PROPAGANDA IN ANCIENT ROME

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Abstract

The Eternal City was not only a world power, a gendarme of the ancient world for a long period of time, but also a power of communication. To increase its influence, ancient Rome made extensive use of communication techniques such as: manipulation, persuasion, and especially propaganda. We can say that Rome was the first laboratory of effective propaganda which obtained tangible results: Romanization.

Roman propaganda followed several stages, depending on the political organization of the City of Seven Hills. Thus, during the Kingdom there was a kind of propaganda with mystical overtones, which ranked Rome as a kingdom of divine origin, and during the Republic, Roman propaganda became a state policy with theorists and practitioners. During the Roman Empire, propaganda reached its peak and managed to perfectly function throughout the world ruled by the Romans, while turning it into a Roman world through the impact of its persuasion.

The Romans propagated their influence mainly through the army, therefore Romanization is primarily a military propaganda, words and deeds were transformed by the Romans in weapons meant to conquer the souls of the vanquished. So, propaganda has not only a Latin etymology, but also Roman practical application.

Keywords: ancient Rome, communication techniques, ideology, influence, psychological war

Introduction

Propaganda has a Latin etimology, therefore Rome can also assume the paternity of this complex process of communication. Although it refers to plants, the verb *propago, -are=1. to multiply (by cuttings); 2. to increase, to stretch, to extend* (Guțu, 1993, p. 330) lies at the origin of the complex communication process of propaganda, actually a derivative from the passive future participle (Strechie, 2013, p. 138) *propagandus*, expressing necessity and being translated as '*which has to be enlarged, multiplied, stretched, extended*'.

The Romans wanted to create a universal Roman society, and this was done by "nationalization", since they had a theory of "absolute society". The aim of Rome was to create "*res communi omnes*" (Gusti,1995, p. 4, p. 64, p. 45) (things common to everybody – our transl.). This world society was Rome, which had to be propagated to the vanquished as the Eternal City.

Like any communication process, Roman propaganda had its actors, the

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most important were its soldiers, as "war creates the closest solidarity between all sons of the same fatherland" (*Ibidem*:106).

Besides actors, Roman propaganda had a well defined goal – "a kind of organized and planned persuasion intended to influence and direct the opinion" (Vlăduțescu, 2006, p. 245) of the Romans, but especially the public opinion of the non-Romans, who had to be Romanized. Roman public opinion developed in time, *Republica* being the most beautiful embodiment of it. The state representing the interests of the community by elected representatives, this was the revolution caused by the emergence of the Republic as a form of government, a participatory democracy of all Roman citizens by electing worthy representatives from among them. Therefore, Roman public opinion was the most drastic "tribunal of public interests" (Gusti D. 1995: 66).

The propaganda of Rome became in time a state policy with its own "grammar of persuasion" which included: "the prestige" of Rome, "the statement" that Rome was the best of all possible worlds, "the repetition" that the Romans were chosen by the gods to rule the world and "the mental contagion" (Le Bon G. no year: 98) of all its subjects by integrating them into this world of all possibilities, through the Latin language and values, in other words through Romanization, the act of becoming Roman by embracing Roman values.

The evolution of propaganda coincided with the evolution of Rome, with the three mandatory stages: 1. "symbolic propaganda" particularly evident during the Kingdom, when the Romans chose the god of Mars with all his symbols, as the father and model of the royal leader; 2. "tactical propaganda" with power interests in the region, visible during the Republic when Rome slowly but surely built its empire and dismembered other empires with which it competed (the Punic Wars are part of this "tactical propaganda"); 3. "strategic propaganda" (Vlăduțescu, 2006, pp. 254-255) present during the Empire, inaugurated by Caesar, masterfully continued by Augustus, which led to the imposition of Roman interests worldwide, *Pax Romana* and *Romanization* being the masterpieces of this type of propaganda.

Strategic as it was, it certainly had the support of the Roman army, which became the main agent of propaganda and politics, by its changing from an institution of force into an institution of political and military force.

The symbols of Roman propaganda

Like any other propaganda, the Roman one used symbols. These symbols were almost the same from Kingdom to Empire, and others were added depending on the interests of Rome. The symbols of Roman propaganda were both physical (usually former totems or representations of divine attributes), and theoretical such as ideology transmitted through literary works and the personality cult.

During the Kingdom, the symbols of Roman propaganda were the gods and the totems of the wolf and the eagle. "Hagiography" (Hentea C. 2015:28-29) was fully used to make an "image" of the king. The first king, even if legendary,

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Romulus, was the son of Mars, the god of war, and his mother was Rhea Silvia, a descendant of Aeneas, the son of Venus, the goddess of love. So the Romans' descent had a double divine seal, they were like the gods.

Totems like the wolf and the eagle were symbols of power, later they became symbols of the Roman state, the wolf (Strechie M. 2014 a.: 292-299) (she-wolf) was a political symbol symbolizing the Roman state and the eagle was a military symbol, representing the Roman legions (whose fight flag was a stylized eagle) (Strechie, 2014 b., pp. 97-107).

Rome was a myth and a goddess for the Romans of the Kingdom. This Roman myth was the expression of divine origin, invincibility nature and liberating vocation (Vlăduțescu, 2006, p. 246; Vlăduțescu & Ionescu, 2015).

By this "power of evocation" the propaganda of royal Rome imposed a real "ideology" and, at the same time, a political "organization" (Arădăvoaice Gh. Coord. 1987: 247, 314) by the electoral reform, namely "he who defends the country rules it". This is how the Latin collective mind was created, dominated by the awareness of the divine mission on earth, namely to Romanize the world. The Latin collective mind was fully and especially manifest in the Republic. During this period propaganda became for the Romans first of all "a way of spreading certain sympathies on behalf of certain goals" (Hentea, 2002, p. 19), i.e. national, Roman objectives.

The main republican values of the Roman mind which were propagated included "the cult of homeland, courage, virtue, devotion, dedication to the public good" (Vlăduțescu, 2006, p. 246), in other words *res* were *publica* for all Roman citizens. During the Republic, Rome's main propagated ideals were related to *cursus honorum*. Now the personal merit dedicated to the Roman state was the most important. The Roman fundamental values were *virtus*, *fides* and *pietas* (Grimal, 1973), i.e. bravery, loyalty and respect for the sacred. Public offices were designed for the advancement of the state of Roman citizens, *Res publica*. A new mentality value emerged, that of *homo novus*, theorized by Cicero (Cicero M. T. 1903), himself such a man. *Homo novus* was a self-made man, a man of his own merit, dedicated to the Roman state.

Republican propaganda used a sort of communication that "wanted to influence the receiver", *populus Romanus*, and wanted "a management of collective attitudes through the manipulation of significant symbols" (Hentea C. 2008: 386, 387). The main institutionalized and representative propaganda body was ***SPQR***, i.e. ***Senatus populusque Romanus*** (The Senate and the Roman people) actually the Roman state, led by the elected representatives of the Roman citizens. The Senate was the parliament of Rome and also the supreme institution of Rome, which also detained and delegated its *imperium* to Roman magistrates. So, Rome made an internal propaganda by this "institutionalized means of influencing individual and collective attitudes and behaviour" (*Ibidem*: 390), as well as an external propaganda by extending its *imperium* throughout its provinces, which significantly multiplied during the Republic.

The values of propaganda multiply with the expansion of Roman rule in

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the world, propaganda that made the object of literature, especially Caesar's *De Bello Gallico,* considered "a masterpiece of propaganda literature" (Hentea C. 2002:40), propaganda addressing Roman citizens, therefore internal, but also of "integration" (*Ibidem*: 21). Propaganda's means change with the great politician and brilliant strategist Caesar. As he makes a real "imagology war" primarily intended for the Roman citizens through "deliberate and concrete action carried out in time of peace or war to impose a public image" (*Ibidem*: 30). So, he uses the victory against the Gauls as the glory of the Roman state which brought him perpetual glory, spreading among the Roman citizens "sympathies on behalf of goals" (*Ibidem*: 19). By the parade of the victorious troops with all their spoils before the Roman citizens, Caesar, even if he had crossed the Rubicon and begun a new civil war, created a new "country brand", i.e. "those intangible values of the country" (Hentea C. 2015:32). The values of the country brand of Rome were the superiority of its institutions, its language, army, light and model for the barbarians. These Roman values were visible especially by "the demonstration of force", "an ostentatious public manifestation of the potential as a military force" (*Ibidem*:68) that Caesar had on behalf of *populus Romanus*.

Roman republican propaganda has not only practitioners like Caesar, but also theorists like Cicero, who gave Roman propaganda its theoretical side, namely oratory. In Cicero's view, highlighted in his work, *De oratore,* the great scholar said that "*An orator should be required the sharpness of a logician's mind, the thinking of a philosopher, the expression similar to that of a poet, the memory of a legal expert, the voice of a tragedian and, I would say, the gestures of a famous actor. Therefore, there is nothing rarer in this world than a perfect orator"* (Guțu Gh. ed. 1973 paragraph translated from *De oratore*, I, 28, 128:31). This was Cicero, the orator, and the perfect propagandist, the one who could impress and managed to change the attitude and determine the behaviour of the Roman citizens. Moreover, Cicero identifies several types of making propaganda by the art of words, thus identifying three oratorical genres, *genera dicendi:* the sublime genre, the simple genre and the medium genre. Orators of the first category have a pompous speech, vast and deep ideas, majestic expression, they are vehement, various, abundant, strong, possessing all the qualities to move the spirits and to delight them. The second category includes simple, sharp orators, clearing issues within a limited framework, they are not vast in speech, using a sober, focused and careful style. Orators belonging to the last category distinguish themselves by practising a temperate, equal, fluent, discreet style in the use of arguments, without the excess of subtlety of some or the fervour of others (*Ibidem* paragraph translated from *De optimo genere oratorum*: 46.).

By the effects of oratory on the Romans, the great man of culture, Cicero, also theorizes such manipulation techniques as: "thinking, behaviour, feelings" (Ficeac B. 20065: 115; Bușu & Teodorescu, 2016). For all these could be influenced by the art of words that Cicero mastered.

During the Empire, from Augustus, Roman propaganda begins to have an

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ideology through the *Aeneid* of Virgil. This ideology was primarily a military one (Strechie M. 2015: in print). Like any ideology, the Roman one had "context, interests, strategies" (Arădăvoaice Gh. coord. 1987: 71-72.). The context of the propaganda-ideology of the Roman Empire with Augustus was *orbis terrarum* (the entire world), the interests of Rome were the organization of *orbis* after the model of Rome (there were also slogans for these interests such as *Roma Victor – victorious Rome*, *Ubi bene ibi patria – Homeland is where it is good*, *Pax Romana – Roman peace*), and the strategies were conceived and put into practice by the Roman army (in particular by granting Roman citizenship to provincials who fought for Rome, for them and for their families; recruitment into the basic institution of Rome was the best strategy to propagate/multiply Roman ideals and rights worldwide).

We can say that the Empire transformed propaganda in state politics, as well as an institution of psychological warfare, for Rome conquered not only territories, but also the conscience of people. There were real "public relations campaigns" by the Roman entertainment industry, by recruiting among the ranks of the armed forces the most effective elements of the provinces, by the symbols of Roman power, by cultural works.

In the 1st century BC and 1st century AD, the classics of Latin literature created for Rome. All the great men of culture of Rome founded the Roman ideology consisting of "information, theories, values, strategies for action, awareness" (*Ibidem*:77-83). Lyrics such as the Aeneid, which traced the fate of the Roman to be a universal gendarme, make a cultured propaganda out of the Roman propaganda.

The Roman *Imperium* becomes universal, therefore the title of the Roman leader and his cult represented a link of propaganda. Besides *IMPERATOR*, (originally, the military rank of general) CAESAR (initiator of the imperial governance) there appears the title of DIVUS (the one like the gods). This very title of DIVUS is the most powerful symbol that the propaganda of Imperial Rome worked with. If during the Kingdom and the Republic, Rome made propaganda especially for its citizens, during the Empire it made the propaganda of its citizens for the whole conquered world.

The purpose of Roman propaganda

The purpose of Roman propaganda was Romanization. In addition to a complex cultural process, Romanization was a genuine "war of meanings" won by "operations for the purpose of influencing" (Hentea C. 2015: 229, 106) that changed the behaviour of the defeated, from barbarians into Romanized people, in other words, like the Romans. Therefore, many expressions like "When in Rome, do as the Romans do" or "All roads lead to Rome" best reflected this Roman successful propaganda. The previously barbarian world became, consciously, Roman by embracing Roman values and a new consciousness, the most desirable purpose of propaganda of all times.

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Conclusions

Ancient Rome was not by chance a world power. It knew not only how to obtain control of the world (through military, economic, psychological operations), but also how to maintain and organize its power through a complex system of institutions, techniques and relations. The most important of them, through their psychological effects, were the means of communication. By these means of communication Rome was able to propagate its ideals, values, ideas and interests. Rome was a power of communication and a power through communication. It brilliantly implemented concepts that today we consider modern and post-modern such as propaganda, manipulation, disinformation, psychological warfare, psychological operations.

In the field of propaganda, Rome surpassed whatever had been previously created by China and Persia. The City of Seven Hills made of propaganda a genuine institution serving the state and its interests, an institution with actors, strategies and goals.

Rome conquered the world not only physically, but also emotionally, changing the will of many barbarian nations, persuading them to become Romans by their behaviour, attitudes, will, in other words the Romans also fought the mind of the defeated nations, while successfully practising "operations for the purpose of influencing". The real masterpiece of their propaganda was Romanization, a process so far unmatched by any other power, though many declared themselves the second or the third Rome.

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