuine ideological fervour have dried up and now function solely as pseudo-populist autocracies. Second, it claims that more work is needed on the revolutionary dynamics of totalitarian revolutions in the context of the modernist revolt against decadence and the resulting drive to find total solutions to the West's permanent state of nomic crisis and to impose closure on its permanent liminoidality.

Third, it is clear that more work is required on the coexistence of ideocratic and pseudo-ideocratic elements within the same regime, their relationship fluctuating over time due to changing material and political circumstances which make the realization and very survival of the regime more or less utopian. An ideal contemporary case-study for such an investigation, but one which demands advanced language skills and a deep understanding of Islam and Islamic society, is the Iranian theocracy. Fourth, it would be helpful to explore how far Weberian understanding of the "routinization of charisma" and the forces of rationalization and bureaucratization could be applied fruitfully to understanding the

process by which a "living" ideocracy, one partially legitimized by charismatic forces from below, can degenerate into a "dead" ideocracy.

By looking more critically and with a greater wealth of specialist knowledge of specific regimes,at the distinction between coerced and spontaneous, living and decayed ideocracies and the specific conditions that have produced their rise and fall, not just in Europe but on all five continents, Western academics might finally break out of decades of Eurocentric, inter-war–centric studies of totalitarianism. They would then be in a position to start locating ideocracies properly within modernity. In particular, they could begin relating a particular ideocracy to the creative cosmological and ideogonic forces unleashed by the revolt against actually existing modernity, a revolt driven by the primordial human need for an eternal nomos in an age of permanent transience.