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## **FALSE WE – THE FALSE COLLECTIVE SELF and THE SOCIAL UNCONSCIOUS IN A TOTALITARIAN SYSTEM**

How has it come about that so many people can identify with totalitarianism? Let me remind just few scenes from the last century:

- thousands of peasants dying of hunger in the fertile Ukraine during the “class enemy struggle”
- thousands of living skeletons found in the Nazi concentration camps
- thousands of people saluting leaders while marching through the main squares of Moscow, Berlin, Peking, Prague...
- the phenomenon of the “double culture”: the “newspeak” purged of any information while the truthful communication existed only underground...

Some of these social catastrophes were born in the context of enthusiastic social movements. Only later the fanaticism was recognised. Then, what made the masses succumb to totalitarian patterns and leaders?

Several phenomena comes to mind, some of them part of the 4<sup>th</sup> Basic Assumption theory: social unconscious, regression, non-verbal communication, communitas, rituals, true or false collective selves...

The false collective self, similarly to the false self in an individual, is born and grows as an outcome of the identification with aggressor. Especially the traumatised groups are prone to succumb to aggressor – in the search for a mighty protective authority. Masses of previously traumatised people are trying to find rescue in the identification with a Big We (Big Us?). Due to the identification with aggressor the group search for one's own proper collective identity stays underdeveloped.

Let us stay for a while with a historical example. In the post-war time of the previous Czechoslovakia, in the elections of 1946, the communist party had legally won its power. How was it possible?

The post-war time was the time of existential transformation, when rationality was temporarily suspended and verbal communication turned into slogans. Masses found pleasure in non-verbal communication, especially in music and in various ritualised body movements. The onset of communism in the post-war central Europe was accompanied and even unconsciously made desirable by the flood of russian folk music. Those songs were musically beautiful, however, they brought the totalitarian verbal message which was

easily swallowed together with inspiring melodies. However irrational this may sound, collective singing (or listening to it) may cause a mighty group or mass motivation. (Even in the contemporary era a national anthem may inspire historical deeds.)

The totalitarian mind found its expression, too, in the so called Spartakiadas - mass gymnastic exhibition on the biggest stadium. The gymnasts were moving in huge rows and files in exactly synchronised pre-drilled movements, all facing the tribune, the place of leaders. The reminder of a military parade was evident. Similarly, it was a mighty nonverbal message and a chilling experience.

The role of such non-verbal activities in the totalitarian regime seemed to be important indeed. These non-verbal messages were feeding the mass unconscious with the messages of strength, security and mission (even when false one). While started as an ideology, the totalitarianism has flooded all forms of social life and intruded even the private behaviour at homes and among couples.

The communist regime had submitted to censorship all forms of communication and art. The non-verbal communication including some art then became loaded by heavy meanings and by contradicting political messages. Art became seen even as a weapon and as a target, too. As the verbal expression was strictly censored, mostly forbidden, **the society was kept in an artificially induced unconscious and massification**. The idea of an enemy was inherent to the time of regression and this idea was artificially nurtured by the hegemon, by the party.

However, as the years passed, the society was coming to consciousness again. After the time of regression deepened by the war trauma, the previous masses started to proceed towards social differentiation and maturation. With the help of the reborn rational thinking people were struggling for separation and individuation. The stronger these evolutionary forces emerged, the more the party tried to keep the society in the previous regressed, irrational mode, in order to stay itself in its manipulative, dominating position.

Then the war of ideologies was waged, most visibly (and audibly) by the rebellious youth, who liked to produce loud music accompanied sometimes by wild dances. (A small contemporary reminder of our past times we saw in the recent Pussy Riot case in Russia. Similarly to the russian girls who were sent to jail our young musicians were imprisoned, too, about forty years ago.) Underground culture grew in spite of heavy censorship and persecution: typewritten books were secretly circulated and read, protest-singers were performing at home parties and highly estimated lectures of forbidden sciences (including psychoanalysis) were pronounced secretly at homes as a part of the so-called "flying university".

These new human experiences were communicated both nonverbally and

verbally and all were inspired by the emerging phenomenon of the true collective self. The social subjectivity underwent transformation: **the true collective self defined itself in contradiction with the manipulative effort of the party.**

The true collective self was growing from two roots:

the first one was **each individual's own experience as a basis for the truthful understanding of the world** (as opposed to the blind belief required by the regime and appropriate to the false collective self)

the other root of the true collective self was the discovery that the collective self should not be decided, run or organised by any higher authority, that **the true collective self connects people directly, horizontally**, that they themselves are the subject that decides and feels: the new discovery could have been expressed as **WE ARE THE TRUTHFUL SUBJECT.**

The new idea of subjectivity was expressing the subject's own responsibility and self-respect. This existential discovery was best formulated and made operational by Václav Havel's appeal for the life in truth: according Havel every individual person should recognise and respect the truth in the smallest details of daily life, and this respect for the truth in the smallest decision-making will be the best start and the best prevention of major historical errors and crimes.

Allow me, now, to say something personal.

As I have experienced myself both Shoah and communism, I wish to try a message: let me formulate few assumptions that may help in the prevention of totalitarianism.

First: totalitarianism is not connected only to any large socio-political system. **Any human group of any size may succumb to totalitarian practices.** These may appear as bullying, as scape-goating, as a sort of crazy market behaviour, as team-building practices, as a dress-code dictatorship among teen-agers etc. Such patterns should be seen as pre-totalitarian. (Actually they appear as post-totalitarian as well). If these patterns prevail in the society at large, then a totalitarian regime of a new fashion may be on its way.

Second assumption: **the unbearable appeal of totalitarianism originates from the way how it manipulates in human groups the powerful instinct of aggression – mainly through the non-verbal channels.** A common enemy is chosen, is proclaimed as different, dangerous and guilty and then turned into a scapegoat. Consequently the rest of the group should be feeling liberated and free of guilt. Some members do indeed. Some others start their way to discover the true collective self.

Third assumption: under totalitarianism a social aim is proclaimed as an eternal solution of all human problems. The aim is never reached – but to reach it all means are permitted. Actually **there is not such a thing as a final social**

**goal so all what matters are the means.**

Fourth assumption: **the totalitarian take-over happens in a creepy way.** This way is marked by a number of small but steady steps of retreat and betrayal, which are intended as saving ones (by those who feel threatened). But these small steady steps lead to the final catastrophe. An unpleasant association may be reminded: of a frog in a steadily warming water. The frog never jumps out as it does not recognise the moment of danger – and thus its destruction is inevitable.

There exist, however, a safe and reliable protection against this creepy disaster, against totalitarianism, which is the practice of the life in truth. Václav Havel's literary appeal may be translated into the group-analytic language. **The life in truth presents a steady effort:**

- **to bring into consciousness the true collective self and**
- **to uphold its demands into reality.**

This is quite satisfactory.

The true collective self, however, cannot be discovered and grasped only through the studies, through rationality, even when it is based on cognition. The true collective self stems from the collective experience of various kind including social history and non-verbal situations. Major role in the birth of the collective true self is played by the true emotional life. **The collective subject has to undergo the path of separation and individuation, in order to become emotionally mature, to become independent, self aware and able to feel self-respect.**

The totalitarian system is to the society a comparable disorder as is addiction to an individual. In both cases the disorders are connected to the time collapse. **The totalitarian system manipulates the social time so that the artificially induced we-feeling (born in the time of regression and later recognized as the false collective self) penetrates through the social structure and prevents its healthy development.**

Thus the fifth and final assumption stays: **the best prevention against totalitarianism is the respect for the time order** in all aspects of the meaning. Time should be structured into work and ritual and these two should be kept apart, well differentiated and well limited. This time order prevents addictions to start in individuals as well as totalitarianism in large groups like societies.

The item of the social time, of the need to bring order into the group time, of the differences between time of structure and time of rituals – these item needs a special study and it is my wish to undertake it as the next one.

But this time and at this place I wish to mention, too, my personal gratitude to the editors. To participate as one of the authors of the SU has been for me honour and enrichment. I proved to myself that still I need to learn. And – what's more – I hope that I can learn and to learn, to read, is such a pleasure.

I would like to thank to Earl and Haim.