

# The Dominance of Collective Mystical Thinking Within the Rise of Far-Right Politics



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## INTRODUCTION

**Mystical or magical thinking** is a form through which we enact ideologies, inspired by irrational beliefs. People seek meaning and belonging in affective and emotionally driven ideas and performances.

Authoritarian leaders build their power based on magical forms, using the structures of ritual and myth to manipulate the public. In turn, people of a specific society reproduce such ideas to shape a certain meaning of themselves and their leader, opposing others and realising dangers for their own survival.

The research explores the presence of magical (irrational) influence and technologies of its implementation in contemporary authoritarian states of Russia and the United States. It further provokes to think about ways to resist such dynamics, looking for the underlying structures of mythologies and associated imagery

## METHODOLOGY

The analysis was built on the digital participant observation approach, collecting media materials shared by governmental leaders and the public through social networks like Truth Social, Facebook, Telegram and VKontakte. The data was arranged in the mind map, highlighting the patterns that represent the presence of magically affective order.

### *Ethnography of Communication Model (Dell Hymes)*

Helped to analyse the sociolinguistic context of communicative events, focusing on the patterns and functions, situations, languages usage, involved actors



To create a correlation between magic and authoritarianism as well as to see it as a mode of practice and affective following theories were used:

- **Theory of Ritual** (Stanley Tambiah) - constructed system of symbolic communication, constituted of patterned and ordered sequences of words and acts
- **Theory of Myth** (Roland Barthes) - a symbolic message, in which the concept overrides the meaning, becoming the signifier for something else, depending on the larger context and the aim
- **Theory of Photography** (Don Slater) – representation of the world in the form of visual spectacle, which enchants and help to create the magical and promising reality



Find full paper, video and references

## ANALYSIS

### Technologies or Forms of Making



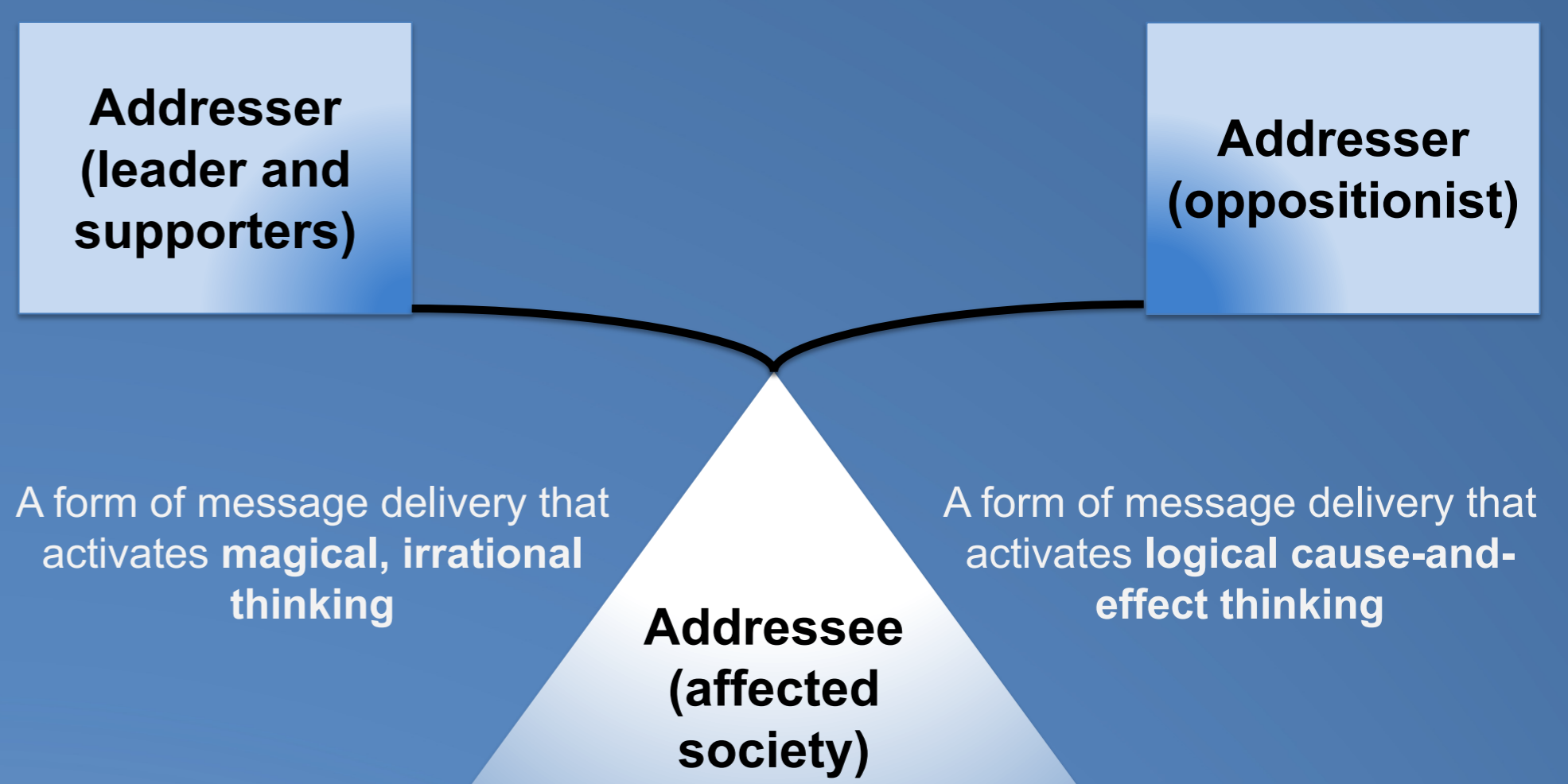
- |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Image</b> of the leader - who has non-ordinary power, often compared with sacral or occult figures</li> <li>- <b>Projection</b> onto the group which imagine special destiny and sacral origin</li> <li>- <b>Twofold wish</b> to submit to authority and to be authority oneself (Adorno 1991)</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Patterned communication</b> similar to the form of ritual</li> <li>- <b>Emotional appeal</b> from metaphoric and metonymic combinations of words</li> <li>- <b>Social control</b> through evocative performance of repetitions (Saville-Troike 2003)</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Simulated realities</b> produced with photographic technologies (manipulation of objective truth)</li> <li>- <b>Wonder</b> of experiencing unreal worlds created with incomprehensible and hidden technologies (Slater 1995)</li> </ul> |
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Example - He's on mission from God, nothing can stop what is coming (Donald Trump, Truth Social)

Example - 'Big Beautiful Bill', 'Deep State')

### Resistance

To counter the effects of magical thinking, it is important to expose the underlying concepts and practices employed by authoritarian regimes. The combination of Roland Barthes's *Theory of Myth* and Dell Hymes's *Ethnography of Communication* helps to uncover the symbolic influence of it, provoking the creation of alternative forms of imagery.



## PERSPECTIVES

The project could benefit from conducting an ethnographic fieldwork to observe the real-time effects of magical thinking on communities in place. Also, it could be expanded by creating in-depth research, differentiating the mechanisms of constructions of magical, irrational structures and opposing principles to them that are more logical and critical.

### Acknowledgments:

The project was funded by the Laidlaw Undergraduate Research and Leadership Programme. I am grateful for Dr. Huon Wardle's supervision and his active involvement. I also appreciate the meaningful and creative perspectives he suggested. I would like to thank Lord Laidlaw and the Laidlaw Foundation Team for creating such an opportunity and community for personal growth and exploration.

