

The cosmogony of Stalinist propaganda in post-war Poland

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This paper analyzes the discourse of propaganda in the apogee of the Stalinist era in Poland (1949-1953) as creating a quasi-mythical reality (mythopoeia). The analysis draws on the structuralist conceptions of myth-making following the work of Lévi Strauss, Mircea Eliade, and Pierre Bourdieu. The data (visual and written texts) comes from a sample of features and articles drawn from the Communist Party national daily newspaper *Trybuna Ludu* and the lifestyle weekly *Przekrój*.

The study demonstrates how the positioning of social actors creates cosmogonic relations between them. It is argued that the key technique underlying the propaganda discourse is the dichotomization of reality reducible to a basic contrast between ‘communism’ vs. ‘capitalism’, e.g. *Władze Francji prowadzą określoną politykę (...) za którą stoją podżegacze wojenni, zawsze gotowi korzystać z usług najciemniejszych elementów. Dla elementów tych natomiast solą w oku jest każdy uczciwy, świadomy robotnik* ‘The French authorities are following a particular policy, behind which some war instigators are implicated, always ready to resort to the good offices of the darkest elements. For these elements every honest, self-conscious worker is a sore in the eye’ (*Trybuna Ludu* No. 90, April 1949, p.5).

Following Levi-Strauss (1983[1993]) I analyze this dichotomization along the vertical and horizontal axes. The discussion subsumes the discursive reflection of such phenomena as, for example: a-temporality (reduction of the historic dimension to an expanding web of ideological beginnings), the emphasis on competition (creating ‘dummy’ enemies within a social class and across classes), and conceptual reification (e.g. *masy kobiece we wszystkich krajach* ‘female masses in all countries’).

The paper argues that the binary ideology of these propaganda texts relies heavily on creating the temporal opposition between what is referred to here as the ‘progressive’ and the ‘reactionary’ aspect, both heavily implicated with opposite axiological values. The former locates social actors, states and events in an imaginary ‘future-in-the-present’ and connotes *progress*, e.g. *sily obozu demokratycznego i antyimperialistycznego, które z nadzieją spoglądają na ZSRR, jednoczą się i wzmacniają z każdym miesiącem* ‘the forces of the democratic and anti-imperialist camp, which are looking with hope towards the USRR, are getting more and more united and they are getting stronger month by month’; the latter invokes ‘past-in-the-present’ relations and connotes *regress*, e.g., *za każdym razem rozlegał się chór wściekłych, burżuazyjnych kłamstw. Tak stało się i dzisiaj* ‘every time there occurred a chorus of infuriated, bourgeois lies. So it has happened also today’.

The paper concludes with a discussion of some implications for the appropriation of mythological, quasi-religious rhetoric and imagery in political propaganda.

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