

Abstract

Why, and how, do humans build societies? This dilemma has been racking thinkers' minds for centuries, and the answer is yet to be found. Is it because of an innate social drive? Or is it for mere utilitarianism? Are societies and their organization born out of ideals or rather they are a simple reflection of the evolution of economy and means of production? This dissertation is an attempt to show the indispensable role of Ideology in the process of building societies, shaping their policies and ideals and orchestrating their actions.

The definition of “Ideology” and its creative role is developed especially in Chapter I, tracing a line of thought that ranges from XIX century thinkers Marx and Engels to contemporary ones – most importantly Michael Freeden – in order to render a conception of ideology that eventually resembles closely Clifford Geertz's one, but without adhering completely to it.

Chapter II and III seek to relate this theory respectively to two philosophical metaphors – by Freud and Nietzsche – and historical examples – Japan and Germany.

Ideologies emerge as set of ideas that humans build to attribute a meaning to the world and give value to concepts; an abstract force that, acting through men, strongly influences – or tries to do so – the political choices of a community; eventually shaping the society itself and directing its collective will.

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The Demiurge

On the creative role of Ideology in shaping societies

Introduction

The inspiration for the studies that brought to this dissertation came three years ago, in 2011-2012, when I was studying History in Milano and attended a philosophy class on Freud's *Totem and Taboo*. The Freudian myth of the gang of brothers – which is analyzed in chapter 2.1 – and the links it has with anthropology and the work by Sir James Frazer, with which I was already familiar before studying Freud's book, made me reflect on the nature of the human process of society-building, a theme that I later on tried to deepen as much as possible during my studies, encountering it in several thinkers' theories and historical periods.

Leaving aside the parricide, I was especially fascinated by the role that the invention of Totemism had for the brothers. Before studying *Totem and Taboo*, I never gave the proper weight to the *ideological* aspect of any human society; it was Freud's myth that made me start to think that in the human nature there is an unavoidable need for a system of ideals – as Clifford Geertz defines it, a *symbol-system* – that enables humans to make sense of the world, come together and shape a society. A system that human groups build through centuries and is called *culture*, but is rooted in something that preexists it and constitutes its indispensable precondition: *ideology*.

This master dissertation was for me a unique chance to gather many thoughts I had during my years of study and shape them in order to develop an original path of theories and historical examples that fascinated and inspired me.

I decided to structure my dissertation in three main chapters:

- the first one is an attempt to select a group of thinkers that helped me make sense of the term “ideology”, to show what the meaning of this word is – the book by the political theorist Michael Freeden (*Ideology: A Very Short Introduction*), was a priceless help in doing this – in order to clarify the forthcoming chapters;

- the second part is more philosophical and is centered around two works. The first is Freud's *Totem and Taboo*, a myth that metaphorically illustrates the paradigm of human society-building and the indispensable role that ideology – in Freud's case, the invention of Totemism – plays in it. The second is Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals*, in which I found a great metaphorical explanation of the imposition of man-made Christianity on the West, that eventually gave rise to the so called “Western ideology”;
- in the third chapter, I tried to leave the realm of metaphors and philosophy to relate the theories contained in the first two chapters to the “real world”. I identified historical examples of the role of ideology in two striking revolutions that were ideological at their core, and only after the ideological shift it was possible to materially change the society: Meiji Japan and Nazi Germany.

The three chapters are meant to create a precise conceptual path supporting the central argument: human nature is such that any society needs an ideological system that provides it with a way to look at the world and make sense of it; without it, any society would lack cohesion and a shared will that makes it functional.

Man is, as Clifford Geertz defines it, an *incomplete animal*, and what makes it complete is the ability to build cultural systems through the unique tool of ideology-making. Thanks to this ability, again referring to Geertz, humans are not *incomplete* anymore, but rather *self-completing*.

This dissertation was made possible by this year's studies of International Political Theory at the University of Edinburgh, which provided me with the intellectual tools and research skills that allowed me to gather a broad amount of different sources and create connections between them in a harmonious way.

This master enabled me to see the interesting material I studied during the past years under a new, more intellectually mature and personal, light and relate it to contemporary thinkers like Freedman, Eric Wolf and especially Liah Greenfeld, whose works stroke me for the multi-disciplinary approach that – I hope – characterizes this dissertation as well.

Chapter I
Defining Ideology

The first step towards getting a sense of why and how Ideology plays a fundamental role in shaping a society – not only a metaphysical one by providing a set of ideals but especially a very material one, constituting a guide in the process of building laws and customs – is to explore the path followed by the term in the history of thought in order to clarify its meaning, which will eventually resemble very closely Clifford Geertz's understanding of it.

1.1) The Marxist 'Smokescreen'

The terms 'ideology' and the adjective 'ideological' are by most seen as ambiguous. The word itself evokes strong emotional responses, due to its intense symbolical content and especially, as Freedman (2003, p.1) suggests, a misled interpretation of it. A person labeled as 'ideological' is perceived as an indoctrinated and deceived one, who accepts a predeterminate set of ideas fed to him by a superior power without a real effort to engage and question them. Many perceive 'ideology' as akin to terms belonging to the realm of religion such as dogmatism or creed, expressions that imply a certain lack of thought and critical sensibility and a blind sense of belief.

Much of this distrustful attitude towards ideology is rooted in the thought of two early, and perhaps still the most influential, thinkers: Marx and Engels. They paint a straightforwardly negative portrait of ideology, seen as a mystification, a deception created by the powerful elites for the common people not to become aware of their exploitation. Marx seems to have a clear and absolute idea about it: the great deception – the *smokescreen* – has not been invented in recent times, but since the very beginning of history: 'all events in the course of time and civilization have been

shrouded in mist by the *smokescreen of mysticism*, fantastically wrought by *romanticism*, and inoculated with *speculation*.’ (1975, p.209, italics in original)

Ideology is an instrument in the hands of the rulers, a fog to keep the workers – the *proletariat* – unaware of their exploited condition under the *capitalist* system. Marx and Engels make it more explicit in *The German Ideology*, in which they intend to show – in arms against the Romantics¹ – how all ideology is born out of a philosophical misconception: rather than departing from the real life conditions to ascend to metaphysical concepts, the so-called ideologists want to impose vague and not material concepts on men. By doing so, the German philosophers fail to ‘inquire into the connection of German philosophy with German reality, the relation of their criticism with their own surroundings.’ (p. 41) Marx seems to indicate that this is not just an unintentional misconception, but the failure to connect philosophy to reality is deliberately meant to deceive the proletariat and keep it in a condition of exploited labor.

To fix this failure and restore an image of humanity and its circumstances as they are, and not ‘upside-down as in a camera obscura’, Marx and Engels intend to mark a new path: ‘In direct contrast to German philosophy which descends from heaven to earth, here we ascend from earth to heaven.’ (p.47)

Their critique of ‘morality, religion, metaphysics and all the rest of ideology’ is a critique of the independence of consciousness from material life itself. According to the Marxian thought, everything sublimates from the material process of life, anything else is ‘phantoms formed in the human brain, as Life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life.’ (p.47)

The Marxist view of ideology has been extremely influential and is still alive nowadays. It has some fallacy but one of its main features withstood the proof of time: Marx unveiled the importance of the social and historical environment in defining political concepts, every ideology is born in its time and is shaped by the

¹ The Romantics were an intellectual movement – primarily artistic and literary – especially active in the first half of the 19th century. Starting from the German *Sturm und Drang* movement in the late 18th century, the Romantics emphasized the value of intense emotions and aesthetic experiences over the rationalist and classicist dogmas. Among the romantics stood prominent figures such as Goethe, William Blake, Nikolai Gogol and Victor Hugo, and artists as J.M.W. Turner, Theodore Gericault and Eugene Delacroix.

various concepts debated and valued in it. Despite this achievement, Marx is wrong in saying that the purpose of an ideology is always to protect the political power and endorse exploitation over the productive class (p.43), I find this to be originated in his rather Manichean view of the world as divided between exploited and exploiters, as ideologies are not always imposed on people but they can rise from the bottom of a society and lead to social change.

Another important realization of the Marxian thought is the crucial importance he attributed to ideas. Despite labeling ideas as *phantoms* and almost saying that ideology is not worth further examination as it has no intrinsic value (Freedman, 2003, p.9), Marx seems to fear them. While saying that ideology is nothing more than a smokescreen, a harmful illusion that blinds and chains workers, he undermines at the same time his own position; he regards a great power to this abstract and metaphysical force called ideology: the power to tie people up and the faculty to generate policies and shape entire legal systems. Despite disvaluing it with his quasi-messianic belief that this smokescreen will be torn down by the advent of real socialism and the 'end of history', he is suggesting that the whole contemporary capitalist system is shaped by this smokescreen, this *superstructure*, which under this light assumes a crucial importance for social scientists.

At the same time, Marx seems to be misled by – borrowing Clifford Geertz's words – a 'flattened view of other people's mentality' to a rather chauvinist conception of the same people he exalts in his theory, the proletariat. If they have been deceived by an illusion since the dawn of time and they were never able to free themselves, the explanations can be two, and both depict them as hopeless victims: either ideology 'deceives the uninformed, or it excites the unreflective'. (1964, p.210)

Geertz accuses social scientists, and in this regard I am referring his words to Marx, to be blinded by a lack of empathy towards the people they theorize about, and this makes it impossible for them to conceive ideology as a symbol system – a *metaphor* – that 'draws its power from its capacity to grasp, formulate and communicate social realities. [...] [That] mediates more complex meanings than its literal reading suggests.' (p.210) Marx grasped the power of this metaphor, but was unable to confess it.

1.2) *Exploring the Smokescreen: Althusser*

In this regard, and strikingly not leaving the realm of Marxist theory, Louis Althusser built a fundamental conceptual bridge to explain how ideology – despite still being regarded as an illusion – acts on the material world by making a really bold claim, only apparently clashing with the Marxist doctrine: ‘Ideology has material existence.’ (1971, p.39) Obviously, Althusser is not saying that ideas exist in the material world as a stone or a rifle do, but he – in an Aristotelian spirit – explains that: ‘matter is discussed in many senses, or rather it exists in different modalities’. (p.40)

His argument has big implications but is relatively simple: any individual has a determinate set of beliefs, derived from his ideas, in which a principle – God, Justice, Freedom and so on – represents the top of the hierarchy; by this internal process naturally follows his behavior, his practical material attitude and, most importantly for Althusser, his participation in determinate practices.

By influencing the material actions of men, these systems of ideas – namely, ideologies – become extremely material: it is only thanks to them if practices invested of a strong conceptual and symbolic value such as masses, trials or demonstrations – still relating to the aforementioned examples of God, Justice and Freedom – are generated. This leads to the conclusion that ‘ideas’ of a human subject exist in his actions.’ (p.42)

Althusser shows how, after being materialized through actions, ideas give birth to *practices* that shape the world and create new meanings (just think about the concept, which became practice, of ‘trial’ and how heavily it changed the material world), practices are themselves governed by *rituals* which enrich them with symbolic value, and this is how ‘the material existence of an ideological apparatus’ comes to be, descending from the realm of metaphysics – Heaven – to that of physical existence – Earth.

He translates this into a more explicit Marxist paraphrase: ‘the existence of the ideas of a subject belief is material in that *his ideas are his material actions inserted into*

material practices governed by material rituals which are themselves defined by the material ideological apparatus from which derive the ideas of that subject.’ (p.43, italics in original)

Althusser’s theory is crucial in moving forward from the dogmatic Marxist perception of ideology, but it is still limited as it only takes into account the individual dimension of it, while on a higher level is limited to unveiling a *repressive apparatus*² that willingly creates rituals and imposes ideology on the individuals in order to conceal itself and at the same time submit them and perpetrate – once again – the capitalist model. He declares that ‘Ideology is a ‘representation’ of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence’. (p.36) Ideology therefore does not represent the actual conditions of existence – it cannot replicate the *real* – but just imaginary representation of them: it is a representation of a representation.

In saying this, Althusser’s thought is inspired by Jacques Lacan’s theories about the relationship between the Real and what he calls the Imaginary Order.³ According to Lacan, the real is *impossible*: it is impossible to have knowledge of it, it is impossible to express, grasp and imagine. All we can gain knowledge of is the Imaginary and the Symbolic. (1964, p.51-55) What he meant by this was that in the moment in which we try to express reality into language, we mark our separation from the real with the act of entering the realm of language.

Similarly, for Althusser it is impossible to gain knowledge of the ‘Real conditions of existence’ while thinking of ideology due to our reliance on language; however, we can come close to perceiving if not those ‘Real conditions’ at least the ways in which we are related to any concept that belongs to ideology through the complex processes

² Althusser’s theory in this regard resembles Marx’s one as the Repressive State Apparatus and the Ideological State Apparatuses relate to each other in a similar way to the Marxian Structure and Superstructure: the RSA is what lies underneath the various ISAs. The RSA acts primarily through physical repression and violence and is directly controlled by the ruling class, while the ISAs mainly through ideology and are more fluid and difficult to control. Whereas the RSA is one – the State – Althusser provides a number of examples of ISAs: religious, family, legal, political, trade union, communications and cultural. (for a more precise account see Althusser, 2001, p.97-106)

³ The Imaginary is ‘the fundamental narcissism by which the human subject creates fantasy images of both himself and his ideal object of desire.’ (1991, p.188) In other words, it is an inner mirror-like system that reflects the real and allows us to make sense of the world. We can only get knowledge of this Imaginary Order, a representation created by our own perception. ‘

of recognition, i.e. the ways in which ideology inevitably influences our reasoning process and how we perceive ourselves and the world and its events.

Moreover, the way in which Althusser thinks of how humans act according to ideology – even though he does not give adequate weight to the collective dimension of it – strictly resembles the Lacanian ‘Symbolic Order’: this order is essential for men to be able to communicate, using language to describe not the ineffable ‘Real’ but the Imaginary through symbols.

The Symbolic becomes accessible to a child, who through it can access the community using the same “code” to describe the Imaginary world, after his acceptance of what Lacan calls the *Name-of-the-Father*: a number of laws and restrictions that control both desire and the rules of communication. (1977b, p.67) The symbolic, through language, is ‘the pact which links subjects together in one action. The human action *par excellence* is originally founded on the existence of the world of the symbol, namely on laws and contracts.’ (1991, p.230)

In the same way, in Althusser’s theory, men who share the same ideology come together in *practices* and *rituals*, but he misses – perhaps due to a too deep devotion to Marxist terminology that prevented him to give an adequate value to the importance of language in ideology – the crucial step of the acceptance of the ‘Name-of-the-Father’. Through this step – which could be transferred into society as the acceptance of a Constitution (“the laws of our forefathers”) or any legal system – citizens submit to a definite set of laws and gain in exchange a sort of code that permits them to communicate, *a shared language* that characterizes them as members of a community. Moreover, Althusser, despite unveiling the fundamental step of the “materialization” of ideas, attributes to the rulers of society a talent that goes far beyond their capacities: the almost magical power to handcraft and dominate ideas and to impose them on other people.

1.3) *The Actions of Ideologies*

As things stand, not only it is impossible to force ideas into people – the physical enforcement of a repressive apparatus may restrain people from publicly expressing them, but not from secretly believing in them – but, more importantly, it is impossible to master ideology.

To show how ideology evolves independently from its creators and resists any attempt to master it, we need to abandon the field of Marxist theory and step in the realm of philosophy. Following Gadamer's – definitely not a Marxist – hermeneutic school of thought we can see how any text⁴ does not stick to its original meaning; after its publication, it embarks on a life of its own for the simple fact that words and sentences cannot be defined unequivocally. This means that any amalgam of sentences and concepts – therefore including, by extension, entire ideologies – inevitably carries infinite meanings and interpretations and is doomed to be forever indeterminate or, better, changing at all times depending on how and by who it is interpreted. An argument becomes alive through public debate and the numberless interpretation of its future readers – whether they be single subjects or a collectivity – rather than being dead and sticking to its author's will. (Gadamer, 1989, p.349)

This argument is taken one step forward by Umberto Eco; in his early and seminal essay *Opera Aperta* he highlights how not only a text – or a piece of art – gains new life through interpretations, but also fulfills its function by getting implemented in material reality: 'the appearance has aesthetic value insofar as it can be seen and conceptualized in numberless perspectives, displaying a manifold of aspects while not ceasing to be itself. [...] In this sense a piece of art, a perfectly measured organism, *closed* in its perfection, becomes *open*, it can be interpreted in a thousand different ways without altering its appearance. Every fruition thus represents both an interpretation and an execution, because through every fruition the text gains new life and a new shape in the world.' (1962, p.56, italics in original)

This has been recently deepened by Maurizio Ferraris, who, referring mainly to Gadamer and Ricoeur, has shown how a text becomes *action* in an analogous way as it happens in Althusser's theory, and the text – again a broad term that includes whole

⁴ Using the term "text", the hermeneutics do not mean merely a book or a pamphlet, but include both written and oral statements, arguments and narratives. A broad definition that we will now follow and ends up including whole ideologies.

ideologies – gains power through narratives of past actions, namely: history. Just think about how ideologies, especially totalitarian ones, are fueled by the selective reading of history and myths – such as the recollection of ancient Roman identity in Italian fascism and the invention, camouflaged as historical reintroduction, of the *saluto romano*. (Winkler, 2009, p.2) By stating this, Ferraris (2008, p.27-36) shows how ideology reinforces itself by causing actions and shaping history in order to exploit it; like a machine that fuels itself, any society acts responding to drives that come from ideology, and then portrays those same actions in a symbolic way that works for reinforcing that same ideology, celebrating *rituals* to remember those ideologically dense actions – such as Liberation or National Days.

Any ideology shapes rituals in a way that emphasizes the values it holds as principal; a country that is based on the value of liberty and antifascism – such as Italy – will give birth to rituals that celebrate those values and the end of the fascist regime, whereas a country that seeks to create a strong symbolism of power and depict itself as vigorous and victorious will perhaps emphasize its victories, as for example Russia, which celebrates in a particularly impressive style the victory in World War II rather than the fall of the communist regime of USSR and, on the contrary, tries to claim a certain continuity with the powerful but liberticidal Soviet heritage.

This reflects another faculty of ideology that has not yet been covered: the capacity of giving value to concepts and shaping the language itself, thus creating a hierarchy of political concepts that assume different meaning depending on the ideological lens through which we observe it. The exact same term can have extremely different meanings in different ideological systems; (Freedon, 1996) just think about how far the different conceptions of the value of Liberty or Justice were in the cold war period USA and USSR or are in contemporary Sweden and Islamic Iran, but also in a UK citizen who supports the Labour Party as opposed to a UKIP activist. This is because different ideologies are constantly struggling to obtain the hegemony, in a battle to assign their own interpretation to contested values and shape the society in accordance to them.

Ideologies are thus systems that give meaning to political concepts under their domain by legitimizing one interpretation and delegitimizing all others; otherwise it would

inevitably remain hard to attribute a precise meaning to political concepts and create relations between them. After defining concepts, the role of ideology is to link them and create complicate patterns (for example, linking the concept of “Legitimate Authority” to “Elections” in a Democracy or “Heredity” in a Monarchy). The definition provided by Freedon is that ‘an ideology is a wide-ranging structural arrangement that attributes decontested meanings to a range of mutually defining political concepts, this entails that in a country where more ideologies are competing to shape precise policies Ideologies compete over the control of political language as well; [...] indeed, their competition over plans for public policy is primarily conducted through their competition over the control of political language.’ (2003, p. 54-55)

Now we can fully grasp the fundamental linguistic aspect of ideologies: they are in a continuous struggle to define concepts and give their own meaning to words. We can see it in many totalitarian regimes: Mussolini, for example, pursued a policy of *Italianizzazione*, through which many foreign names, toponyms and words to which the dictator scornfully referred to as ‘Ostrogoth terms’. For example, Whisky became *Acquavite*, cocktails became *bevanda arlecchina* (preferred to the Futurists' proposal of *Polibibita*) and sandwich became *tramezzino*, a word still used in contemporary Italian. The aim was clear: to show how Italy did not need foreign terms, precisely because they were foreign and therefore inferior.

George Orwell strikingly depicts this in his book *Nineteen Eighty-Four* with two quotes, the first is represented by the three slogans – huge letters carved in the walls of the *Ministry of Truth* – of the party that runs the State and they highlight the relativity of words and the faculty of manipulating them through ideological actions: ‘WAR IS PEACE; FREEDOM IS SLAVERY; IGNORANCE IS STRENGTH.’ (p.6)

The second quote is perhaps even more important, and it relates to the new language that the Ministry of Truth is about to impose on people: ‘It’s a beautiful thing, the destruction of words [...] Don’t you see that the whole aim of Newspeak [literally, a New-Speak invented by the party, opposed to what they call ‘Oldspeak’] is to narrow the range of thought? In the end we shall make thoughtcrime literally impossible,

because there will be no words in which to express it'. (p.44) Syme – the man behind the development of Newspeak – goes forward, stating that 'Newspeak is Ingsoc [meaning 'English Socialism', the ideology of the totalitarian government] and Ingsoc is Newspeak'. (p.45)

From these symbolic words by Orwell, we can now jump to the Geertzian conception of the role of ideology: it is a mental tool that gives meaning to words and concepts, without which everything would be impossible to grasp as the Lacanian *Real*. Ideology – through its linguistic function – enables humanity to understand the world and direct its will.

This understanding of ideology is quite far from the Marxist one. Ideology is something that is needed to make sense of the conceptual political world, a tool that helps us to codify and comprehend social phenomena. It is 'a metaphor that extends language by broadening its semantic range, and it renders otherwise incomprehensible situations meaningful.' (Geertz, 1964, p.220)

Ideology making is something inextricably rooted in the human nature, as man is the only animal capable of complex speculative thinking and abstraction. Geertz states that it is precisely for this reason that humanity inevitably creates ideologies, intended as systems of symbols that helps us to define the world: it is in its nature, that he strikingly depicts saying that 'the tool-making, laughing or lying animal, man, is also the incomplete – or, more accurately, self-completing – animal.' (p.118) The faculty of creating symbol-systems, and therefore ideologies, is precisely what completes this animal.

Geertz goes forward arguing that when an ideology is shared by a large group of people, a community, it enables this group to forge a political system that reflects its ideas and values, thus freeing it from immediate governance or simple received tradition, from 'the unreflective precepts of conventional moralism.' (p.119)

This allows us to finally unveil what we mean by "ideology": it appears as the opposite to the Marxian *smokescreen*, it is a creative force that enables men to make sense of the world, to give value to things that would otherwise be meaningless or incomprehensible. It enables mankind to complete itself and the world at the same time, to give a definite shape to its abstract aspirations and to direct its will.

Ideology is a response to a need, not a superfluous superstructure; it is a response to social, psychological and cultural strains innate in humanity, an imaginative and symbolic faculty that enables us to make sense of the otherwise vague social and political world.

1.4) Conclusions on Ideology

Through these thinkers' theories we get an image of ideology as something quite different from the Marxist conception of a *smokescreen*; ideology is a cultural structure that humans build while thinking about the world.

Thought, the ability to give a sense to the world and to build rational systems have been perceived for centuries as unique features of mankind, which has been depicted through history as the only animal able to do so by a long tradition of thought;⁵ from the ancient Aristotelian definition of man as a *rational animal*, the only one that adds to organic life the capability to carry out rationally formulated projects (Aristotle, 1976, p.75-88), to the still vital conception rooted in anthropology of man as a *cultural animal*, one that possesses peculiarities that are not just genetically but *culturally inherited*. (Baumeister, 2005) And what is culture if not an extremely complex system of the same rationally formulated projects – shaped by societies and bequeathed through generations – that Aristotle mentions?

Humans shape the world they live in through their actions, and their actions are themselves directed by the thought that causes them and the way they perceive the world, this thought is in turn regulated in a precise and rational way by an organizing force, a “conceptual map” – to borrow Geertz’s metaphor (1964, p.216) – that gives meaning to the single concepts and traces “roads” between them, just as a geographical one gives to mere physical locations a new meaning as “places”. This complex system is often assimilated, not only by anthropologists, to what is usually defined as *culture*, but we can now call it *ideology*: a system of ideas that organizes

⁵ Modern biology and primatology might have proved this claim wrong on a scientific ground, but its influence on the history of thinking and its philosophical importance on the conception of human nature can still be intact.

and gives value to concepts, shapes language, drives human actions – on a singular but more importantly on a societal level – and through them influences the material world and molds societies.

Man emerges, again referring to Geertz, as an *incomplete animal*, that needs to complete itself by constructing a system that enables him to make sense of the world. Ideology is therefore, as Marx grasped, constructed by mankind in an artificial way, it is a product of our psyche and rationality that is born and acts on a purely metaphysical level but this does not undermine its importance, even in a strict Marxist and materialist perspective, because acting on metaphysical level – inspiring men and guiding their activities – it becomes material, it influences the physical world by causing any individual's actions. We can go forward saying that by causing the actions of individuals, ideology can also, and perhaps more importantly, bond them together and create a mass of people that acts following a unified and unifying ideological drive.

This can give birth to new groups within a community that holds a different ideology – as happens nowadays in every liberal state – but also generate a completely new society, or radically change one if an uprising ideology successfully becomes hegemonic overthrowing the old one. We will deepen this process later on, analyzing the historical examples of Japan and Germany.

When a community shares the same ideology, its values will be reflected in the laws and customs that this community gives itself, inspiring constitutions and traditions. In this respect, the lesson taken from Gadamer and Eco is important, as they show how ideology – or, in Eco's case, an artifact or a text, adopting the broad hermeneutic definition of text – is not rigid, dead and immutable, its meanings and interpretations can be endless; after its creation, an ideology constantly changes, flowing with the times and the events that change its perception and the ideas of men.

Ideology – whether it can be created consciously by an elite of intellectuals or born unconsciously and spontaneously out of a community – does not have a master or a class of masters, but it evolves constantly following its own will; after its creation, it *embarks on a life of its own*. This does not mean that an ideology can survive without people that partake it, but that it lives through their spontaneous interpretation and it

evolves in ways that are impossible to dominate either by a single subject or by an entire ruling class. Because of its very nature, an ideology changes as its interpretation changes.

To conclude, it is now essential to provide a clear definition: by political ideology we mean any set of ideas that, acting through men, strongly influences – or tries to do so – the political choices of a community. Interestingly, it is not necessary for it to be strictly *political*. The most notable example of this is ostensibly represented by religious ideals, that throughout history have influenced the political systems and choices of numberless societies: from the religious drive – which of course only functioned as a mask for economic and political motivations, but the ideological language used in this case was strictly religious – that brought the Catholic West together for the crusades, to the deification of the *Tennō* (the Emperor) in pre-World War II Japan, to nowadays policies in the Islamic world and even in several Western countries such as Italy, which is still reluctant to change certain policies – i.e. laws regarding abortion, euthanasia or homosexual rights – due to a strongly politicized religious ideological opposition.

Chapter II

Freud and Nietzsche – Building Ideological Systems

After having provided a definition of ideology as something that is naturally constructed by humans, needed to interpret the world by giving sense to concepts and linking them through what Geertz metaphorically defined as a map, my purpose is to provide philosophical examples of how an ideology gets in the world relying on the theories of two eminent philosophers of the late XIX and early XX century: Sigmund Freud and Friedrich Nietzsche.

In different ways, the two thinkers highlighted through strong symbolic metaphors how a society needs to build an ideology and dedicate itself to it, in order to achieve different aims such as social stability or a cohesive identity. They both talk about ideology building, but while Freud describes the invention of an ideology in a moment of pre-humanity – or, better, the step from pre-humanity to humanity – Nietzsche shows how an ideology can replace another one through a *transvaluation of values*. To show this, I will analyze mainly Freud's *Totem and Taboo* and Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals*. It is important not to attribute to neither of the two theories a desire to achieve historical accuracy; both Freud and Nietzsche did not aim to provide a precise historical account of what happened respectively in the pre-historical moment of the invention of Totemism and in the Roman Empire, when Christianity and its morality replaced the Pagan values that guided roman society until then. Rather, they intend to subtly show a collective interior process that changed human mentality, and this is interesting for the purpose of this dissertation as it is an attempt to report the action of ideology. I will start from Freud's speculations on Totemism.

2.1) The Freudian Myth of the Primeval Horde

In his controversial book published in 1913, *Totem and Taboo*, Freud intends to rely

on ethnographical studies – mainly from Frazer, Robertson Smith and Atkinson – for the ambitious aim to identify, as the subheading states, ‘resemblances between the mental lives of savages and neurotics’.

Freud centers his analysis on Australian aborigines’ Totemism⁶, which, according to an ethnological tradition preeminent in his time, he sees as the first and most basic form of religion, the one that is most similar to the primitive and original manifestation of human spirituality. (1950, pp.1-2)

The main topic he focuses on is the institution of *taboos*, especially the ones relating to incest and patricide – which he identifies as the only two universal taboos – and others relating to homicide, crimes against the Totemic animal and taboos related to kings and rulers.

A taboo – a word original of Polynesian cultures – is an action that is forbidden within a community because of sacred reasons. It is hard to define the word because, as Freud states, our culture lost the ambivalent concept of sacred related to the taboo centuries ago. To find something similar we have to go back to the ancient Latin, Greek or Hebrew, languages that featured words such as – respectively – *sacer*, *ἅγιος* (*agòs*) and *kadesh*, all these terms incorporate an ambivalence of meanings: on one hand they denote something “sacred” or “holy” but on the other they can mean “dangerous”, “forbidden” and “unclean”. (p.18)

Freud relies on different ethnological sources and on the definition contained in the 1910-11 edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* to provide an impartial account of a term that, by his own admission, is inevitably ‘highly obscure’. Taboos are not religious or moral prohibitions, they differ from the first ones because they are imposed on their own account and not by divine ordinance, and from the latter ones because they are not motivated by a moral system which provides reasons for them. They relate to any kind of topic and, in Polynesia, they have to do with the *mana* (translated as “magical influence”), a vital energy that pervades everything; typically

⁶ Totemism is an ancient belief mostly diffuse in Australia and Oceanic Islands, but also in Asia, Africa and North America, in which a community is spiritually linked to a sacred natural being – most commonly an animal such as a wolf, a bear or an armadillo, but there are examples of totemic plants – which represents the community and bonds them together within a kinship system. The community worships the Totem, which is often represented with sculptures and poles, and it is usually forbidden to kill, eat or even touch the totemic animal outside of special occasions that will be discussed later on.

kings and priests are characterized by the possession of an abundance of *mana* which can be harmful and even lethal to those who have low quantities of it – the common people. This mechanism reflects the ambivalence of the sacred: it is something holy and powerful, and for this very reason it can be extremely dangerous if violated.

He who violates a taboo, becomes himself taboo. His people repudiate him and a punishment for his violation shall follow automatically: the taboo is expected to take vengeance on its own. In most of the cases though, Freud reports that ‘society itself took over the punishment of offenders’. (p.20)

Often the penalty for minor taboo violations was an ‘act of atonement and purification’ (p.21), which could last from days to years and typically included reclusion from the society or heavy restrictions. However, for major misdeeds – as incest or homicide – death penalty was common, and often the perpetrator was executed by several members of the community together.

This definition is indeed foggy and vague, but one thing appears as clear: taboos are meant to prevent people to commit a series of actions that would harm the community. In this light, taboo systems appear – in Wilhelm Wundt words – as ‘the oldest human unwritten code of laws’. (1906, p.308)

In his endeavor to discover the origin of taboos Freud was impressed by the universality of only two of them, which appear to be strictly related to his fundamental concept of the *Oedipus complex*: incest and patricide. This led Freud to work even harder to elaborate a theory that would allow him to grasp the taboos’ origin and their purpose.

To do so, his starting point was one of Charles Darwin’s most speculative theories about the original social condition of humanity: ‘Darwin deduced from the habits of the higher apes that men, too, originally lived in comparatively small groups or *hordes* within which the jealousy of the oldest and strongest male prevented sexual promiscuity.’ (1950, p.125) Darwin relies on the analysis of the behavior of gorillas to hypothesize that the original social organization of primitive communities was that of a *horde*: a small group in which the father killed or exiled younger males to keep the hegemony and the exclusive possess of the females. Darwin’s conclusion is that the exiled sons, ‘when, at last successful in finding a partner, prevent too close

interbreeding within the limits of the same family' (1871, p.362). This theory clashed with an argument that was widely believed to be true in those times, which depicted incest as something towards which humanity had an innate sense of horror. (Freud, 1950, p.122) Another theory back then described the origin of the laws against incest with an explanation 'according to which primitive peoples noticed at an early date the dangers with which their race was threatened by inbreeding' (p.124), but Darwin quickly states that 'savages are not likely to reflect on distant evils to their progeny'. (1875, p.127)

Rather, Darwin indicates that there was an urgency to culturally and socially prevent incest. Frazer supports this theory stating that 'it is not easy to see why any deep human instinct should need to be reinforced by law. There is no law commanding men to eat and drink or forbidding them to put their hands in the fire.' (1910, p.97)

This discovery that the horror of incest is not innate supported Freud's theory of the Oedipus complex, which sees the mother as the fundamental sexual desire of a child, and led his curiosity to elaborate a theory that departs from Darwin's scenario to develop a completely different outcome. He was unsatisfied with Darwin's conclusion as it does not explain the taboo of the patricide and the rise of Totemism, and chose to develop his own myth to go beyond Darwin's theory and provide a metaphorical event that gave rise to Totemism – the original form of human spirituality – and its taboos.

To get to this myth, Freud first analyzes a striking ritual – a unique and primeval type of sacrifice: the totemic meal. 'The clan is celebrating the ceremonial occasion by the cruel slaughter of its totem animal and is devouring it raw – blood, flesh and bones. The clansmen are there, dressed in the likeness of the totem and imitating it in sound and movement, as though they are seeking to stress their identity with it. Each man is conscious that he is performing an act forbidden to the individual and justifiable only through the participation of the whole clan; nor may anyone absent himself from the killing and the meal. When the deed is done, the slaughtered animal is lamented and bewailed.' (1950, p.140)

This gory ritual – which Freud refers to as ‘mankind’s earliest festival’⁷ (p.142) – is by Freud connected to a single murderous act that gave rise to both the universal taboos and the Totemic religion at the same time, eventually implying that this event was the spark that gave life to the Totemic society itself: an original collective patricide performed by an alliance of exiled brothers that ended the supremacy of the jealous father.

The totemic meal thus becomes a ritual to reinforce the totemic society through the symbolic reenactment of this collective murder: ‘One day the brothers who had been driven out came together, killed and devoured their father and so made an end of the patriarchal horde. United, they had the courage to do and succeeded in doing what would have been impossible for them individually.’ (p.141) This is a twisted myth that marks the triumph of Oedipus: a band of brothers that succeed to physically eliminate the father in order to get to their mothers and sisters, and through the act of devouring him they symbolically embody his strength and authority: ‘The violent primal father had doubtless been the feared and envied model of each one of the company of brothers: and in the act of devouring him they accomplished their identification with him.’ (p.142)

As said in the beginning of this chapter, what is interesting here is the next step, the one that transforms a brutal patricide in ‘the beginning of so many things – of social organization, of moral restrictions and of religion’. (p.142)

It is important not to take Freud’s words too literally, and neither him nor me believe this to represent an exact reconstruction of historical facts: ‘it would be as foolish to aim at exactitude in such questions as it would be unfair to insist upon certainty’. (see footnote, p.143)

It is indeed a myth, a hypothesis that bears psycho-analytical and sociological value, and especially a strong metaphor to show how mankind is able to build an ideological system in order to achieve both abstract (i.e. a shared identity) and more material (i.e. social stability) aims.

Here is the particular step in which this violent and destructive act achieves its

⁷ According to the previously described Althusser’s theory, this ‘festival’ is a *ritual* aimed at reinforcing the core values and the identity of the community by remembering, in a symbolic way, its past triumph.

unconscious generative purpose: the brothers had strongly ambivalent feelings towards the father, he was hated for being an obstacle preventing them to fulfill their desires due to his hegemony of power and sexual objects, but he was at the same time envied and admired for his superior strength and undisputed authority; moreover, now that he was gone, the brothers risked to lose their unity and their group was on the verge of a fratricide war of all against all to claim possession of the women: 'the brothers had no alternative, if they were to live together and rescue the organization that had made them strong, but to institute the law against incest.' (p.144)

The Father unconsciously became the Totem, his earthly authority sublimated into a metaphysical one and the explicit prohibition to get to his daughters and wives fell on the brothers in the metaphorical form of a taboo. Moreover, the taboo of killing and eating the totemic animal outside of the ritual of the totemic meal was instituted out of the remorse that the brothers felt for their crime.

By doing so, the brothers were able to conclude their revolution and create a new ideological system that allowed them to live in a more peaceful and functional society, and gave themselves an 'unwritten code of laws' to regulate it. By creating a symbol system, the equivalent of the Geertzian map, in which the concept of "Totem" replaced the concept of "Father" as supreme authority, they provided themselves an essential form of authority – Freud defines it as 'deferred obedience' – that was less oppressive but successfully prevented more blood to be spilled by enforcing exogamy and eradicating – at least from a conscious level – the desire to breed with mothers and sisters that would inevitably have brought new conflicts.

2.2) Reception and Evaluation of Totem and Taboo: René Girard

The theory set forth in *Totem and Taboo* is a controversial one and it was received with harsh criticism, especially after Freud's death, by his French disciples and – to a lesser extent – ethnologists. René Girard reports that the first chapters of the book were not considered as something particularly bad, but the crucial part about the patricide was the one drawing the criticism; it was labeled as superfluous and

incongruous, even leading some psychoanalyst to wonder why Freud included it at all. Girard points out how such critiques were rushed and rather superficial, as ‘the French psychoanalysts have responded to this question in their customary fashion by attributing the concept to the author’s unconscious. In *Totem and Taboo*, they inform us, Freud treats his readers to a particularly spectacular revelation of his own repressed desires.’ (1988, p.194) Girard continues saying that due to this hurried condemnation to oblivion, the book never received serious critical examination.

Despite agreeing with some of the points against Freud – mainly the vagueness of the term “Totemism” and the exaggerated role played by the Oedipus complex in the murder – Girard found Freud’s metaphor illuminating as it anticipates his theory of the ‘surrogate victim’, one of the foundations of culture, in showing with striking metaphorical force how the importance of actual or symbolic sacrifices in every religion – not least the crucifixion of Christ – points at a murderous act as the foundation of religion itself and, consequently, culture.

Girard argues that the main effect of this murder was to act as a scapegoat in order to draw on the victim all the violent drives of the community. The murder did not just give rise to prohibitions under the form of taboo, but it is precisely the event that generated what he calls a ‘surrogate victim’, a victim that is sacrificed in order to prevent the natural human violence to destroy the community. The surrogate victim is seen by Girard as the founding stone of society itself and, as Geertz would say, is a natural mechanism that completes the incomplete animal and saves it from his own destructive instinct: ‘We know that animals possess individual braking mechanisms against violence; animals of the same species never fight to the death, but the victor spares the life of the vanquished. Mankind lacks this protection. Our substitution for the biological mechanism of the animals is the collective, cultural mechanism of the surrogate victim. There is no society without religion because without religion society cannot exist.’ (p.221)

In other words, what is interesting in *Totem and Taboo* is not the murder or the classification of taboos, but the phase that brought – undoubtedly, even in Freud’s metaphor, not in one precise instant but through generations – from a state of pre-humanity to the rise of a basic form of civilization: the invention of religion, kinship

and laws, that brought the brothers to step forward from the primal horde into a human society.

To do so, they needed an ideological map that gave value to a very specific series of concepts: women stopped being merely sexual objects and became mothers and sisters, members of the same totemic kinship and therefore taboo, the concept of authority that was previously represented by the brute force of the father was now represented by the spiritual entity of the Totem – indeed, a sublimation of the Father – and the rules of the community were not anymore to be followed just for fear of being beaten or killed, but because of the very belonging to the community.

The crucial step discovered by Freud was the ideology-building process, that responds to what Geertz defines as ‘social, psychological and cultural strains’ (1964, p.220): in order to save their unity, the brothers invented a God (the Totem), a system of laws (the taboos) and a new system to classify their family (the totemic kinship).

In other words: they forged a new ideology, without which it would have been impossible to build a new society.

2.3) Nietzsche and the Birth of Slave Morality – or Christian Ideology

If we stick to the definition of ideology provided in Chapter I, it appears as clear that also the different moral systems belong to a broader structure: that of ideology.

As different cultures have different ideologies, they bear different conceptions of morality as well. The example could still be the contemporary one of Sweden and Iran, but we can find a more interesting one in ancient times, taking a closer look to the cultural revolution that brought an end to Paganism and saw the rise of Christianity, that during the centuries influenced so deeply the European – or “Western” – ideological system. To do so, I will rely on another philosophical – and extremely historically vague – theory: the one provided by Friedrich Nietzsche. While tracing his *Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche discloses the fundamental creative role played by *resentment*, a metaphysical and psychological factor, in the rise of Christianity and its imposition in the Roman Empire.

Nietzsche clearly states at the beginning of his quest that his purpose is to unveil the birth of the concepts of Good and Evil: ‘under what circumstances and conditions did man invent those valuations of Good and Evil? And what is their own specific value? Did they retard or further human progress so far? Are they a sign of need, of impoverishment, of degeneration of life? Or is the reverse the case, do they point to the fullness, the strength, the will of life, its courage, its confidence, its future?’ (1899, p.3-5)

From these words it appears clear that Nietzsche refers to Good and Evil not as absolute concepts, as Christianity portrays them, but he is well aware of their nature of ‘human, all too human things’. (1965, p.80) Even without calling it ideology, it is clear that Nietzsche, by using the verb ‘invent’, is talking about something very similar to the Geertzian definition: at one point in history, humanity – whether voluntarily or not it is unknown – changed the definition of Good and Evil, giving new names at points in the map. There is no ‘Good’ and no ‘Evil’ without the value that a human community attributes to them.

Specifically, Nietzsche believes to have discovered through his deep philological studies a different conception of Good, that predates Christianity and is rooted in the ancient Greek culture: ‘it is clear to me that the true and primitive home of the concept “good” was sought for and posited at the wrong place: the judgment “good” was not invented by those to whom goodness was shown! On the contrary, the “good”, the noble, the powerful, the higher-situated, the high-minded, felt and regarded themselves and their acting as of first rank, in contradistinction to everything low, low-minded, mean and vulgar.’ (1899, p.18)

Referring again to the road map metaphor, we can see how Nietzsche shows that in the Greek ideological system the concept of good was linked with roads leading to what he calls *vital* values; essentially strength and power, being ‘high-situated and high-minded’. On the contrary, the Christian conception of good is linked to concepts such as modesty, humbleness and essentially to weak, what Nietzsche calls ‘sickly’, people: those who need to believe in *anti-vital* values, who can only hope for Heavenly redemption because of their poor conditions on Earth as ‘the last shall be first, and the first last’. (Matthew, 20:16, New International Version)

This discovery brought Nietzsche to elaborate a theory according to which there was a precise point in history when someone enacted what he calls a *transvaluation of values* – that we can see as a radical ideological revolution – to tear down the original “master morality” and replace it with a new one, the Christian ideology that Nietzsche refers to as “slave morality”: ‘the Jews, that priestly people, which finally succeeded in procuring satisfaction for itself from its enemies and conquerors only by a transvaluation of their values, an act of the keenest, most spiritual vengeance. Thus only it befitted a priestly people – the people of the most powerfully suppressed, priestly vindictiveness. It was the Jews who, with most frightfully consistent logic, dared to subvert the aristocratic equation of values (good = noble = powerful = beautiful = happy = beloved of God), and who, with the teeth of the profoundest hatred (the hatred of impotency), clung to their own valuation: “The wretched alone are the good; the poor, the impotent, the lowly alone are the good; only the sufferers, the needy, sick, the ugly are the pious; only they are godly; them alone blessedness awaits.’ (1899, p.28-29)

We can see how those who Nietzsche refers to as ‘the priestly caste’ acted in the same way as the Freudian brothers did: they created a new ideology that suited their needs and turned them from helpless victims to virtuous and moral heroes, they were now the chosen by God and the blessed ones, while those who were until then regarded as “Good” are now transvalued into “Evil”. The tool by which they imposed this ideological revolution, that was eventually institutionalized with the replacement of Paganism with Christianity and all the societal changes that it brought, is entirely metaphysical and it was not fueled by magnanimity but – Nietzsche states – by the quite opposite feeling of *resentment*: ‘the slave revolt begins by resentment itself becoming creative and giving birth to values – the resentment of such beings, as real reaction, the reaction of deeds, is impossible to, and as nothing but an imaginary vengeance will serve to indemnify.’ (p.33)

This particular bit is fundamental for my thesis because it clearly highlights the *creative* aspect of ideology: Nietzsche unveils the faculty of metaphysical concepts – in this case resentment – to fuel actions and change history.

As things stand, Nietzsche’s claim seems to be vague and rather shaky under a

historical point of view: the fall of the Roman Empire and the decline of Paganism are extremely complex phenomena and it is at least reductive to link them to the single event of the birth of Christianity.

Anyway, Nietzsche was not the first to cover this controversial theme. The fall of Rome was already linked to the advent of Christianity by the XVIII century British historian Edward Gibbon, with arguments that closely resemble – despite lacking philosophical depth – Nietzsche’s thesis: ‘As the happiness of a *future* life is the great object of religion, we may hear without surprise or scandal that the introduction, or at least the abuse of Christianity, had some influence on the decline and fall of the Roman empire. The clergy successfully preached the doctrines of patience and pusillanimity; the active virtues of society were discouraged; and the last remains of military spirit were buried in the cloister: a large portion of public and private wealth was consecrated to the specious demands of charity and devotion; and the soldiers' pay was lavished on the useless multitudes of both sexes who could only plead the merits of abstinence and chastity. [...] the Roman world was oppressed by a new species of tyranny.’ (1776)

What is relevant in this matter is the crucial importance attributed to an ideological change: the *transvaluation of values* brought by Christianity. By spreading and imposing the ‘slave morality’ over the ‘master’ one, Christians radically changed the aspect of the ideological map on which the Roman Empire was founded; this radical change shook the foundations of the Empire itself and – obviously far from being the only cause – eventually brought to its collapse for the simple fact that the two set of values were incompatible and, once the Christian ideology triumphed over the previous one, the Empire could not be the same as it was. Christian ideology – as Gibbon reports – reflected itself on the legal and material aspects of the Empire, bringing a radical and irreversible change that had its main drive in religion: a religious ideology that thus became political, and shaped European political life for millennia, from the Middle Ages to our society.

Just as the Freudian brothers needed ideology to build the values that would have regulated their society, the first in human history, the early Christians had to transvaluate the Roman values in order to achieve the extremely material change they

were striving for on a societal level, as only through a radical ideological revolution it was possible to accomplish it.

To conclude, it is interesting to specify how Nietzsche believes Catholicism not only to be a revolt against the previous morality, but a completely man-made one, unrelated to the original words of Christ. The priestly caste appears to have exploited the messages of Jesus to their own advantage: ‘the very word Christianity is a misunderstanding – at bottom there was only one Christian, and he died on the cross’ (1970, p.50)

In his book *The Antichrist*, he raises his accusation against the Church, seen as: ‘the highest of all conceivable corruptions. It has had the will to the last corruption that is even possible. The Christian church has left nothing untouched by its corruption; it has turned every value into an un-value, every truth into a lie, every integrity into a vileness of the soul. [Christianity is] the most subterranean conspiracy that ever existed – against health, beauty, whatever has turned out well, courage, spirit, graciousness of the soul, against life itself.’ (p.95-96)

This is the accusation raised by someone who is committed to a different ideology, and is deeply determinate to unmask all the artificiality and hypocrisy behind the mask of absolute truth that Christianity wears. Nietzsche is perfectly conscious that the “master morality” is not *true* – certainly not more than Christianity is – but in this crucial step resides the importance of his words towards getting a sense of what ideology is: ‘my truth is terrible: for hitherto lies have been called truth. The Revaluation of all Values, this is my formula for mankind's greatest step towards coming to its sense – a step which in me has become flesh and genius.’ (1965, p.127)

His ultimate conclusion coincides with what we said in the first chapter. Since, as Lacan said, ‘the real is impossible’, we cannot get a knowledge of it, the only thing we can know is what we build: the imaginary, or, better, a map written by us that gives names and values to the different concepts; ideology. In Nietzsche’s theory this is the ultimate goal of he who unveiled the artificiality of any ideological system: ‘The Revaluation of all Values’. Without the ability to revalue concepts, every man is doomed to remain an *incomplete animal*, or to be powerless and dominated by an ideology imposed on him.

In this sense, Nietzsche seems to agree with the fact that ideology building is not simply a faculty unique to humanity, but it is precisely what makes us human.

Chapter III

Japan and the Third Reich: Ideology Making in Contemporary History

3.1) *Introduction: Liah Greenfeld*

After exploring the realm of Philosophy, we now need to relate the theories exposed to the realm of reality and History. In doing so, it is evident how the process of ideology building is not far from those theorized by Nietzsche's and Freud's metaphors: ideology building is a creative strain that responds to a need for new values and concepts, essential to build a new image of the world and shape a society that suits it – the Nietzschean *transvaluation of values*.

Geertz himself states that the reason why revolutionary France was the cradle of the most extremist ideologies ever produced up to the XVIII century was not merely the personal insecurity or the pervasive social disequilibrium – as they were common plagues in earlier historical times as well – but the destruction, and consequent urge to replace it, of 'the concept around which political life gravitated until then: the divine right of kings.' (1964, p.220)

To display relevant examples of this process in the limited space of this dissertation, I will focus on two historical cases, both impressive for the radical change – firstly ideological and consequently societal – they achieved in a short amount of time: the Japanese Meiji Restoration and Germany under the Third Reich.

It is fair to object that both the examples relate to totalitarian societies, but I chose them for their unique peculiarities and the evident role of ideology in them. This does not mean that ideology building happens only in such cases, but simply that choosing examples of democratic societies such as USA or social-democrat Sweden – which I considered including, and I don't exclude to deepen in forthcoming studies – would have required more unpacking and therefore more space. Democratic societies are characterized by the presence of several different ideologies, in constant competition for defining the society's policies (Freedman, 2003, p.54-55), while totalitarian ones

only boast one ideology, crushing others. For this reason, such examples are at the same time less complex and more striking and explicit, thus representing more vivid images for the illustrative role I need in this last chapter.

The following reflections have been deeply inspired by the theories of Liah Greenfeld, who focuses on nationalism, seen by her as the main ideology of modernity, to show how ideologies are not an epiphenomenon generated by material and economical processes, but rather the opposite. Nationalism becomes in her words ‘the constitutive element, or organizing principle, of modernity.’ (2001, p.4)

Her starting point is the Weberian concept of rationalization⁸, which is an ‘organizing principle’ – not far from Geertz’s conception of ideology as a shared roadmap – to get to the strong statement that ‘*History is the march of rationalizations, the endless succession of attempts to introduce order into experience that does not carry it within itself.*’ (p.20, italics in original)

Greenfeld sees a single ideology as the source of the “Spirit of Capitalism”: nationalism. But if we can see how nationalism is the source of capitalism, we understand how any society needs an ideological source: ‘behind this shift of societal attitudes in regard to the acquisitive drive and its dramatic valorisation stood a new secular form of collective consciousness (thus a new system of ethical standards): nationalism.’ (p.21) Just as the brothers and the Christians built an ideology in order to shape their societies through a *transvaluation of values*, nationalism provided the drive to subvert the economical order and institutionalize capitalist societies.

We are now going to analyze its role in Meiji Japan.

3.2) *A Strong Ideology for a Strong Country: Meiji Japan*

⁸ Max Weber indicates as “rationalization” the ‘articulation and organization, primarily cognitive, of an area of reality’, it is the fundamental process of ordering the inherently disorderly nature of human reality, the cultural construction through which we make sense of the world. Weber emphasizes how if one precise rationalization is shared by a numerically or otherwise influential portion of society, it becomes a social process, its articulation becomes a collective effort and – when this same rationalization of reality endures over time – it ‘may become the basis of institutionalization’. (1976, p.17-26)

The case of Japan's modernization is impressive under several points of view, first of all its pace: it took less than 20 years, departing from the Meiji Restoration in 1868, to build a functional modern society. By the middle 1880s Japan had a new government that worked swiftly and efficiently, a new constitution, centered around the figure of the Emperor – *tennō* – and, more importantly for us, a new ideology that organized the whole society.

The aim of the Meiji ideology was well summarized by new nationalist slogans like *fukoku kyohei* (“enrich the nation, strengthen the army”), that joined the preceding *sonnō jōi* (“revere the emperor, expel the barbarians”). These words clearly highlight the precise aim towards which the new ideology directed Japan: the will to compete and fight, to obtain dignity and the respect of Western countries as an equal power. (Greenfeld, 2001, p.284) This was achieved through an impressive modernization; by 1905 Japan's army was powerful enough to win a war against Russia, a huge achievement that, in the Japanese nationalists' eyes, was enough to show the world that Japan was just as strong and modern as any Western power, and therefore could rightly demand respect.

Greenfeld shows how the discontent towards the Tokugawa Shogunate – which ruled Japan from 1603 to 1868 – was widespread in the XIX century, especially among the more cultured Samurai class, and its main cause was the economic backwardness caused by the Shogunate's policies. The Samurai felt that their superior education was not rewarded as the highest ranks in the government and especially in the army were reserved to mediocre members of noble or wealthy merchant families – not even of the traditional warrior class!

Anyhow, the main reason was not the personal frustration of their class but, as the Samurai dissident Sakuma Shozan writes in his notes while imprisoned, the damage that this mediocrity caused to Japan's dignity: ‘the officials who negotiate with the foreigners are mediocrities who have no understanding of warfare. The situation being such, even though we wish to avoid incurring the scorn of the barbarians, how, in fact, can we do so?’ (Reflection 28, in Tsunoda et al., 1964, p.103)

Sakuma felt that Japan's honor was crushed because of its people's inability to protect the land, and proposed to adopt Western military organization – especially

meritocracy – to restore its dignity: ‘Should a national emergency arise, there is no one who could command the respect of the warriors and halt the enemy's attack. This is the great sorrow of our times. For this reason, I have wished to follow in substance the Western principle of armament, and [...] form a voluntary group with as sole aim that of guarding the nation and its people. [...] Anyone wishing to join would be tested and his merits examined. Men of talent in military strategy, planning, and administration would be advanced to positions of leadership. It is to be hoped that they would drive the enemy away and perform greater service than those who now form the military class.’ (Reflection 30, p.104)

It is interesting to note that Sakuma was imprisoned after the event which most undermined Japan's dignity and contributed greatly to the uprising of Japanese nationalist pride: the 1853 American expedition led by Commodore Perry, when steam-powered boats broke into the harbor of Edo (Tokyo) and forced the *bakufu* (the Shogun government) to open its borders to uneven trade with the West. This event ‘gave Japanese intellectuals the possibility to reinterpret their humiliation at the hands of the *bakufu* as the humiliation of Japan at the hands of the barbarians.’ (Greenfeld, 2001, p.274) Sakuma Shozan died four years before the Restoration, in 1864, but his slogan perfectly embodies the Meiji spirit and is still used nowadays to describe Japan's approach to modernization: *wakon yōsai* – Japanese Spirit, Western Technique. (Josephson, 2012, p.108)

The first to feel the need of a *transvaluation of values* in Japan were the Samurai; the ancient warrior class (almost 8% of the Japanese population in 1600) had great prestige and honor, similarly to the numerically much smaller European feudal aristocracy, but could not fulfill its usual task, given that the Tokugawa brought peace to Japan for more than 250 years. They had to seek satisfaction in the field of education, and eventually became a cultural elite – “the sword in the right hand and the book in the left”, since the left was traditionally considered as superior to the right – but, as said, the highest positions were inaccessible to them.

The Samurai class, Greenfeld argues, was the first to develop this need, but over the centuries it grew and spread on all the levels of society, eventually bringing to the restoration of the Imperial power and the modernization of Japan. The demise of their

class was for the Samurai only a reflection of the national one, and they felt what Greenfeld defines, in a Durkheimian fashion, *anomie* – a crisis of identity, a need for an ideological change – almost two centuries earlier than the rest of the country: ‘the class clearly experienced a crisis of identity – inevitable given the condition of status-inconsistency in which it was placed as a result of the way the Tokugawa society was intentionally organized and its heightened sensitivity which came with intellectual training and sophistication. The stage, therefore, was set for a transformation of identity.’ (2001, p.262)

This urge, as said, was felt by the Samurai class long before the Meiji Restoration, and always took the form of a rebellion against foreign cultures that were perceived as oppressing the original Japanese one. At first this stage of proto-nationalism was developed by the *kokugakusha* (“school of native learning”); an organization whose scholars specialized in the study and reevaluation of Shinto and rejected the philosophy that inspired the Shogun's government, the Chinese imported Confucianism. The critics of Confucianism became implicitly directed towards the Shogunate, that in the end was depicted as a foreign oppressor. *Kokugaku* scholar Kamo Mabuchi argued in the early 1700s that ‘Confucianism made men crafty, and led them to worship the ruler to such an excessive degree that the whole country acquired a servant's mentality. Later it even came about that an emperor was sacrilegiously driven to an island exile. This occurred because the country had become infected by Chinese ideas. [...] Our country in ancient times was not like that. It obeyed the laws of Heaven and Earth. The emperor was the Sun and Moon and the subjects the stars. If the stars protect the Sun and Moon, they will not hide as is now the case.’ (1964, p.12)

This Sinophobia – which later on developed into an anti-western sentiment – can be considered one of the roots that brought to the Meiji Restoration of the Imperial power, seen as a re-establishment of the Japanese original value – very similar to the German Romantics' values seen as spontaneous and intuitive rather than “crafty”.

All that took to make the next step was to spread this feeling developed by the Samurai. Many intellectuals like the *kukugakusha* or Sakuma Shozan tried to solve this *anomie* – to fill the gap between their perception of how reality should be and how it is – with their intellectual works, by building theories; Tessa Morris-Suzuki

argues that, to succeed in this, ‘intellectuals may take two approaches: either they may argue that society should be made to conform to the ideals of existing theory, or they may try to modify theory to encompass existing reality.’ (1989, p.14)

Greenfeld complements this theory showing how the Samurai intellectuals always strove to spread their feeling among the lower classes, but always lacked the right tool: nationalism. Nationalism allowed at the same time the Samurai to reinvent their image and implement meritocracy, and the whole Japan to unify its aim and compete with the western powers, freeing itself from the obsolete Shogunate. Japanese nationalism was rooted in a solid intellectual tradition built by the Samurai, and inherited its spirit from ‘the Germans, who, because of the Romantic nature of their nationalism, offered the most explicit and contagious example of the phenomenon. The Japanese got the idea very quickly, and by the time of the Meiji Restoration, Japanese Nationalism not only was born, but was able to provide this revolution with its ideological direction.’(2001, p.276-277)

Nationalism was the ideological tool that completed Japan, it was the concept that started Japan's incredibly fast modernization because it provided its people with the will to compete, at first on the field of economy, and later on militarily: ‘Nationalism, which was the greatest gift the West gave to Japan, and which, because of the indigenous conditions, was so gratefully and eagerly accepted, was brought to Japan in an economic package.’ (Greenfeld, 2001, p.327)⁹

3.3) A Radical Transvaluation: Germany under the Third Reich

While exploring the XX Century, there is probably no example of society as impressive and twisted as Germany between 1933 and 1945. After the defeat and collapse of the Third Reich, many thinkers and scholars dedicated their efforts to

⁹ This claim seems to be not only supported by Greenfeld, but accepted by the Japanese society as well, at least within its scholar elite. Sugiyama Chuhei, a leading professor of economics at the Tokyo Economics University, states in the foreword to his book that ‘it is easy to recognize that economic thought [of the new Japan] was inseparably fused with Nationalism’ (1994, p.VI)

analyze a society that appears to be insane and inhuman, perhaps, according to Hannah Arendt, the first society in human history that followed the principle of ‘the banality of evil’. (1963)

As it appears, it is hard for our contemporary perspective to even grasp the “how” and “why” behind the actions that took place in Germany under Hitler's domination; the anthropologist Eric Wolf – who, curiously enough, was born in Vienna from a nonreligious but originally Jewish family and had to flee between 1933 and 1940 first to Czechoslovakia, then England and then to the US to escape the regime – argues that the main hurdle in getting to an answer to such queries as ‘how this could have happened at all within “modern civilization”’ such as the European Germany of 1930s, is that most try to answer these departing from a wrong assumption: ‘that “modernity” means progress in the rule of reason and the belief that rationality will liberate humankind from ignorance and brutality.’ (1999, p.251)

Wolf – in a relativistic anthropological perspective, grounded in his studies especially of the Latin American populations – believes this assumption to be wrong, and to be originated by the lack of relativism caused by a too deep involvement in contemporary Western culture. Not only he considers such an “evil” regime to be possible in modernity, given the radical ideological change brought by Hitler's doctrine in Germany and the fertile ground he found thanks to the resentment and heterophobia diffused at the time, but he seems to follow Zygmunt Bauman in saying that while a complex of different features of “modernity” might not be ‘the Holocaust's sufficient condition; it was, however, most certainly its necessary condition [...] It was the rational world of modern civilization that made the Holocaust thinkable.’ (1989, p.13)

Bauman highlights as reasons some economic and pragmatical Marxist topics – the division of labor, the development of technology and the growth of impersonal bureaucracy within the State – but, more interestingly for us, a multi-faceted ideological aspect that may rise in every society, and on which Hitler's propaganda blew to ignite it and spread its fire in the German society. This feeling is rooted in a fear and resentment towards what is different (“heterophobia”), an ideological effort to label different categories and draw boundaries between the ‘we-group’ and those

we are outside it (“constant enmity”) and the removal of people placed in a different, enemy, category (for which he reserves the term “racism”). (p. 23-24) Bauman argues that anti-Semitism was employed by Hitler precisely as the right tool at the right time to seize consensus by forging alliances with different interest groups. In this process, modern science and rationality came useful to him and his followers – especially Alfred Rosenberg – to create a rational and legitimate image of their theory through the exploitation of biology's and eugenics' branches which are nowadays obsolete and proved wrong, but were back then studied and accredited. On these grounds, Bauman is right when he sees modernity as an indispensable condition for the creation of the Third Reich's ideology.

As in the example of Japan and in the philosophical myths discussed in Chapter II, Hitler's ideology seems to provide a powerful answer in a time in which all throughout Germany a strong sentiment of *anomie* was rising. Wolf analyzes the German society in the aftermath of World War I to demonstrate how another assertion that emerges from many studies is wrong or, at least, not informative; ‘that the NS (National-Socialist) movement was strongly “middle class” in character.’ (1999, p. 224) This claim is quite vague and a generalization, as it ignores the complex composition of such “middle class”, inside which the share of party members in 1935 varied from the 40% among teachers to the 25% of self-employed merchants to 13% in other categories. (*ibidem*) Wolf goes on showing how there was a substantial polarization of political support within the workers: the National-Socialists succeeded in drawing to them many former socialists and communists, especially in Bavaria and among the skilled metalworkers, long considered the revolutionary vanguard of the German proletariat. This was partially because the Left overestimated the cohesion within their electoral class, and this belief proved wrong when the workers ‘in massive numbers went along with the new regime, [...] also (and even more so) when it came to Nazi policies of rearmament and war – and many even joined in the jubilation.’ (Lüdtke, 1995, p.200)

The NS party also had massive support from the upper-class, and not only for mere opportunism after Hitler's seizure of power. While it remains true that Elite families profited greatly from Germany's industrial policies and military expansion and by

transacting business coming to terms with political fanatics, it is also true the greatest early electoral support towards Hitler in most large cities came from ‘upper class neighborhoods, while people in middle-class categories voted Left along with the working-class districts.’ (Wolf, 1999, p.225)

This picture of a country in which the support for Hitler's party was widespread in every layer of the society, together with Bauman's considerations mentioned above, brings us to an important point: the NS seizure of power is not something that happened for mere chance, something inhuman and unthinkable entirely attributable to Hitler's madness; the Nazi ideology was forged by the *Führer* and his contributors in the precise moment in which Germany was a fertile ground for it to plant roots and grow, eventually causing the biggest tragedy in human history.

Just as the Meiji revolution, the Freudian parricide and the invention of Christianity theorized by Nietzsche, 1930s Germany found in Hitler's doctrine the ideological *transvaluation of values* it was striving for. Just as Geertz indicates for revolutionary France, which gave birth to several extreme ideologies in the attempt to replace the collapsed value of monarchy, the most extremist ideology ever forged – National-Socialism – was born to satisfy the need for new values. Barrington Moore, agreeing with Wolf, rejects the simplistic view of the Third Reich being born out of “middle-class *ressentiment*”, and he attributes its rise to a much more ideological origin: ‘attitudes of moral outrage at the collapse of values, especially the bureaucratic values of duty and obedience and the “feudal” values of personal honor and loyalty to superiors’ (1978, p.411)

The social fabric of Germany was weakened and made vulnerable by the outcome of World War I, the treaty negotiated at Versailles opened fissures in German society by imposing the cession of Alsace and Lorraine to France, which also gained control of the mines of the Saarland, while the Ruhrland, on the borderlands of France, had to be demilitarized and was occupied by French forces from 1923 to 1925. Moreover, 132 billions gold marks were requested as reparation, a sum hardly payable by Germany – whose economy was inevitably slowed down by the defeat in World War I and was ruled by a politically impaired and weakly legitimated State – which caused years of hyperinflation that ruined social strata that depended on fixed incomes.

In this condition, Rightists pointed at the politicians who signed the treaties as the ruiners of Germany, who betrayed their people to fulfill their own interest and business. (Geyer, 1984) The NS party gained popularity by never taking part in the Weimar Republic's political arena and always adopting a hostile position while promising the – *ressentiment*-filled – dream of a Third Reich that would revitalize Germany and free it from the yoke imposed by the foreign powers and their allies ruling the Weimar Republic. As Michael Geyer notes, the NS party promised ‘in its own inverted and brutal way to replace interest politics with one predicated on moral principles’, (1984, p.202) a new ideological set of principles such as Volk, Race, Reich and Führer.

Once the NS ideology was successfully spread, each German was required and expected from Hitler himself to shift his own self-perception: the individual had sense only within its Volk, a supra-personal entity to which he was devoted and submitted, and to which he alienated his aspirations. The Führer himself perceived his role as twofold: an ideological demiurge as he had to possess ‘the talent of shaping ideas’, but at the same time, and more importantly, he had to ‘be able to move masses’ (1939, p.848) by using the power of such ideas. He was – in the Nazi perspective – capable to grasp metaphysical concepts and bring them to the chosen German Volk, in order to show it the way and lead it towards its inescapable destiny: a sacred figure, a prophet, almost a demigod.

Through his impressive skills of public speaker – which have been described by witnesses as those of a shaman whose body represents a connection between the world of humans to that of the spirits (Blank, 1931, in Fest, 1970, p.36) – Hitler sought to hypnotize his audience using the ‘magic force of spoken word’ (Hitler, 1939, p.136) in order to make them feel as their individuality was merging in a collective entity, the Volk. In Hitler's assemblies, the NS ideology found fulfillment and became action, as any lonely individual in the German masses felt part of a ‘great embracing body, [...] holding the ‘force of thousands.’ (Hitler, 1939, p.715)

This is the force that an ideology as extreme as the one forged by Hitler and expressed in his *Mein Kampf* can hold: it can question even the principle of human subjectivity, creating a superior collective entity to which many Germans willingly subjugated, and

which made them feel radically different from how they were.

This ideological process of transvaluation did not only aim to change the perception that the Germans had of certain principles or introduce new ones, but it was what Wolf calls a *cosmology*.¹⁰

Each German had, within the Third Reich, a new place in the world, a new *raison d'être*. And this, according to Wolf, is a perfect and emphasized example of the indispensable role of ideology: it is what allows us to build culture, what makes man the culture-building animal. 'Humans share some of their capacities that underlie this ability with other animals, such as our chimpanzee and bonobo cousins, but its full human orchestration is far more complex than theirs. It allows us to model experience in the mind, [...] this capacity for abstraction allows us to map the world and plan our engagement with it, [...] we gain greater control of our operational environment, but we also increase the risk of having to deal with imaginary entities that can inflame our passions or scare us out of our wits.' (1999, p.288) This system, that once again closely resembles the Geertzian concept of ideology, is by Wolf called "culture", but is built through an organizing power that fuels and directs it: ideology.

¹⁰ An ideology becomes "cosmology" when it seeks to provide a new view of everything, a new *kosmos* (a Greek term that can be broadly translated as "order of the universe"). The NS ideology was indeed a cosmology because it aimed to revolutionize the role of the German Volk and therefore of any individual in it. 'For the National Socialists, the struggle for survival through war was the *raison d'être* of existence. [...] the Führer and his soldiers saw themselves as carrying out the law of nature: to harden the nation and to destroy the Jew, the primordial source of its debility.' (Wolf, 1999, p.283)

Conclusion

In the space of this dissertation, my aim was to show the fundamental role that ideology has in the process of building any human group or society, gathering a strong set of shared values and concepts that are reflected in every aspect of it and provide it with a common will. I tried to do so by structuring my argument in three main sections, each with its purpose, that work together to describe what “ideology” means and what, and how, it does: firstly, I tried to render the term “ideology” by tracing a path across several theorists, taking some characteristic from each of them to properly define the term, and eventually employing a definition very close to the one provided by Clifford Geertz; then, I took more deeply into account two philosophical myths – by Freud and Nietzsche – that explore the links among ideology and society building, relating it to the inner nature of humans; lastly, I wanted to create a link between the theories previously described and the material world, analyzing two historical examples of times in which an ideological shift brought a radical change of human self-perception and at the same time of the society as a whole – and, in this regard, I found Meiji Japan and Third Reich Germany to be the most explicit and interesting.

It would be presumptuous and pointless to try to capture everything there is to study about ideology in a single dissertation, and I acknowledge there is a lot more to deepen: the link between ideology and culture was briefly mentioned; the focus was only on totalitarian societies, while the historical role of ideologies in a democratic society was not covered; perhaps many aspects of the history of Japan and Germany (few was said of the centuries before the fall of the Shogunate, while Prussia was not even mentioned) deserve much more space to be analyzed in order to fully grasp the historical evolution of these countries' ideologies; while the two myths by Freud and Nietzsche should be compared with a few others taken not only from Philosophy and Anthropology, but also Mythology and Literature.

Still, even if this dissertation necessarily leaves many corners in the shadows, to be lightened by forthcoming studies, I believe that the previous pages succeeded in their

attempt to develop an original argument that takes into account many important theorists from past centuries, from Marx to Freud and from Nietzsche to Geertz, and relate them to a contemporary and ongoing debate, with the precious help of the books by Eric Wolf, Michael Freeden and Liah Greenfeld.

Moreover, the argument gathers a wide range of theories – philosophical, sociological and psychoanalytical – around a main point: the conception of ideology as a “roadmap” that is indispensable to humans not only to make sense of the world, but especially to direction the collective will of a society towards specific goals. In other words, without ideology, a society lacks in motivation and will, as it would not be able to give value to concepts and shape a definite desire.

A specific focus has been put on identifying key moments, both in myths and actual history, in which the indispensable role of ideology gave birth to values or – employing the term borrowed from Nietzsche – *transvaluated* old into new ones in times in which there was an indispensable need for change, thus moving history forward and creating new societies. Remembering the Weberian “march of rationalizations”, human history can be seen as the ever-changing march of ideologies.

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