

# THE PRESENCE OF IDEOLOGIES

## IDEOLOGIES AFTER IDEOLOGIES: ON CYNICAL NAÏVETY

By **MAŁGORZATA KOWALSKA**

*The article sees me deliberating over the current state of ideology and the meaning of the very notion deriving from the popular – in its day – slogan of ‘the end of ideology’. I construct a thesis that this headword, close to the representatives of the Warsaw school of the historians of ideas during their break with Marxism, is already to a large extent redundant, equally implying a fairly impoverished meaning for the concept itself. Ideology is there understood chiefly in epistemological categories as false knowledge, dogmatic thinking and/or unlawfully totalising. Such an understanding I confront with its psychological meaning, in accordance with which ideology constitutes ‘false consciousness’ (after Marx though chiefly on the basis of psychoanalysis), consciousness which ‘does not know what it does’, directing itself by means of obscure motives. The common denominator and even the basis of both meanings of ideology – the epistemological and the psychological – I see in the practical-political dimension: false knowledge and false consciousness deserve the designation of ideology in so far as they are instruments of the ‘will of power’. Ideology so understood is doing splendidly in contemporary times.*

*I conjecture in connection with the theses of Peter Sloterdijk but I also claim in the polemic that contemporary ideologies are both cynical and naïve. Cynical to the degree that we have increasingly fewer illusions over the odds at state in ideological clashes: victory or defeat within the framework of force relations. Naïve in the sense that it is linked to an investing of desire into the objects shoved in front of one by the ruling system or leader, and even with a willingness to sacrifice oneself for them.*

Key words: ideology, false consciousness, desire (desire investment), will of power, capitalism, fundamentalism, cynicism

### 1. PROBLEMATIC CONCEPT

The ‘end of ideology’ slogan, popularized initially in the 1960s through the well-known works of, among others, Daniel Bell and Raymond Aron;<sup>1</sup> a term which seemed to

<sup>1</sup> Daniel Bell, *The End of Ideology: On the Exhaustion of Political Ideas in the Fifties* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988); Raymond Aron, *The Opium of the Intellectuals*, (New Brunswick-London: Transaction Publishers, 2001).

IDEOLOGIES AFTER IDEOLOGIES: ON CYNICAL NAÏVETY

enjoy a growing credibility and currency with the fall of real communism and the adoption of liberal democracy in an ever larger part of the world, has ceased being popular for some time, and has even become completely *passé*. It has been subverted not only by especially aggressive psycho-political forms and socio-political mobilization such as radical Islamism, but also by various phenomena taking place within the domain of so-called Western culture, and even more so, by those which can be observed within the territory of former Communist countries, in particular in Poland.

Much depends, of course, on how we are going to define ideology. It is without doubt an unclear concept and from this perspective problematic. Setting aside its etymological and original sense (the science of ideas according to Destutt de Tracy), in the course of its already long and stormy career it has profited from having many meanings, not necessarily ones mutually exclusive, but certainly disparate.

This is not the place to go into detail on the subject of this polysemy. By way of an introduction and in order to accept at the same time a sense of this concept that is as wide and as precise as possible, we will say this much: 'an important difference between one or another way of understanding the term 'ideology' is linked to the act of paying attention either to the epistemic status and functions of a certain system of concepts in comparison with knowledge assumedly non-ideological, or to the relationship between such a system of ideas and the condition and consciousness of the subject. This is equal to the distinction of ideology as false knowledge and ideology as false consciousness. The first concept can be called epistemological, the second – socio-psychological!'

The understanding of ideology in the categories of false knowledge, pseudo-knowledge, or partial knowledge, at best, but one aspiring to be true and – at least to a certain extent – complete, assumes the possibility of defining what *de jure* proper knowledge is. The latter, in modern times, was habitually identified with science as the domain of rational thinking, made objective and intersubjective in contrast to the sphere of merely subjective convictions, imaginaries, and beliefs. Such a distinction is already present in the philosophy of Kant, according to which ideology – though he does not use this term yet – should be defined as attempts at a metaphysical transgression beyond the borders of the theoretical reason which delineate the possibility of knowing at all; that means laying a claim to, as a result of succumbing to a transcendental appearance, know the thing-in-itself. This Kantian thread would be radicalized in classical positivism, in accordance with which philosophical speculation, similarly to religious beliefs, does not have any epistemic value, although science for its own part can only answer questions concerning phenomena (observable facts and the constants controlling their occurrence), resigning forever from attempts at granting answers to questions concerning primary principles: the wholeness of the world, the meaning of life, etc. Struggling with such questions would be then the domain of ideology. In the twentieth century, the variant of the Kant-positivist approach is present in, for instance, Popper's philosophy of science, putting emphasis on the hypothetical and unstable nature of scientific claims – in contrast

MAŁGORZATA KOWALSKA

with totalizing, non-experimental, unfalsifiable, and therefore also 'irrefutable' ideological theses, the model example of which would be the theses of Hegel and Marx.<sup>2</sup>

On the other hand, the distinction between proper and improper knowledge is also present in Hegel and (in a more complicated way, to which we will return) in Marx. Except that here it comes to the overturning of the Kantian-positivistic valuation of the elements of opposition. From the Hegelian perspective, only 'absolute knowledge' is a science truly worthy of being considered as proper knowledge because it recognizes the mechanisms of the very becoming of itself and places it at certain moments in the framework of the Whole. Although Hegel himself does not yet use the term 'ideology', it is clear that in the context of his dialectical-speculative system, each type of thinking that is fragmentary, one-sided and in this sense abstract, particularly when it claims to rank as concrete and universal, deserves to be called ideology – especially each detail-oriented positive science which forgets about its own historical conditioning and limitations, aspiring to rationality and truth *tout court*.

Contrary to appearances, the opposition between these concepts of knowledge in the proper sense is relative. At least at the level of a coherent theory of truth, it can be accepted, that each claim or theory confirms their epistemological value only in the frames of a possible *de jure* total system of knowledge, until this happens (in practice, never), each of these has only the status of a more or less probable hypothesis. In this context, likewise on the basis of Hegel's thought, ideologism would be bound to bypassing this inevitably provisional and hypothetical status of knowledge, being a synonym for naïve dogmatism.

One of the particularities of the positivist tradition is also the distinction between the concept of knowledge as a set of better or worse justified affirmative judgments and the concept of knowledge as a set of evaluative, and especially moral, judgments. From this point of view, ideology would be then characterized by a lack of distinction between these types of judgements, a direct and unauthorized passage from facts to values and obligations, and in the psychological order: the 'contamination' of understanding through emotions. This amounts to recognizing the whole axiological sphere as, in an important sense, irrational, and to denying emotions of any epistemological value, which is a difficult position to maintain. However, it seems reasonable to maintain a distinction between emotions, but also between value judgements that could be reflected on and those which are 'blind', as well as between conscious ones or consciously controlled and unconscious ones. From this point of view, the sphere of ideology would be filled with, first and foremost, emotions that are unconscious, or at least those controlled to an insignificant degree (drives, desires, traumas), and that already leads us in the direction of a psychological conception.

<sup>2</sup> See: Karl Popper, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* (London: Hutchinson, 1959); Karl Popper, *The Poverty of Historicism* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964).

IDEOLOGIES AFTER IDEOLOGIES: ON CYNICAL NAÏVETY

The case of Marx and Marxism is particularly interesting for ideology theory because it constitutes not so much a synthesis as a combination of a positivistic and Hegelian approach to the problem, but at the same time a link between an understanding of ideology – for the first time called by its name – as the opposite of science or false knowledge, and ideology as false consciousness. Turning Hegel's dialectics 'upside-down', Marx accuses idealism – which familiarizes the entanglement of consciousness in material, economic interests – of ideologism, but he simultaneously maintains the Hegelian distinction between total, universal – and therefore deserving to be called scientific – knowledge, and particular though unconscious of its particularism and indeed for this reason ideological knowledge.

Taken most broadly, consciousness is false when it fails to recognize its particularism, its historico-societal, and in the end, individual conditioning, confusing its own imagination with universal truth and – what is more – not recognizing the objective sense of the acts it accompanies, but of only those which it seemingly controls. In this sense, false consciousness 'does not know what it's doing'. It remains unconscious of its true motives, interests and/or drives underlying its ideas and beliefs. It is in no way synonymous to an intentional falsehood nor even self-deception, but it is a manifestation of a fundamental rupture between that which the subject is conscious of, and that by which this subject is 'truly' motivated. In keeping with this approach, the consciousness of the subject in principle 'does not keep up' with its factual motivations that are historically, socially, and finally psychologically and biologically formed. At the level of consciousness, we are essentially only dealing with the rationalization of unconscious interests and/or drives. Psychoanalysis, from Freud to Lacan and Žižek, adds that the actual source of ideology, below the threshold of the consciousness and rationalizations connected with it, is a desire and striving for its investment ('cathexis') in a certain object, and what follows, is an aspiration to transfer it onto all, or at least a considerable part of, psychic energy; a desire to finally identify itself with some kind of 'master', a symbolic-phantasmatic father who specifies norms and meanings. Such an identification confers an imaginary identity to the subject, unifies it around the 'Ideal-I', seemingly patching its internal fracture, but in fact only deepening it further, because in accordance with the psychoanalytic interpretation, the imaginary construction of the subject's identity never corresponds with reality.

In the Marxist, but also in the psychoanalytic perspective, there is a peculiar case of false consciousness; namely the case of what can be described as 'doubly-false consciousness'. It is a consciousness that is oblivious not only of what conditions it and what secretly motivates it, but also of the fact that the latter is in reality contradictory with its 'proper' interest and desire because it relies upon identification with the interest and desire of others who only seemingly are advocates of that interest and desire, while in fact they repress and act against them, and in accordance with their own (interests and desires). According to Marx this is the case of classes that are subordinate to the ruling class, in particular, of the proletariat subjecting themselves to the bourgeois ideology, accepting

MAŁGORZATA KOWALSKA

its system of ideas and values, until it becomes 'a class for itself'. According to critics of Communism, beginning with Orwell and the Frankfurt School, it was the Communists and broad supporters of Communism themselves who inflicted violence on their own subjectivity, enslaving not only others, but also even themselves while being ready to sacrifice their own desires, their own thinking, and in the end their own lives in the name of the phantasmic Cause. Such a diagnosis also applies, of course, to supporters of fascism.

The relationship between ideology understood as false knowledge (an epistemological concept) and ideology understood as false consciousness (a psychological concept) is not, of course, a disjunctive relationship. False knowledge can be recognized as the work of false consciousness and conversely: false knowledge, from the moment when it is internalized as the 'Master Signifier' – to use the language of Lacan – gives birth to false consciousness, obscuring from the subject the truth about itself (the subject), about its situation and true desires. Despite this relationship, the difference between an epistemological and a psychological conception is essential and in extreme cases these conceptions can completely diverge. At the level of a psychological conception, one can resign from providing a positive definition of knowledge in the proper sense, at least in its objective dimension, that is to say, as knowledge of the world. The adequate criterion of ideologism would be here – as perhaps in Lacan or, though on the basis of other philosophical principles, in Sartre – the 'inauthenticity' of the subject understood as its inability to recognize its own 'nothingness' and the indeterminacy of its own desire, as a constant tendency to confer on itself a substantial, or in fact phantasmatical, identity through the investment of desire in some kind of object and identifying with some other (other as with a concrete object, but also the Lacanian the Other, that is, a social system of signifiers, where a certain concrete individual or group other always establishes dominant meanings). And conversely, on the level of an epistemological conception, one can ultimately skip over the subject, along with its consciousness and its unconsciousness, desires and phantasms, creating an idea of knowledge without a subject, while recognizing as ideological these very deliberations on the subject as well as the concept itself; or noting that the subject is the product of ideology (as Althusser has done here<sup>3</sup>) which does not turn out to be the same thing. The opposite of ideology would be here pure science understood as 'theoretical practice' without the subject; all the more epistemologically valuable, the more impersonal, anonymous, and ownerless it is. The question is, where then do ideologies come from? Even on the assumption that the impersonal power of science and epistemology without a subject are possible, it is impossible to fathom the phenomenon of ideology without an appeal to some kind of concept of subject which precedes ideology.

However, in the relationship between the epistemological and the psychological conceptions of ideology, the point of the matter is also and above all different. If not in

<sup>3</sup> See: Louis Althusser, *For Marx* (London-New York: Verso, 2010).

IDEOLOGIES AFTER IDEOLOGIES: ON CYNICAL NAÏVETY

all, then at least in the majority of historical ways to understand the term, the relationship of false knowledge and/or false consciousness with power, force, and ultimately violence has fundamental meaning. From this point of view, ideology is not every private illusion nor even every set of collective representations, but only a kind of quasi-knowledge, which grows out from the 'will to power' while rationalizing it, a kind that is meant to serve as a platform to attain and maintain a superior position in society, to subdue other representations and practices, subordinating them to itself. In this sense, ideology always has a practical and political character in the crude sense of the word: it is connected with relations to individual, and above all collective, strengths and with the striving of some to rule over others, also at the cost of ruling over 'oneself', over that which in 'myself' can resist a force – a force which to some extent I desire or to which I surrender while identifying myself with it. Such a practical (pragmatic?) and political understanding of ideology is typical of Marxism, but also of psychoanalysis starting from Freud, of course of Nietzsche, and subsequently of all of their twentieth century heirs, from the Frankfurt School and Foucault to Žižek. It is also typical of the seemingly purely epistemological tradition, of which Popper and Aron can be considered representative. Because for them too, the hallmark of ideology is not only and not just its pseudo-scientific character as much as – and above all – the fact that it constitutes a tool of constructing a certain type of society and exercising power over it. Therefore, both from the psychological perspective and from the epistemological perspective, ideology not only and not just thinks (inadequately, dogmatically and inauthentically), as much as it acts. As such, it reveals itself not only and not just in a set of representations, as much as in a system of societal practices embodied in institutions (in 'the state apparatuses', as Althusser put it<sup>4</sup>), in the specified interpersonal relationships and behaviors shaped through it, in a certain ritual or in a 'cult' (Benjamin<sup>5</sup>), or in a 'habitus' (Bourdieu<sup>6</sup>), in bodies themselves, disciplined in a certain way and connected with a certain form of societally produced subjectivity (Foucault<sup>7</sup>). In an extreme case, the cult does not need consciously worshipped dogmas, nor even subjectively experienced faith; ideology, situated as if in things themselves, becomes to a large degree independent of the content of consciousness and of the types of desires, but also independent of the existence or nonexistence of the subjective will of power, becoming an autonomous power over people's minds. In this way, the phenomenon of the commodity fetishism – as

<sup>4</sup> See: 'L'idéologie et appareils idéologiques d'Etat' in Louis Althusser, *Positions, 1964-1975* (Paris: Éditions sociales, 1976).

<sup>5</sup> See: 'Kapitalismus als Religion' in Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. IV (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1972).

<sup>6</sup> See: Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Stanford UP, 1990).

<sup>7</sup> See: particularly Michel Foucault, *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. A. Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books 1995); and also Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-1979*, trans. Graham Burchell (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

MAŁGORZATA KOWALSKA

described by Marx – can be interpreted and generalized (as Žižek has done for example<sup>8</sup>). Ultimately, fetishism consists in the effect of social practice that wholly separates itself from the consciousness of this practice and reveals itself to subjects as a logic of the things in themselves to which one needs to surrender, and which, in the end, themselves determine the content of consciousness (that which is thinkable). In such a situation (that is, in such a conceptualization of the problem) the falsehood of knowledge and consciousness should ultimately be considered a synonym of their practical irrelevance. However, even in such a situation, consciousness is important at least as much as it is capable of strengthening the action of 'objective structures', providing them with an ideational justification.

Summarizing the above reconstruction and discussion, let us accept that in keeping with the majority of historical concepts and, as if at their crossroads, ideology can be understood – broadly, but quite precisely – as knowledge that is simultaneously false (partial and dogmatic) and as a false consciousness connected with the tension between the consciousness and unconsciousness of the subject, between that which one knows and says, and that which one wants and does, and also, and above all, between consciousness and practical political relations of power. In other words, let us accept that the concept of ideology covers a certain spectrum of phenomena, of which the poles are from the one side limited knowledge and from the other side – objectivized practices, which are largely independent from the state of knowledge, along with the form of the social world related to them. Between these poles extends the sphere of false consciousness understood as consciousness capable of knowing in a limited degree, and in at least an equally limited degree transparent, driven in large measure by unconscious motives and participating in the social conflict of forces only in a half-conscious way.

## **2. THE END OF IDEOLOGY?**

What 'end', and of what kind of ideology, has been discussed in the discourses of the last decades of the twentieth century?

Everything indicates that the fundamental point of reference here was the definition of ideology proposed by Raymond Aron, according to which ideology is a 'secular religion', that means 'a global interpretation of the universe, its past, present and future.'<sup>9</sup> This global explanation in which descriptive and value judgements mix, becomes (or perhaps became in the past tense?) the basis of 'ideocracy', of power which draws its legitimization from the supposed revelation, at least in basic outlines, of ultimate truth. Aron did not entangle himself in the outlining of the vicissitudes of consciousness and

<sup>8</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London, New York: Verso Books, 1989).

<sup>9</sup> See: Aron, *The Opium of Intellectuals*, 290.



IDEOLOGIES AFTER IDEOLOGIES: ON CYNICAL NAÏVETY

unconsciousness producing ideologies. It can simply be said, though he never wrote this outright, that he recognized the very concept of false consciousness as belonging to the ideology of Marxism, and in this measure it was an ideological concept. His definition of ideology is epistemological and in many respects close to the views of Popper, though more distinctly colored with epistemological skepticism. In any case, in this perspective the end of ideology (although Aron himself carefully attaches a question mark to this phrase) consists in the decline of belief in the value of 'global explanations', which are subjected to rational, scientific criticism, and above all are falsified by social experience, including actual social desires (for example: safety, material wealth, but also liberal 'formal' freedom).

For Aron, the standard example of ideology, or even ideology *par excellence*, was Marxism. Not just Marx's own thought, which he did appreciate on its own, as much as the vulgarized, Marxist vulgate with all of its dogmas and postulates. The crisis of dogmatic Marxism would be then equivalent to the crisis and also perhaps the ultimate end of ideology as such. It would also be equivalent to the recognition of a rational justification for the conflict between different points of view (interests, experiences, resources of knowledge) and the search for compromise between them in the framework of a pluralistic liberal-democratic society.

Starting from the 1960s, 'Polish revisionists', with Leszek Kołakowski at the forefront, presented a similar understanding of the problem. For them, dogmatic Marxism had also become a model of a repressive ideology, the antidote to which was a type of skepticism, the acceptance of the value of pluralism, of free critique, but also of compromise between 'warring gods'. The renowned text of Kołakowski, 'How to be a Conservative-Liberal-Socialist' is an articulate example of this.<sup>10</sup> Critique of ideology means here a critique of global explanations, and the crisis or even the end of ideology – a readiness to simultaneously take into consideration various values, which in the frames of dogmatic ideological systems function as separate and even antithetical. The critique of the revolutionary and totalitarian social imaginaries<sup>11</sup> carried out by Bronisław Baczko and the defense of liberal democracy as a *tertium* between extremes (in particular between Communism and fascism) formulated by Krzysztof Pomian,<sup>12</sup> both belong in the same line of thinking.

Somewhat paradoxically, the 'postmodern' thought of Lyotard can also be included in this same line of thought on the condition of ideology, at least to a certain degree. Paradoxically because Lyotard belongs among the philosophical radicals, but likely neither he nor Aron nor the Polish revisionists and critics of Marxism would wish to set a common denominator between them. However, such a common denominator, though at a limited

<sup>10</sup> Leszek Kołakowski, 'How to be a Conservative-Liberal-Socialist', *Quadrant* 9 (2009), 88-89.

<sup>11</sup> See: Bronisław Baczko, *Les imaginaires sociaux: Mémoires et espoirs collectifs* (Paris: Payot, 1984).

<sup>12</sup> See Krzysztof Pomian, *Filozofowie w świecie polityki: Eseje 1957-1974* (Toruń: Wydawnicwto Adam Marszałek, 2004).

MAŁGORZATA KOWALSKA

level, exists and is indeed clearly visible. Of course, this is in reference to the well-known thesis of Lyotard concerning 'the end of metanarratives' in modern western society that is called postmodern.<sup>13</sup> Nothing, indeed, stands in the way of associating Lyotard's understanding of metanarrative with Aron's understanding of ideology, especially since Lyotard himself, after 'shaking off' Marxism, at least in its dogmatic version, similarly to Aron, considered Marxism the model metanarrative, and *de facto* its crisis was for him equal to the crisis and even the end of the metanarrative as such.

In spite of this general similarity, both the diagnosis and the postulates of Lyotard differ greatly from the diagnosis and postulates of Aron or Leszek Kołakowski. Lyotard is a critic of 'global explanations' and an advocate of pluralism, but for these same reasons he is also an opponent of ideological syncretism, of compromises, and even more an opponent of consensus, in which, arguing with Habermas, he sees the new form of ideological oppression and injustice. He also notices, that the end of the metanarrative, with the Marxist one at the forefront, took place not only and not just under the influence of a rational, scientific critique, as much as due to the release of a trapped force contained in the capitalist economy and modern technology, therefore due to the 'brutal empiricism' and the victory of a totally non-ideological and, at least from a traditionally philosophical point of view, irrational principle, as is the principle of effectiveness, of the 'increase of power'. In the context of Lyotard's analyses, metanarratives ultimately crumbled not because they were unscientific (though they were) or too repressive towards the heterogeneity of human experiences (though they were), but because they limited the global 'increase of power', even if they served it temporarily and locally. After achieving a certain level of development, capitalist economy and technology do not need ideological legitimation anymore; they legitimate themselves through their own effectiveness. This is why if we can still speak of ideology today, we speak of a 'hegemony of economic discourse', which subordinates all others: science, culture, private life, the thought and behavior of individuals, in the name of the criteria of effectiveness, of a better mastery of nature, productive output, market competitiveness, and so on. In this perspective, ideological compromise and consensus based on a general skepticism about the value of the 'metanarrative' and 'global explanations' is only something in the category of an epiphenomenon of the will of power released from the shackles of traditional ideology. It therefore successfully fulfills, even if Lyotard himself does not state it this way, the fundamental criterion of ideology, that is the relationship of knowledge with power. It especially fulfills it since it produces victims, those whose voice is not taken into account in compromise and consensus, whose voice is unheard or does not count in the economic-technological discourse of power. This is why Lyotard calls for the creation of new expressions up to the task of articulating the experiences of victims, the experiences that are marginal, abnormal, extravagant and even non-human. He does it without faith, however, that this will allow for some kind of more

<sup>13</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Manchester UP, 1984).

IDEOLOGIES AFTER IDEOLOGIES: ON CYNICAL NAÏVETY

general agreement, quite the contrary – he does it with the intention of counteracting agreement, and only in order to break apart apparent consensuses; without faith also in the possibility of overcoming a system (meaning capitalism), and only with the hope that this will disturb it, that it will somewhat deflect it from its main axis, its brutally pragmatic principle.

The thought of Sloterdijk, the author of the *Critique of Cynical Reason* has brought an interesting contribution to thought on modern times as the end of ideology.<sup>14</sup> Cynical reason, being the destination point of enlightenment, along with a progressing decline of illusions, is already non-ideological in the sense that it does not believe in global explanations nor *a fortiori* in a utopia of a bright future. Neither does it believe in the value of the present, that is, of the current social reality and current knowledge, or even in knowledge as a motor of progress whatsoever. It does not have illusions and it does not have hope, which does not mean that it is reconciled with a hopeless reality. It suffers in its own way, and it is a form of 'unhappy consciousness'. But it does not seek an escape from this unhappiness, but rather in the name of survival it finds only an escape that, in spite of a lack of belief, would enable an adaptation to that which is there. In contrast to Aron, Sloterdijk is a proponent of the psychological conception of ideology, binding it with the concept of false consciousness. The problem of modernity, at least in the West, was to be nevertheless founded in the fact that consciousness in general is not already false in the sense that it is unconscious of its own conditioning and motives. It is not a consciousness which 'does not know what it is doing', doing something other than it thinks, and other than it thinks it is doing. It is contrarily the consciousness that knows what it is doing and what motivates it, but despite this, although it does not believe in the value of what it is doing, it is still doing it because it also does not believe in the possibility of changing that which is and which requires a specific set of behaviors. Sloterdijk calls this state of mind 'an enlightened false consciousness'. Though enlightened in the sense that it is free of illusions, it is false in the respect in which it remains in contradiction with what the subject 'truly' wants, accepting a reality which it 'really' does not accept. Ideology persists already primarily as that same reality is shaped through a set of collective practices, through a 'cult' without a faith.

On a certain level, these various diagnoses of the end of ideology are not mutually exclusive. Aron, the Polish ex-Marxists, Lyotard and Sloterdijk in the end say as much, that in the face of the crisis of Communism as an alternative to liberal-democratic capitalism, faith and the very need for faith in 'grand explanations' has collapsed. Similarly to faith in an alternative system, which, though imperfect, started to be universally considered as the best of the possible ones or, at any rate, as the most efficient and too powerful to be overcome either in practice or even in thought. The difference between the diagnoses cited above consists both only and so much in the question of whether such a recognition

<sup>14</sup> Peter Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

MAŁGORZATA KOWALSKA

of the state of things is considered equivalent to accession to reason and a chance for a better organization of society – because it is more rational – and a chance for fuller reconciliation of subjects with reality and with themselves or, on the contrary, this could rather be seen as the next episode of enslavement, suffering and alienation.

Although Sloterdijk did not devote much attention to the condition of consciousness in the declining period of real Communism, he could successfully prove that, in the last decades of its existence, consciousness was both also and especially cynical because even on the side of the rulers, faith in Communist dogmas ceased to accompany ritual discourses and routine practice, and a great share of the supposed-Communists did not believe in what they were saying and in what they were doing. Even if hidden behind the sustainment of this ideological shell was the will to power, a discrepancy still grew between them because the shell was turning out to be ever more powerless. Individual and collective desires increasingly sought for themselves other outlets, other objects, detaching themselves from such objects as the idea of a classless society, from the universal mission of the proletariat, world revolution and so on, not to speak of the avant-garde role of the Communist party. Already at that time, new conflicts of interests were being outlined, not to say – new class conflicts. But if so, that means that in the post-Communist world, ideologies had a future before themselves, both from the psychoanalytical and the Marxist point of view.

### **3. THE RETURN OF THE NAIVETÉ?**

Slavoj Žižek wrote somewhere, that ideologies never had it so good as when their end was announced. It is easy to agree with this diagnosis, especially from the east European perspective.

When in the West during the last decades of the twentieth century representative liberal democracy started to be doubted, it being recognized at most as the best system among the bad, and many came to terms with capitalism as with a necessary evil, by contrast in post-Communist countries, still before the ultimate fall of the Communist regime, the western system had become an object of desire; certainly not for everyone, but for a great many, in particular for the political and intellectual elites. In the scale of the entire Western world, on the wave of a general departure from Marxism and therefore not by accident, this coincided with the triumph of the views of the radically liberal: a la Margaret Thatcher, the Chicago and Austrian economic schools, privatization doctrine, opening and elasticity of markets, combined with budget discipline, the Washington Consensus and so on; in a word: with the advent of neoliberalism.

Liotard, writing at the end of the 1970s about the dissolution of the metanarrative and the triumph of brutal empiricism, was not right in as much as he did not notice nor did he appreciate the prevailing need to 'elevate' the new surge of the will to power to

IDEOLOGIES AFTER IDEOLOGIES: ON CYNICAL NAÏVETY

the status of a concept, and simultaneously to invest desires in the object suggested by the doctrine: a vision of individual success in the framework of the market game, and at the same time, secondarily, a vision of a rich and free society. What he called the hegemony of the economic discourse, was not and is not an issue of that same discourse or language. Especially in eastern Europe, it involved an enormous investment of desire and the phantasms which accompanied it, a need to identify with the Master signifier and to weave one's own desires into it. Some who were called to take matters into their own hands, undoubtedly chased after spontaneous desires, but many, and undoubtedly most, decided that they should desire what one should desire, of which desire became a necessity.

Neoliberal theory, similarly to Marxist theory, is a hypothesis and not an ideology in itself. It is not an ideology even taken uncritically as a doctrine, if doctrine is understood as an exclusively intellectual creation. It becomes an ideology the moment it intercepts and structures the mass imaginary, mass desires, when it becomes the object of collective faith and when, what is the most important, it modifies the power relations and produces a new type of power. The more it is an ideology, the more it forms the imaginary, the better it determines the object of faith, the more it forces the subject to submit to the orders of the Other and the Master signifier at the cost of renunciations, sacrifices, and near violence on the part of one's own desires. Much indicates that this is how the identification of Communist societies with neoliberal capitalism operated. Work and suffering in order to achieve success and enrich oneself – this is the version of a credo for the strong. Work and suffering in order so that others can enrich themselves, because it serves the entire society, but in the end it can perhaps serve you too – this is the version for the weak; at least for those who dream that they could find themselves in the place of the strong.

In so-called postmodern times, though these perhaps could better be called hypermodern, technology also has become the object of an enormous investment of desire. Fetishism of technological gadgets, ever-newer equipment and various 'apps' particularly determine the imagination of young people. Older people attempt, for better or worse, to keep up under the threat of 'digital exclusion'. Remaining behind technological innovations and novelties becomes a handicap. However, active participation in the production of these innovations or at least an active rooting for them, strengthens not only the feeling of power, but also a belief in science fiction scenarios, in the vision of a totally automatized and robotized world, in which human intelligence will either be fantastically strengthened by an artificial one, or completely overtaken by it (which is rather already a dystopia). Believers in so-called transhumanism constitute an extreme case in this context, believing in the idea that the mind can be separated from mortal bodies, converted into silicon and with time, thanks to the progress of science and technology, eventually bring about the resurrection of neo-biological bodies. The strongest believers, and the otherwise wealthy, give themselves up to hibernation, in order to wait for better times in liquid nitrogen.

MAŁGORZATA KOWALSKA

For the greater part of 'postmodern' societies, not only technology, but even science is in no way, as Popper wanted, a territory of falsified hypotheses; nor is it especially, as Lyotard wanted, a dangerous language game, which leads mostly to the discovery of aporias and the limits of certain knowledge; but as at the dawn of modernity, in the times of the first Enlightenment, it holds the promise of defeating all hitherto prevailing limitations, of poverty, sickness, and perhaps even death itself. That is why they are meanwhile also willing to suffer in the name of scientific-technological progress, to accept 'shock therapies', the necessity of liquidating traditional types of employment and pursuing innovations, accepting even barbaric experiments (at least on animals), complying with many painful recommendations, giving up the body and mind to the scientific regime. Aside from the natural concern for health and survival there is a type of religious devotion inscribed in this. Scientific knowledge-power, and the biopolitics associated with it, function not only as a group of inner pressures of disciplinary-normalizing nature, but as a type of superego, a source of self-subjugation, but also a source of various fantasies (from belief in philanthropy or in the harmfulness of some types of diets, to transhumanist fantasies).

In large measure, the close relationship of science and technology with capital and the market was also internalized and imaginarily sanctified. In order to carry out research and accomplish technological innovation, it is necessary to have funds which can only be attained under the condition that the research will contribute to innovation, and innovation will bring an increase in capital. Science has to pay off. Discoveries must be sellable and must bring in a measurable profit; at least in the character of 'points' (the number of publications in good periodicals, the number of citations) and the prestige associated with it. Widely understood innovation, not limited to one that is purely technological, thus societal innovation included, must serve to improve output. 'Science becomes... a moment in the circulation of capital', as Lyotard already diagnosed it at the end of the 1970s. From that time this process has only intensified, the relationship between science and business, of thought itself and business; all of social life and business has become the object of a cult in the interrelated slogans of 'cognitive capitalism' and 'a knowledge-based society'. Whoever would want to question these slogans, defending for example the autotelic quality of knowledge or the social ties based, above all, on 'values', exposes themselves to the accusation of obscurantism, or in the best case scenario, of improper aestheticism. A machine put together from science, technology, capital, and the market inflicts suffering, but also delivers pleasure, especially to those who receive power from it, but also to those who identify with this power, for whom this power has become their own superego, even when they fall victim to it.

This is happening neither without exceptions nor without reaction. Both the 'religion of the market', and the 'religion of science and technology' have many opponents in the West, and even more so outside it. The most distinct is Islamic, but also Christian and Jewish religious fundamentalism. Fundamentalism, differing from the 'normal', eschatologically oriented religion in that it directly translates into political action; it is a simple, clearly visible

IDEOLOGIES AFTER IDEOLOGIES: ON CYNICAL NAÏVETY

manifestation of 'the will to power' and in a very particular way fixates desires on a certain vision, very clearly pointing also to an enemy (materialism, liberalism, consumerism, and so on). In the conceptual sphere, that is on the level of consciousness and rationalization, it invokes a narrow set of dogmas. Faith in dogmas is however – as everything indicates – secondary to some kind of trauma and projection of all evil onto a phantasmic enemy. One's own identity, associated with a certain 'Ideal-I', that is, identification with a leader (mulla, bishop, politico-religious leader), has most apparently a primarily reactionary character here in the narrow sense of the word, meaning, it is a reaction against a reality considered to be foreign, oppressive and threatening survival. The answer to this oppression is counter-oppression, physical, political, or at least verbal violence against an enemy burdened with guilt for past frustrations. Even if this counter-oppression means also self-oppression and self-repression, sacrificing one's own happiness and even life.

Racism and nationalism have a similar structure. Reactionary identity also comes into play here, the will to power directed against another will to power or that which is in this way perceived in the frames of a phantasmic projection. (Do refugees and immigrants from the Near East and Africa represent a real force which should be opposed with one's own force? In a sober, not only moralizing and sentimental evaluation, nothing points to that: refugees and immigrants are victims of wars and of the extremely uneven distribution of profits from global capitalism; they are the unlucky people, who need help, even if some Islamic fundamentalists and terrorists get into their flock. However, in the racist-nationalist imaginariium, they receive *en bloc* the status of invaders and mortal enemies.) From the Marxist, in any case Marxizing, point of view something like class conflict is at play here, and even more so a rivalry to maintain or attain a better socio-economic position under the global system, especially from the position of the lower classes, but also the declining middle class. From this perspective, the false consciousness of racists and nationalists relies on rationalizing economic interest as a cultural, national and racial interest. In the psychoanalytical perspective, which does not contradict the first one, the problem of racism and nationalism is based above all on a projection and the transfer of bad emotions on a stranger as an enemy, especially when he is pointed at by some kind of 'master'.

The recent violent rebirth of religious fundamentalism, nationalism and racism, equally in the most developed and civilized societies, must have been an unpleasant surprise for those who believed in the end of ideology and even the 'end of history'. Is this rebirth, however, tantamount to a return to ideological naïveté, the end of which Sloterdijk already diagnosed in the 1980s? Is the 'religion of capitalism' connected with 'the religion of science and technology' on the one side, and radical Islamism or more generally, religious fundamentalism, and also racism and nationalism on the other side, bearing witness to the triumphal return of false consciousness understood as a fundamental dissonance between that which consciousness knows and that which motivates it and what it allows?

My answer is ambivalent: yes and no. Yes, because again we have (but was it ever otherwise?) a mass production of representations not having anything to do with scientific

MAŁGORZATA KOWALSKA

rationality, but with epistemological caution and with a massive investment of desires in objects suggested by the Other, through a dominating system of social and economic relations, through an institutionally maintained symbolic system but also through concrete Others fulfilling the role of politico-religious leaders. No, because much speaks to the idea that these systems of representations, even if they happen to be hypnotizing, ever more weakly hide behind their own actors and supporters – a fight for power associated with them, a 'bare' conflict of power.

The dominant modern consciousness is not naïve in the sense that it does not realize the motives that drive it, nor its own desires and interests, even if they are accompanied with phantasmic imaginaries and intellectual rationalizations. Everything, in any case a lot, indicates that such a consciousness, and this according to all sides of the symbolic debates – not without reason named culture wars – is quite aware of this, that ultimately it is about who defeats whom. In this sense it is a demystified consciousness, not only through enlightenment, Marxist or a psychoanalytical critique of ideology, as much as under the influence of experiencing a confrontation with power considered to be foreign and hostile, to which there is nothing left but to oppose its own power, taking advantage of all possible means (available factographic knowledge, but also manipulation, PR, in particular 'black', organized propaganda, mobilizations of all the unsatisfied, etc.)

Very significant in this regard is the phenomenon of right-wing populism, which has enjoyed ever larger triumphs in Europe and the USA over the last dozen years or so, and in Poland it has become the dominant option, and even officially in power – though in a version that is politically correct in its own way. In a fairly universally accepted appraisal it represents a reaction to neoliberal capitalism (representing also, despite elements of solidarity and redistribution politics, the official doctrine and practice of the European Union). In this populism, the promise of a return to justice is intertwined into one with elements of religious fundamentalism, racism, and especially nationalism, creating a phantasmic image of an enemy, who is at once the current elites and the 'establishment' (those who 'were feeding from the trough' and those who should be detached from it) and foreigners (Russians, Germans, Brussels bureaucrats, refugees...) lying in wait to ambush our national self-determination and our identity. Simultaneously, what is not left behind is the principle of increasing productive power or even the neoliberal cult of private enterprise, low taxes, the servitude of science to business, and so on; assuming only that productivity will be better when it will be subjected to an authoritarian control in the name of the 'nation'. Right-wing populism does not indeed propose any alternatives to the system of global capitalism, it is only seeking to have more power in its hands, or at least the feeling of power. And it is conscious of this because both its elites and the 'people' supporting it without inhibition indeed use the language of strength, revenge and expected success in the global contest.

Populism is not doctrinally pure. On the contrary, it is outstandingly syncretic, representing *sui generis* a counterpart, a mirror image of the liberal-conservative-



IDEOLOGIES AFTER IDEOLOGIES: ON CYNICAL NAÏVETY

socialist 'consensus' celebrated by the advocates of the end of ideology, and in practice legitimizing – on the level of the consciousness of elites – a new face of global capitalism. If one were to currently define the essential line of political conflict as a line separating the proponents of 'globalism' from the proponents of 'national identity', then it is necessary to state that on the intellectual level the difference between them is fluid, and the differences of imaginaries accompanying the fight for power decides the severity of the conflict. The classic Marxist analysis employing the concept of class conflict has limited use here because it seems that the supporters of globalism and national identity recruit from various classes, even if the national option becomes ever more popular among the lower classes. Perhaps, a more adequate distinction would be in the spirit of Nietzsche: rather more psychological than socio-economic, it would be a delineation between the ideology of active lords and reactive slaves. Regardless of which of these would have to prevail (as it is known, according to Nietzsche, similarly as according to Hegel, especially in the interpretation of Kojève, the slaves are the driving force of historical change), the common denominator between them remains the will to power and the conflict associated with it. Perhaps hardly anyone, including the main protagonists, still has any illusions today that the most important political and cultural conflicts are about something else.

The absence of illusions does not mean that we enjoy such a state of affairs. The vision of socio-political relations presented solely as a game of brutal powers remains unacceptable even for the active actors of this fight, and even more so for its observers and secondary supporters of one of the two 'camps'. That is why, not only in the public discourse, but also on the level of the individual as well as the group imaginaries, the traditional philosophical and moral slogans still prevail; among them are truth, justice, solidarity, equality, freedom, democracy, and so on. I am not at all claiming that these words do not correspond to the real desires of subjects, that they are only 'empty signifiers', the real content of which is fulfilled every time by the 'will to power'. On the contrary, I think that in a certain way they name, out of necessity weakly defined, an important piece of the real desires of a great many people, and even those desires which have the least in common with 'will to power', and more with the need for peace/calm and moral sensitivity understood above all as a sensitivity to the suffering of others. The snag is that, evidently, this sensitivity is not finding for itself a sufficiently expressive language in the frames of the contemporary culture wars and is often forced to take on the language of one of those wars, together with the phantasms of the enemy that accompanies it and along with the necessity to bend to the ruling discourses and practices of one's own desires and a line of thought.

In sum, the modern condition of ideology seems marked as much with cynicism, as through a new, but rather old-new, naiveté; depending on individual, and perhaps also group cases the proportions of cynicism and naiveté are undoubtedly disparate. It seems however, that in none, or at any rate in few, of these cases can we talk about pure cynicism

MAŁGORZATA KOWALSKA

or pure naïveté. As for the question that often arises, 'do they truly believe in what they say?' or 'do they know what they are doing?', there is no unequivocal answer and perhaps there cannot be one.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

Counter to the thesis of 'the end of ideology', in the contemporary, post-communist and 'postmodern' world, ideologies are notably present. At most they have become somewhat more self-aware, meaning slightly more cynical. The more cynical they are, the more they are accompanied with opportunism and finally with conscious falsehoods in the name of, if not victories, then at least in the name of survival in a specific social reality. The structure of false consciousness, in comparison with the one Marx and even Freud wrote about, became very complicated, repeatedly entangling what is conscious with what is unconscious, the intentional with the unintentional, the subjective with the systematic. Perhaps, in this way, today – better than ever before – we can see the complex nature of ideology as such.

TRANSLATED BY Zachary Mazur and Agata Tumiłowicz