

## Is disinformation easier than in the past?

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### 1 ABSTRACT

We start from the “economy of attention”. Some of the theories on this topic are optimistic (Cooley), other are pessimistic (Walter Lippmann). According to Walter Lippmann, to understand the Public Opinion, we have to speak of stereotypes and even myths (and blind spots). Moreover the myths circulate. There is a “fabrics of myths”. One could fear that when the myths circulate more thanks to Internet, the working of the fabrics of myths will be facilitated.

Some study of the famous anti-Semitic fake “The protocols of the learned elders of Zion” allows describing the “laws” of the fabrics of myths. For that we use historical works (Henry Rollin) or current ones (Pierre André Taguieff). The ingredients of the fabrics of myths are: a discourse-suitcase, a scapegoat, support from some power, use of Medias, chances and personalities, tactics and strategies and competition/cooperation/twinning concerning myths.

Not only the fabrics of myths matters, but the “targets” matter also. Who is targeted by a mystification? Here we can use the theories of the sociologist of the Chicago School Robert Park. He showed how the second generation migrants are not influenced by the primary groups (family, religion, school) because of the influence of life in large cities and Medias. They can be sensitive to propaganda. Since their mind is open on the global world, the recourse seems to be to facilitate access to Internet, and associations able to give them advices and help them. It is to bank on these Internet sites which are devoted to demystification.

### 2 INTRODUCTION

We start from the “economy of attention”. There are several versions. The Charles Cooley’s one, which is exposed in his book “Social organization: a study on the larger mind” is optimistic. Kindness and sincerity are part of the human nature. It is strengthened in a democratic society. A new generation (around 1900) looks for real experience. They do not lie because it would trigger a loss of time. Thanks to the “prevailing sentiment of sincerity”, there is an economy of attention which allows anybody achieving some realism. Modern means of communication facilitate this evolution. At the opposite, the Walter Lippmann’s version, which is exposed in his book “Public opinion” (published in 1922) is pessimistic. Public opinion is not as lucid as it is wished and hoped for these reasons: censorship, confidentiality, physical and social barriers, insufficient attention, difficulties because of the vocabulary, the attractiveness of entertainment, unconscious influence of sentiment, fatigue (because of the lack of silence in large cities), emotion, violence (which influences our reactions), boredom. When an individual lacks experience in some field, he has recourse to stereotypes. He constructs his own pseudo-environment. Therefore he does not adapt to the real environment. The lack of knowledge exists because of the lack of experience, because the facts occur far away from the place where we live, because we have not enough time ... The “larger mind” (because of the modern means of communication we are interested in more topics than in the past) has this consequence: we cannot understand all the topics we are interested in. Hence the recourse to stereotypes. Moreover, besides stereotypes, there are also myths and blind spots. According to Walter Lippmann, a remedy could be political science.

There is a “fabric of myths”. The myths circulate. The circulation of myths is a condition for the working of the fabric of myths. As myths circulate more thanks to Internet, one could fear that it facilitates the working of the fabric of myths.

We shall start from an example of disinformation: the famous anti-Semitic fake called “The protocols of the learned elders of Zion”. We shall tell its story briefly. Then we shall deduce the “laws” of the fabric of myths. We are interested not only in the fabric of myths, but also in its “target”. Who is targeted by a mystification? To answer this question we have recourse to the ideas of the American sociologist Robert Park. Because the second generation migrants are no more influenced by the “primary groups” (family, church, and school) they could be sensitive to propaganda. As their mind is open on the global world,

recourse is to facilitate access to Internet. It is to bank on these Internet sites which are devoted to demystification.

### 3 “THE PROTOCOLS OF THE LEARNED ELDERS OF ZION”: A BRIEF STORY

The story of the Protocols is exposed in books written in the past, or in currently published works. We used the Henry Rollin's book “L'apocalypse de notre temps” (“The apocalypse of our time”) which was published in 1939, and the Pierre André Taguieff's book “Les protocoles des sages de Sion. Faux et usage d'un faux” (“The protocols of the learned elders of Zion. A fake and its usage”), which was published in 1992.

At the start there is a brilliant lampoon written by the French advocate Maurice Joly in 1864 “Dialogue aux enfers entre Machiavel et Montesquieu” (“Dialog in the Hell between Machiavelli and Montesquieu”). In the shape of a project described by Machiavelli for Montesquieu, it is, in fact, a description of the political recipes used by the Second Empire in France. The Protocols are a plagiarism of this lampoon written by Golovinski, a member of the secret police of the Tsar, around 1900, in Paris (and in French). It was ordered by Ratchkovski, the chief of the secret police of the Tsar abroad, in office in Paris. In the fake, the project which is described is a project of domination of the world, which will be carried out by a small, mysterious group of Jews, able to give orders to all the Jews. It is anti Semitic propaganda. The goal was to use it in Russia, to trigger pogroms and have some pretext to impose authoritarian measures. It was translated in Russian by a mystic, Serge Nilus, but was not used (to trigger pogroms) during a very long time, because in 1905 the defeat during the war between Russia and Japan obliged Russia to ask for French loans. Anti-Semitism and authoritarian measures should have triggered bad effects, since France was a democratic country. Later the Protocols were used by the White movement during the Civil War (1918-1920). After 1920, Russian migrants into Germany as Alfred Rosenberg brought the Protocols in this country. Now the plotters (who are described by the Protocols) are Jewish-Bolsheviks. The Protocols were presented to Hitler, who became an enthusiastic proponent. He quoted it in his book “Mein Kampf” (written in 1924). The Protocols became part of the Nazi propaganda.

At this time it was known that it was a fake. The truth was known in 1921, and exposed by the newspaper The Times in London (it has published the fake one year before, and made its apologies). After that the success of the Protocols in Great Britain ceased. In the USA, the publication of the Protocols was supported by Henry Ford. In 1927, his anti Semitism ceased, he made apologies and it was the end of the diffusion of the Protocols in this country. In Germany, the argument which was used was: “Even if the Protocols are a fake, it does not matter, because all that is written in it is true”. For instance, the First World War and the October Revolution should have been forecast in the Protocols... When all was lost, on May 1945, Hitler wrote his testament, accusing the Jews of having triggered the war. It was in accordance with the Protocols.

Today the “career” of the fake continues. It is diffused in Russia, Iran and some Arabic countries. It is used as a mean of anti Zionist propaganda.

### 4 THE “LAWS” OF THE FABRIC OF MYTHS

How to explain this (incredible) career of the fake? The metaphor of the snowball is inadequate. It describes contagion only. The notion of viral diffusion is also too simple. The specialists of linguistics have shown this: a sign (a set signifier/signified) is considered as a signifier, and the meaning is re-elaborated. The outcome is a new myth. There is a fabric of myths. Using the example of the Protocols, we can expose its “laws” (necessary conditions):

*A discourse-suitcase.* The Joly 's lampoon describes the political recipes used by any authoritarian regime. Here the complexity of the fabric of myths appears. Joly takes advantage of the old fear of Machiavelli which has been described by Michel Foucault. For him Machiavelli exposes the recipes used by some politicians, not all (he was himself a democrat and a republican). In the fake, the name of Machiavelli does not appear. It takes advantage of the old fear, but unfairly attributes the use of the recipes to all politicians, called “plutocrats” and supposed to be manipulated by the Jews. The discourse is like a suitcase, in which you can put any suit you want. A scapegoat is needed<sup>(1)</sup>.

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<sup>(1)</sup> We cannot expose all the measures that those wanting to dominate the world, whoever they are, have to take according to the discourse. We shall only give the example of the measures concerning newspapers and books: authorization, taxation, suppression after two condemnations in one year, control over the agencies diffusing news,

*A scapegoat.* He is the Jew. Note that there are old roots and modern sources of anti-Semitism. A modern source could be biologism. The idea of a “racial strategy” is a monstrosity. In ecology, there is the Gause principle, stating that when two species are rivals inside the same ecosystem, after some time one survives and the other is extinct. However there is no deliberate will. There are only favourable or unfavourable mutations. All the human races can coexist, if each accepts birth control measures. After all, even if there were only one race, it should accept birth control measures, also, one day or another.

*Support from some Power.* At the time of the Nazi regime, there was a kind of Nazi international, called *Weltdienst*. The headquarters was in Nuremberg. It was controlled by Goebbels. One of its tasks was the diffusion of the Nazi propaganda in the foreign countries. According to this propaganda, Germany was surrounded by countries (France, Great Britain, USA and Soviet Union) of which government and opinion were manipulated by the Jews. They were hostile. Germany had to prepare war. Germany was the only country able to resist the Jews. Often the Protocols were quoted. In Germany, the diffusion of the Protocols was supported by the Nazi party itself.

*Use of Medias.* In the United States the diffusion of the Protocols was supported by the Henry Ford’s newspaper, the *Dearborn Independent*. In Germany, all the Medias were used. For instance, the newspaper controlled by the Nazis, the *Volkischer Beobachter*, was used. Hitler said: “We the Nazis could not have imposed our power over the Germans without the radio”.

*Chances and personalities.* The context matters very much. For instance, today the conflict between Israel and some Arabic countries has favoured re-using the Protocols. In the past, the roles of personalities as Hitler, Goebbels and Rosenberg are obvious.

*Tactics and strategies.* The myths are diverse. There are political, religious and racial myths. In particular, it concerns anti-Semitism. Moreover, different myths are linked to different strategies. For instance, the proponents of a stronger, conquering Germany believed in two different myths.

Some were proponents of pangermanism. A representative is Paul Rohrbach. He was a Russian migrant (arriving in Germany before the First World War). Hitler applied some of his ideas and rejected the other ones:

- The “diplomatic strategy”. To act by force, but remaining inside Peace. The idea is to conquer countries while avoiding the appearance of a coalition of foes.
- *Drang Nach Osten* (conquests eastwards). Rohrbach wanted Germany to conquer the Baltikum and Ukraine.

He rejected the other ideas:

- Do not provoke the USA.
- To take into account the “psychological forces”. Rohrbach observed the better efficiency of the democracies, compared to Germany, concerning the psychological forces. The goals of the war were accepted by the citizens. He wished a propaganda debunking the Germany’s foes: denouncing autocracy in Russia (at the time of the First World War), selfishness of England etc. He disagreed on anti-Semitism, the denunciation of a “Jewish plot” etc.
- To choose a kind treatment for the people in the conquered countries. For instance, Germans having conquered Ukraine could carry out a land reform.

The other myth was the racial strategy as it was exposed by Rosenberg. Hitler believed in this myth.

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possible seizures, official or secret control over many newspapers (it allows testing the opinions of the readers) , control over all the newspapers in the provinces.

It is a competition between myths:

Paul Rohrbach	Alfred Rosenberg
Pangermanism	Racial strategy
Political myths	Biological myths
Historical rights, culture, “interests”, nation’s strength	Race struggling for surviving another race’s aggression
Total war	Extermination of races
Army	Nazi party

During the last years of the Nazi regime, the two groups were rivals. On one side, Karl Haushofer and many officers of the Army. On the other side, Hitler himself, Goebbels, Himmler, Rosenberg ... In fact, the Army was the only force capable of some opposition to Hitler.

*Competition, cooperation and twinning concerning myths.* Not only there is a competition between myths, but there is also some cooperation. Take the example of Ludendorff. He mixed pangermanism and anti Semitism. He wanted the German race to struggle against the Jewish race, to survive (the Jews being aggressors). He was also anti Roman. He wanted to create a new religion for the Germans, relying on the worship of German gods. His book on total war is a mix of pertinent strategic ideas and pure folly (example: the Army has to have control over Politics).

The twinning of myths is also possible. The International Financier is a Jew. The Bolshevik is a Jew. Masons are manipulated by the Jews or even are Jewish. The Masons (manipulated by the Jews) have triggered revolutions against aristocrats. The Communist revolution was triggered by Jews-Bolsheviks, and financed by the Jews. The plutocrats (manipulated by the Jews) trigger disorder in democratic countries. The spread of disorder is provoked by the Jews. One day or another, they will dominate the world. The Protocols inform on this plot.

Today the myth of the Jews’ perversity and the myth according to which the Jews have made up stories about the persecution they suffered are twinned.

To sum up, myths are diverse. They are linked to groups applying tactics and strategies. In case of political disputes, conflicts between religions, conflicts between nations or ethnic groups, the working of the fabric of myths can occur. One side wants to produce its own propaganda.

**5 WHO IS TARGETED BY A MYSTIFICATION?**

In his book “The City” the American sociologist Robert Park has described the differences between the first generation migrants and their children. Park speaks of “the unsolvable cultural conflict between the immigrants and the children of the immigrants”. The first generation migrants are influenced by the primary groups (family, neighbourhood). They keep their custom. They still speak their native language. They find some support in their community. They have their own newspapers (sometimes in the native language). Their children are very different. They are no more influenced by the primary groups (family, church, school, and playground). They live in large cities where social upheavals are frequent. Their mind is open on the world. They do not find useful information in newspapers, because at the time of the “yellow press” news is only sob, heart and muckraking. The recourse could be secondary groups, as associations or the juvenile court judge. In fact they are lured by entertainment (cinemas, dancing). They are anomic people who could be sensitive to propaganda.

In another book (“The crowd and the public”) Park has described the emergence of any group. First there is a stage of contagion and imitation. Emotions and sentiments are shared. Then there is a second stage, the emergence of a collective will and conscience. Thanks to discussion, a circular process of “sociological attention” (“I mind something because you do so and you mind this thing because I do so”) appears. The group becomes able to acquire its own “theoretical norms”, which allow interpreting the facts. A collective will and a public opinion appear.

The mystification is aimed at blocking this process. Only the first stage (contagion) remains. Instead of the “theoretical norms” chosen by an autonomous group, there are the stereotypes of propaganda. The group’s

will is discretely manipulated by somebody. A young man or woman does not find support in such a group. He (she) is not on the way to integration into Society. He (she) is mystified. He (she) will not live in one of the city's "moral regions". A "moral region" is a district in a city where live all those who have some affinities (alcohol, game, traffic ...) in common. In the worse case, he (she) will go to an Arabic country, where he (she) will be indoctrinated.

What could be the remedy? The playground, being a primary group, is insufficient. Recourse could be to facilitate access to Internet. Also, associations giving help and advices to those who need it are indispensable. The mind of the children of the first generation migrants being open on the world, Internet could be useful to learning. If it is not the acquisition of a deep knowledge on some topic, it is to choose questions and find answers. The goal is to be convinced by some arguments and reject other ones. Such navigation on Internet should be free and autonomous. Often, the outcome could be demystification.

What is the goal of propaganda? Agitators want to create many groups that they can manipulate, which will obey them. When they are numerous they will phagocytise the groups in which there are a real will and a public opinion, in which people believe in the Society's values. One day or the other force will be used. A remedy is to help people to be capable of a sound judgment. They are less influenced by propaganda if they are able to interpret facts by their own means.

## 6 CONCLUSION

Internet allows a more efficient circulation of messages. Therefore it allows more circulation of stereotypes and myths. It is a condition for the working of the fabric of myths. We have exposed what are the "laws" of the fabric of myths. Of course, some information is available on Internet. Some sites are devoted to demystification. For this reason, to facilitate access to Internet to some (would-be) anomic people is to help them. They shall acquire autonomous ability to interpret facts.

The goal of demystification is adequately chosen. A mystification can collapse. It happened. Take the example of the cult of the personality of Mao Zedong. It collapsed when the death of Lin Biao, who has been designated as the successor of Mao, was announced. For months, he has been severely criticized. He flew with his family. He died in a mysterious crash of his plane. It was incredible that a personality of such a high rank could have been a traitor. It was not believed. But if Mao has lied about a very serious topic, he could have lied about many other topics. All the cult of the personality of Mao collapsed. China was on the way to the Deng Xiao Ping's reforms.

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