

Understanding MAGA

Misrecognitions and Social Parolesⁱ as Identity Markers

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In the operation of modern political economies, symbolic violence has a central role. What is meant by symbolic violence? It is an extension of the term “violence” to include various modes of social/cultural domination, where it operates as the unnoticed and unconscious domination that over time evolve into every-day social habits, such that the conscious subject doesn’t recognize it as domination or a form of psycho-social violence.

Symbolic violence is thus oppression that is executed within structures of social power relations, where narratives inculcate into the subject acceptance of oppressive and exploitative domination inherent in the relationships. It is often dependent upon existing social norms that the narratives twist into enabling rationalizations for the oppression. In this way, the oppression is not directly linked to threats of physical violence, as in traditional force-reliant authoritarian political economies (although force-reliant systems also employ symbolic violence in order to minimize the need for execution of raw force).

Oppression linked to patterns of symbolic violence is an important element in the way exploitative and contested arrangements are imposed upon a populace by political and economic elites. In this function, the symbolic violence mainly operates through two overlapping forms:

A) Memetic narratives (narratives anchored upon memes, or words with constructed and purposive meanings) that inculcate social beliefs built on misrecognitions, designed to obscure the factual oppression and exploitation perpetrated by a dominant elite.

B) Status domination, whereby contestable social relationships are attempted removed from the area of contest by invoking the status, or alleged professional competence, of people who act as rationalizers for the exploitative social arrangements.

Memes are word or phrases or even stories that are constructed and brought forward in order to promote certain defined interests. Thus, from their inception they do not attempt to simply convey factual observations or knowledge as elements of a discourse.

ⁱ Parole, a term borrowed from linguistics, is used to denote identification codes within a social group. It includes speech patterns where certain words and expressions have meanings that like dog whistles are only understandable to insiders. I extend parole to include all markers of group identity, including clothing, bodily expressions, etc.

Their nature and purposes are to change behaviour and understanding by twisting perceptions.

As a practical matter, memes often anchor upon existing, well-recognized social beliefs and cultural norms in order to gain credence and reduce potential resistance. However, they insert twists into the recognized perceptions or norms that produce an appearance of support for the interests of the meme creator (or the interests of his or her principals). In the current political economy, actual meme creators (outside of the purely commercial use of memes in advertising) are most likely to be the in the modern political landscape ubiquitous spin-doctors and pollsters, often working with support staffs that include high-level psychology professionals in various relevant cognitive fields.

In general, when memes inculcate purposive misrecognitions into the public universe of debates and contest, they become building blocks in the construction of the interest-promoting narratives that flourish in the modern political fields. The creation of memes is therefore an important tool in the *modus operandi* of the current political economy.

In the case of the neoliberal narratives, the main social conditions that they attempt to divert attention away from are the economic inequalities and the inherently exploitative tendencies incipient in modern corporate-led market capitalism. In support of this endeavour, the market fundamentalist version of economics have become an important auxiliary narrative by producing memes that anchor on people's vague conceptions of what markets are, whereupon it twists these vague connotations into the misrecognition of unfettered markets are an absolute and unquestionable social good under all conditions, even when it—as has been the case in the neoliberal economy—leads to preposterous social and economic inequalities as well as environmental neglect.

When employed as political spin, memes quite often latch on to discriminatory attitudes, since such attitudes, by their propensity to evoke aggression, have shown to be especially effective in diverting attention away from the underlying factual conditions. The effectiveness of memes with aggression-evoking discriminatory twists partly explains the predilection of right-wing politicians to employ hot-button cultural issues. It's important to note that in this connection it is not necessarily that racism is central to MAGA, but that it is kindled and re-awoken as means to both exert control and to further draw attention away from the economic domination and corruption at the root of the ideology.

In general, the effects created by the various forms of symbolic violence cause the social beliefs of receptive individuals to twist into states that solidify into inflexible misrecognitions that are no longer contested by the subjects. This, of course, often happens without the subjects are aware of the change in their perspectives that constant exposure to the narratives of symbolically violence have engendered over time.

When a misrecognition becomes a dominant expression of identity that is shared within specific social sub-groups, it will create social habits that combine patterns of speech, dress codes and even bodily attitudes into serving as paroles, or social identification codes. Of course, this is a fairly common phenomenon in the general culture, and in

many social situations subjecting oneself to behaviour of parole can be an innocuous way of enhancing a specific social experience such as, say, watching a sports match, where the subjection to the dress codes associated with a favoured team—for instance expressed by dressing in its colours—creates a shared experience that might enhance the enjoyment (the Swifties’ armbands also comes to mind as an example of experience enhancing parole).

However, when the engendered behaviour are the result of misrecognitions that have been inserted into economic and political fields, the social reactions created are politically purposive and therefore of a quite different nature, liable to exacerbate the group’s social and political tensions with outsiders.. As the misrecognition solidifies within the social group and is carried forward by its identifying paroles, the shared experience—which for instance might be experienced during political rallies where a narrative propagating the misrecognition is the basis for the group’s coherence—will create a psychological feedback loop that will tend to further solidify the misrecognition. The feedback loop is a function of the fact that the misrecognition is now tied to an emotional experience (the uplift of the rally) that is sought repeated, but which only can exist—and thus only be repeated—by continuing to embrace the socio-political views implicit in the misrecognition. Importantly in this connection, the group unity becomes a strong accelerator of loyalty to the misrecognition and its representatives of leaders,

With regard to paroles used as identifiers of a political ideology, a characteristic is that they often include elements with a level of absurdity to them, for instance the Nazi salute. By subjecting oneself to the absurdity, one surrenders part of one’s identity to the claims, or the representatives of the claims that the ideology center upon. In this way, when Trump constantly claims that he is making America great again, and one constantly runs around with a red hat that also says “make America great again”, this creates a strong mental barrier against acknowledging that Trump is, in fact, not making America great again, but on the contrary—due to his factual ineptness—slowly sinking its economy, its democratic traditions and its international reputation in a downward spiral. But the victory of the misrecognition is now complete and devours all facts.