

*I. TEORIA NARODU  
W KONTEKŚCIE KULTURY I POLITYKI*

WOJCIECH JÓZEF BURSZTA

## THE FRONTIERS OF IDENTITY, AND THE IDENTITY OF FRONTIERS

### Abstract

The essay discusses the relationship between group identities (especially national) and the notion of territory and its symbolic significance in the creation of the idea of community. The author examines possible contexts that connect the frontiers of identity with the identities of national state borders, as well as ways in which these connections become symbolic, using the example of the recent plane crash tragedy in Smoleńsk. In the final part of the essay, the author refers to Leszek Kołakowski's notion of myth in order to justify the thesis that each nation (also in the first decades of the 21st century) is always a mythical community that is being constantly reactivated through current political and ideological actions.

**Key words:** frontier; nation; identity; myth; ideology; politics; memory

### GRANICE TOŻSAMOŚCI I TOŻSAMOŚĆ GRANIC

### Streszczenie

Artykuł omawia kwestie związków tożsamości zbiorowych, zwłaszcza narodowych, z pojęciem własnego terytorium i jego symbolicznego znaczenia dla budowania dla wyobrażeń wspólnotowych. Na przykładzie tragedii katastrofy samolotu pod Smoleńskiem autor artykułu pokazuje możliwe konteksty, w jakich tytułowe granice tożsamości wiążą się z tożsamością granic narodowego terytorium oraz w jaki sposób zaznacza się

.....  
WOJCIECH JÓZEF BURSZTA  
Instytut Sławistyki PAN, Warszawa  
E-mail: wburszta@swps.edu.pl  
This work was supported  
by the author's own resources.  
No competing interests  
have been declared.

symbolicznie ten nierozzerwalny związek. W końcowej partii artykułu autor odwołuje się do koncepcji mitu Leszka Kołakowskiego, aby uzasadnić tezę, że każdy naród, także w pierwszych dekadach XXI wieku, jest zawsze wspólną mityczną, która nieustannie się reaktywuje również w kontekście działań politycznych i ideologicznych.

Słowa kluczowe: granica; naród; tożsamość; mit; ideologia; polityka; pamięć

/

In his essay "Soil, blood and identity" Zygmunt Bauman wrote:

If the need of identity is universal in the human species burdened with its drive to sociability, its awareness, consciousness of its *experience* – as a need, as an end to be pursued, task to be fulfilled – is far from universal. That experience intensifies with the ferocity of contest (or, which amounts to the same, with the decrease in certainty). Competitive challenge makes any identity seem precarious; and the one comfort identity is expected to offer is self-confidence, certainty, 'knowing where one stands.' One would expect, therefore, the *search* for identity to be at its most intense when identity is not to be taken placidly, as a gift of blood and soil; when it appears instead fluid, pliable, located in the not-yet-accomplished future instead of in the already-too-late-to-be-tinkered-with past. By and large, this is what happens at a time of rapid change – when new forms of life emerge too fast to be absorbed and domesticated by the old mechanisms of control and ancient mental frames. [...] Lifting identity to the level of awareness, making it into a task – and objective of self-reflexive activity, and object of, simultaneously, individual concern and specialized institutional service – is one of the most prominent characteristics of modern times (Bauman, 1992, pp. 679–680).

Even though in the next passage Bauman adds that „it is against this background that the phenomenon of nationalism can be best understood,” I am certain that his utterance retains a more general significance. Let us consider two concerns that appear in the fragment quoted above. Firstly, “the need for identity” understood as a universal feature of humanity. This approach to identity is distinctive for philosophy and psychology, especially psychoanalysis (See: Wrong, 2000, pp. 10–14). When we think about metaphysics, it is always related to individual identity, to the explicit foundation of our adjudication of being, and hence to transcendental identity. In psychology, however, the aim is to establish a stable identity, to achieve confidence that a person always remains himself regardless of the changes taking place through time; an individual who meets the psychological criteria of “norm” admittedly must experience trouble with defining his or her own identity in different stages of life, but generally – under the threat of being classified with one of the many mental illnesses – contemplates himself or herself to be the same person.

The second issue, even more important in the context of this essay, is the problem of cultural identity. According to common conception as long as the state of the world can be characterized as stable, repetitive, and for that reason comfortingly predictable, the issue of “problems with identity” does not appear. However, when things take a different turn, and the state of the world becomes unstable and changes begin to occur in a rapid pace, identity may show traces of confusion and uncertainty. Its primary manifestation is the persistent questioning of who we are in this world, in this strange reality that seems harder and harder to grasp while we try to situate ourselves in it, still holding on to traditional criteria of belonging.

Usual defensive reactions to these confusions of identity are conscious actions directed at reestablishing the clarity of the criteria. A reoccurring pattern of every identity founded on ethnic and national criteria is its relationship to some "cultivated" land or territory. There is a general agreement that every culture is located in a particular space – it always belongs and comes from "somewhere." Even the classic definition of culture formulated by Edward B. Tylor, which defines culture as a "complex whole" consisting of such components as knowledge, religion, art, morality, law and customs, implicitly states that the way in which people live and give meaning to the world also depends on the awareness of their own distinctness from other "complex wholes" inhabited by territorially-limited communities. Tylor seems to be hinting that the boundaries of my culture are the boundaries of my world, and this thought in turn shapes the foundation of every nationalistic ideology whose indeclinable ambition is the creation of a group identity founded on the metonymical signs that define the relation between "us" and "our territory." My world is a system of opinions and beliefs which I share with my countrymen, a homogenic and consistent entirety guaranteed by the mutual bonds and contacts we share within specific boundaries.

The relationship between an image of a place and the creation of cultural identity is also a central issue for traditional, conventional theories of culture. As Nestor Garcia Canclini writes:

To have an identity meant, above all – to have a country, a city, neighborhood; a separate whole within which everything is common for those inhabiting this place. Those who did not share our territory, who did not possess the same objects and symbols, rituals and customs, were different – they were those alien (Canclini, 1993, p. 13).

Culture demands distinctions, the division of people and things; culture is not a natural order, but one that is shaped with intention. In each of these environments there are boundaries that connect certain people and at the same time eliminate others, or at least indicate which boundaries should not be crossed. It is also the boundary between "in-groups" and "out-groups." Zygmunt Bauman and Tim May wrote:

[...] an out-group is precisely that imaginary opposition to itself that the in-group needs for self-identity, for its cohesiveness, for its inner solidarity and emotional security. A readiness to cooperate within the confines of the group thereby requires, as its prop, a refusal to cooperate with an adversary. It is as if we needed the fear of wilderness in order to feel security (Bauman & May, 2001, p. 31).

Regardless of the different transformations happening in the world, the taxonomies that define membership to a cultural group still function on the basis of central and essential features. Under the pressure of the European positive valorization of property (anthropologists having had their share of influence) today it is demanded of us to "posses" culture in the same way as we "posses" a permanent address. Herzfeld notices that people without nationality have become the new "accursed people of the land," since they have been classified as people suspended beyond social existence. Indeed, we may experience these dilemmas most fully realized in cities and on border crossings, respectively, in spatial loops and materialized breakpoints of taxonomies. Both of these spaces are treated as contaminated, impure, unregulated, distant – in other words – create a predictably understandable system of "our" and "other" (see: Herzfeld, 2001).

The discourse centered around the concept of nation provides a model that explains what it means to have an identity and to belong to a territory. Indeed it is fascinating to observe how it is adapted by people who in the end find themselves excluded by their own nationalist validations. In the conditions of a national state the fear of others (heterophobia), thoroughly examined by anthropologists, corresponds to xenophobia. It is the source of the settled populations' attitude to the different types of migrants: immigrants, re-emigrants, refugees, as well as temporary newcomers who may permanently join the group which has a tendency for treating itself as a kinship community. Georg Simmel wrote many years ago that the act of travelling signifies an absence of relations with any point in space, a condition completely different to the feeling of permanent attachment to a particular place. The notion of otherness is a synthesis of the terms "travelling" and "attachment," since the phenomenon behind it reveals, on the one hand, a condition, and on the other, is a symbol of the attitude to a person (Simmel, 2006, p. 204). In terms of definition, a traveler does not belong to any established circle of "homeliness," he brings qualities that are not and cannot be indigenous to this circle. The problem lies in the fact that in our contemporary world not only people are moving, but so are their identities, and their shape is determined by other conditions than territory. Group and territorial identifications have a grand rival – electronic media which give inducement to the search for imagined identities, in some measure even crossing the traditional connection with a particular place and in-group.

Contrary to what Zygmunt Bauman is suggesting, that which is directed towards the past does not have to be more safe or more unambiguous. The changes happening "here and now" also reflect on our hitherto vision of the past, e.g. national. They are no longer perceived as comforting, but also undergo revision, since that is the cost of confronting modernity: political, demographic, media, etc. Today we experience this in Poland after the tragedy in Smoleńsk, therefore a little more should be said on this subject.

The events that happened in Smoleńsk on the 10<sup>th</sup> of April 2010, and the subsequent eruption of the symbolically-mythologizing rhetoric that we can observe in different circles of the Polish society force us to critically consider the commonly accepted thesis that we are living in a post-ideological and post-political time. I dare to doubt it, especially if we choose to contemplate the issues of national identity and its social hermeneutics. In order to explain this thesis, we must turn our attention to a landmark anthropological text written by the exquisite anthropologist Clifford Geertz.

In his essay Geertz notices that our problems with the notion of ideology, best expressed – as he himself has called it – in the Mannheim paradox – can be reduced to the fact

that the social sciences have not yet developed a genuinely nonevaluative conception of ideology [...] Bluntly, we need a more exact apprehension of our object of study, lest we find ourselves in the position of the Javanese folk-tale figure, 'Stupid Boy,' who, having been counseled by his mother to seek a quiet wife, returned with a corpse (Geertz, 1973, p. 196).

I am convinced that in our times a similar way of "silencing" a problem is the adoption of the thesis that we live in post-ideological times (the corpse of the ideology), and the issue is much more complicated, as ideology has not disappeared but only moved from the openly political sphere to the cultural and symbolic sphere, connected with group identity and the concept of value – *exempla virtutis* of the nation for which territoriality places a crucial role.

Geertz arranges the various concepts of ideology in his own style, narrowing them down to two categories: the interest theory and the strain theory:

For the first, ideology is a mask and a weapon; for the second, a symptom and a remedy. In the interest theory, ideological pronouncements are seen against the background of a universal struggle for advantage; in the strain theory, against the background of a chronic effort to correct sociopsychological disequilibrium. In the one, men pursue power; in the other, they flee anxiety. As they may, of course, do both at the same time – and even one by means of the other – the two theories are not necessarily contradictory; but the strain theory (which arose in response to the empirical difficulties encountered by the interest theory), being less simplistic, is more penetrating, less concrete, more comprehensive (Geertz, 1973, p. 201).

Marxist tradition has developed the interest theory to perfection, and it is still “in use” and has its faithful followers. As Geertz notes:

The great advantage of interest theory was and is its rooting of cultural idea-systems in the solid ground of social structure, through emphasis on the motivations of those who profess such systems and on the dependence of those motivations in turn upon social position, most especially social class. Further, the interest theory welded political speculation to political combat by pointing out that ideas are weapons and that an excellent way to institutionalize a particular view of reality – that of one’s group, class, or party – is to capture political power and enforce it” (Geertz, 1973, p. 202).

Today this theory has been utterly compromised and accused of being too primitive to illustrate the complex interactions taking place among social, psychological and cultural factors.

The strain theory considers that the integration of society is being permanently obstructed, and no social arrangement is reliable when dealing with problems that inevitably appear during its functioning. Each arrangement is full of antinomies: between freedom and political order, stability and change, efficiency and humanity, precision and flexibility; between the different sectors of society – economics, political system, family. Such frictions also appear on the level of individual personality. In this view ideology is a symbolic outlet for emotional anxieties caused by the disorder of social balance.

There are different ways to explain the mechanisms behind tensions and anxieties experienced by the society. We have the cathartic explanation, in which the emotional tension is diffused through displacement into symbolic enemies (“The Jews,” “Businessmen,” “The Russians,” etc.). There is the morale explanation, according to which ideology has the ability to keep individuals and groups in a situation of chronic strain, or to unambiguously contradict its existence, or to legitimate it in the name of some higher values. The solidarity explanation states that ideology allows to merge groups on the symbolic level. And, last but not least, we have the advocacy explanation, where the power of ideology and ideologists comes down to the articulation of tensions which force them to act. As a result these issues are noticed by the public opinion (Geertz, 1973, pp. 204–205). We can observe each of these explanations being used in Poland, sometimes even in a synthesized form. The tragedy in Smoleńsk confronted the reality of a nation as not only an imagined community, but one that experiences a loss of stability and searches for perfectly-recognizable symbols and signs.

According to Geertz – who scrupulously analyzes the weak points of these ideologies and their explanation – the existing traditions of framing ideology have steered clear of one basic issue: the process of symbolic formulation, the functioning of symbols and transmission of meanings. There is absence of an analytical framework when it comes

to dealing with the figurative language of ideology. As a result, most explanations formulated in the fields of political sciences and sociology perceive ideology as nothing more than set of sophisticated cries of pain. Not knowing the functions of metaphor, analogy, irony, ambiguity, wordplay, paradox, hyperbole, rhythm and other elements that constitute "style," social researchers have no access to the symbolical resources that can be used in more sophisticated formulations.

What do we mean, therefore, when we say that after the tragedy in Smoleńsk socio-psychological tensions are expressed primarily through symbolic forms? Let us once again turn to the assistance of the master of interpretative anthropology, transferring his insights into our modern conditions. Geertz writes that symbols can be used like a map that enables people, especially those facing collective tragedies, to transform physical experiences into emotions and attitudes that permit us not to react to such tragedies blindly, but intelligently! He writes:

The central rituals of religion – a mass, a pilgrimage, a corroboree – are symbolic models (here more in the form of activities than words) of a particular sense of the divine, a certain sort of devotional mood, which their continual re-enactment tends to produce in their participants (Geertz, 1973, p. 216).

We can definitely expand this list by adding other types of rituals that took place in front of the Presidential Palace during those tumultuous weeks, on the procession route, in churches, squares, etc.

In the case of ideology "cognition" and "expression" do not form a dichotomy, similarly as cognitive and expressive symbols are also a source of information that can be used to shape one's patterns of life. Symbols allow us to perceive, understand, assess and manipulate the world. Given that ideologies are culturally constructed, they are in fact schematic images of a social order, and through them a person transforms himself or herself into a political animal. To conclude:

Whatever else ideologies may be – projections of unacknowledged facts, disguises for ulterior motives, phatic expressions of group solidarity – they are, most distinctively, maps of problematic social reality and matrices for the creation of collective conscience" (Geertz, 1973, p. 220).

The renaissance of national symbols is a fact. It is nonetheless interesting that the statement being repeated like a mantra – that today the nation is uniting on a symbolic level, in some measure reconstructing its own heritage and constantly recalling its significance – as well as the appeals to strengthen collective identity, both refer to a strangely rehabilitated notion of myth. It is said, then, that we are experiencing a "new founding myth," "the myth of Katyń," a myth of union etc., without ever answering the important question: does it really indicate a return of cultural ideology, or – as I have stated previously – a temptation of ideology? Indeed, a myth cannot be constructed. The creation of a collective sense of suffering, references to a national sacrifice and death that have always characterized Poles, and are now being restored with the additional context of the "cursed Katyń," is not a founding myth. It is a collective ideology, a reference to the "national conscience." A myth always comes from nowhere, it cannot be constructed. It is shaped spontaneously. Furthermore, it always holds a uniting effect, deriving certainty and sense of meaning from the fact of collective identification with specific values. The ideology that is returning today, on a grand scale, has an antagonizing character, as it is not shared by everyone but on the contrary, it divides society into those who – also metonymically – adhere to a particular vision of a world filled with symbols and signs car-

rying almost religious connotations, and those who are denied this right, or at least their right is questioned and they are forced to make some kind of explanation. Not everyone agrees with the recurring belief that in times of tragedy Poles turn to religion, not seeing any significant difference between a state-secular and religious-sacral celebration of national grief. The state has once again merged with Catholicism, surrendering in a moment when it was allegedly still strong...

Everything that is happening in the public space, in media and on the streets of Polish cities (especially in the one of the country's many symbolic centers, the Presidential Palace) demonstrates a specific helplessness of interpreters dealing with the here and now. And yet the antagonism between different visions of Poland resembles a cultural war, understood as an unresolved conflict over values. Chantal Mouffe has rightly noticed that the theory of democracy proves useless in some circumstances, e.g. when the articulations of collective conscience are being symbolically concentrated. It is characterized by a "blindness" to antagonism. This happens because "an idealized view of human sociability, as being essentially moved by empathy and reciprocity, has generally provided the basis of modern democratic political thinking. Violence and hostility are seen as archaic phenomenon, to be eliminated thanks to the progress of exchange and the establishment, through a social contract of a transparent communication among rational participants" (Mouffe, 2005, p. 3).

Cultural anthropology adopts a more ambivalent approach to human sociability, showing that reciprocity and hostility complement and condition each other. Mouffe follows this path and argues that in today's world both the political and cultural ideology play out in the *moral register*. The division between "us" and "them" is still perfectly functional, although it is no longer defined with the use of political categories (hence the term post-politics), but in moral terms: "In place of a struggle between 'right and left' we are faced with a struggle between 'right and wrong'" (Mouffe, 2005, p. 5). Nothing illustrates this better than the antagonism induced by the Smolensk trauma which became a source for an enticing ideology that in essence represents another face of Polish nationalism. The ideological discourse that would indeed be an interesting subject of a closer examination (also from the perspective of figurative language) focuses on several major nodal points, as a result of which ideology tends to articulate itself in the plane of expression, through emotions. This type of ideology is governed by the logic of equivalence according to which the world becomes divided into two camps – "our" (patriotic) and "their." This way the right-wing and conservative appropriation of the symbolic national space reaches the highest point of division and separation. In one value system essentially everything stands in opposition to elements from the other system. Hence the growing feeling that there is not one but two different Polish societies. Only one segment of the population (described in different terms, but always connoting "rightfulness") claims the right to appoint these nodal points of national identity. Today this part of the society is granted the voice to speak, and the ideological definition of the symbolical fundamentals of the nation are being restored in their name.

///

Stuart Hall is correct when he observes that in today's world we can pick many different identities, and the constant balancing between the possibilities they create has become an element of everyday experience (Hall, 1996, pp. 4–10). Identity turns into a "challenge,"



something in the process of constant creation and becoming. Questions about the spatial location of an individual reinforce the feeling of anxiety, all the more with the media's significant influence on the horizon of our imagination (see: Appadurai, 1996). This relates both to those who build their individual identity while being firmly embedded in the realities of liberal democracy, as well as to those who are rooted, for good and for bad, in their own locality (which becomes less and less tight), who observe the images of the world (which do not come from "nowhere") to which they are indeed invited to, although this world disappears at the same time as the image. That expanded reality never escapes them entirely, however, since its characteristic features infiltrate the ways of perceiving their own community, nation, family model, and even the self-esteem and consistency of an individual's identity. An open and silent battle takes place over which of these identities is legitimate: either those that are based on territory or those on individual choice, a result of one's autonomy. It is a battle between territorial and deterritorialized identities.

The deterritorialization of identity refers to an increasingly common state when an individual feels that he belongs to different communities regardless of the fact that they are not in any way connected through any mutual territory. It also refers to the new situation in which national and regional cultures are no longer considered a source or foundation for a consistent and distinct identity. To some extent these cultures experience the same fate as the notion of culture was exposed to in the past, no longer understood as an autonomic and totalizing entity. The term was first used by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari to describe a moment of linguistic alienation resulting from a lack of attachment. Franz Kafka represents an archetypical figure of a deterritorialized and nomadic linguistic self-consciousness. The way he uses languages serves to "express a different potential community, is a search for a different type of awareness and sensitivity (Deleuze & Guattari, 1986, p. 17). Speaking in more broad terms, the term "deterritorialization" refers to second-rate, minor, "minority" literature, although not in the sense of its status, but the critical stance it shares towards the canon of literature and the subversive nature of its use of the dominant language. According to the two authors, the rule of deterritorialization, in its most generalized sense, is defined as:

Thinking is neither a line drawn between subject and object nor a revolving of one around the other. Rather, thinking takes place in the relationship of territory and the earth. [...] It merges with the movement of those who leave their territory en masse, with crayfish that set off walking in file at the bottom of the water, with pilgrims or knights who ride a celestial line of flight. The earth is not one element among others but rather brings together all the elements within a single embrace while using one or another of them to deterritorialize territory. Movements of deterritorialization are inseparable from territories that open onto an elsewhere; and the process of reterritorialization is inseparable from the earth, which restores territories. Territory and earth are two components with two zones of indiscernibility – deterritorialization (from territory to the earth) and reterritorialization (from earth to territory) (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p. 86).

Deterritorialization should not be seen as a romantic gesture of spiritual and physical exclusion from the world, or a cosmopolitan lack of rootedness. The homeland of philosophy is always unknown, lost or forgotten, leaving the philosopher is a state of deterritorialization; only through the process of critical thinking may he attempt an act of re-territorialization. The latter is never complete or final, on the contrary, it is rather a never-ending oscillation between different states and characters of awareness. The act of searching for a territory implies prior deterritorialization and one's own re-territorialization in the sphere of myths, dreams, images of earth and objects. This type of thinking is not linear. It rather resembles a loop, an entanglement with contradictions and aporias.

The concept introduced by Deleuze and Guattari seems to be a useful instrument that can help to understand the cracks and scratches of language and cultural identity, especially for those who – like Kafka and Rushdie – live in imaginary homelands (of words), or – like exiles, aliens, migrants and individuals *sans papiers* – will never be completely *chez soi*. In the dimension of culture globalization “produces” millions of analogous subjects, a problem analyzed in length by Arjun Appadurai. Contrary to common beliefs about the relationship existing between culture, space and identity, they cope with the situation in which these three, allegedly inseparable, dimensions of existence have been dispersed. Identities that are “beyond territory” are a great challenge for territorial thinking, since they believe that race, nationality, religion, language, as well as gender have a much larger impact on human life than the place of residence. In other words, the autonomy of diversity stands in contradiction to homogeneity that is presupposed by the notion of culture and territorial power (see: Donnan & Wilson, 1994; Papastergiadis, 2000).

From an anthropological perspective this vision of a nation is a classical example of mythological thinking. Its axis is not a reference to the rational argumentation and careful historical examination, but the rule of a metonymical contiguity to an area that is considered to be a kind of ontological being without any precedence. Nationalism can be understood as an attempt to position oneself in an existing and unconditionally experienced order of values. Antonina Kłoskowska has noticed that symbolic culture still remains the sphere that most strongly differentiates national cultures, their specific “syntagma.” National culture can be seen as a complex “expression,” a syntagma in the sense that the connections between distinct elements of this “national expression” define the syntagmatic axis. Its elements consist of different systems: art, customs, religion, literature, historical reflection or politics. As a consequence – writes Kłoskowska – national identity can be defined as “a sum of national culture texts, its symbols and values that construct the universe of a culture, creating its syntagma, especially its canonical core” (Kłoskowska, 1996, p. 100).

#### IV

We should once again return to the words of Leszek Kołakowski, who described “myth as a desire to move beyond ourselves into an order in which I treat myself as a subject possessing a limited range of possibilities, as a thing, as something that fills a space in a construction that is built, even if virtually, by myself. [...] A myth can be accepted as far as a single glance becomes a type of coercion that enslaves the whole community, no matter whether it is global or tribal” (Kołakowski, 1994, pp. 25–26). Therefore, if we consider the idea of nation as a value-creating myth – after all, nationalists refer to it as a “natural” historical necessity – it becomes clear that this mythological image imposes a strict formula that grounds the historical community in an ahistorical (and thus unconditional) situation. The worlds of values are a mythical reality, even more so in the case of national *exempla virtutis*.

It then becomes apparent where this specific feeling of obligation comes from – persistently emphasized by the nationalistic and patriotic thought – or an awareness that we are in debt with the nation, and that the nation requires sacrifices, that every member of the national community should support each other, creating a genuine bond of genuine assistance between the participants of this debt. Furthermore, referring to the nation as

an unquestionable existence also expresses the conviction that social history is not reduced only to – as I have written earlier – the discourse of transformation, but most of all it is an accumulation of things from the past which are preserved in what comes after; that facts are not only facts, but little bricks creating this world of values that can be salvaged regardless of the irreversible events.

As a result, we “adhere” to the national community as if it was some territory of the world of values; we do not belong to a nation metaphorically, although the idea of a nation indeed has metaphorical character. On the contrary, we are part of it in tangible and physical terms – a testimony that proves we know the symbolic universe which constitutes its various elements.

Nationalism is thus primarily a specific figure of thought (as well as a linguistic trope) that is based mostly on metonymical associations. If we refer to the way metonymy is understood in contemporary cognitive linguistics and adapt its elements to the problems under consideration in his essay, we can state that the idea of nation most certainly belongs to a set of idealized mental (cognitive) models (see: Lakoff & Johnson, 2003; Kövecses, 2002). The domain we define as “nation” consists of various elements that remain in a close metonymical proximity, and are exchangeable as they fit into this more general domain, in addition to the fact that each one symbolizes an entirety understood in axiological terms. Contrary to metaphor, the main purpose of metonymy is not to serve cognitive objectives but to provide mental access to a more abstract idea (domain, institution etc.). Each of these concepts – territory, family, the sons and mothers of the homeland, heraldic, national flag, memorials, even the decision to write “Polish Nation” in capital letters – belongs to a metonymical construct identified as “nation,” in this instance a specific nation, although this principle has a much more general value. As an idealized mental model “the nation” can be “harmed” in many different ways, although in the end it always comes down to violating the status of one of its components.

Each metonymy consequently gives substance to a more general notion and helps us to see it more clearly. It serves the role of a designative function that allows to use a certain notion (e.g. “*Matka-Polka*”) in such a way as to replace another (e.g. Nation). Metonymy also permits us to reach a better understanding of the desired vision of a nation, and to understand the subjects that form the national community. It enables us to distinguish different parts that can represent the whole, while our decision to focus on a chosen one is always conditioned by a previous choice – the sphere which we focus our attention on. In a systematic way metonymical notions organize our thinking about the idea of nation. As and Johnson convincingly demonstrate, the linguistic systems of cultures and religions are in fact metaphorical, and symbolic metonymies “are the essential link that connects everyday experience with a coherent metaphorical system that characterizes religions and cultures” (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003, p. 63).

When considered a myth, the idea of nation is never safe, since in myths everything exists „forever,” and „since forever.” Historical arguments have little significance, as the mythical awareness characterizing the essence of the nation lies stretched over and beside them. A nation is indeed a community proven by linear history as well as myth. In the second dimension – on the mythological plane – an important role in keeping some of these ideas alive is played by a category of people I propose to call contemporary version of mages. I am thinking specifically about particular depositaries of an “ultimate truth,” modern demiurges laying claim to ways the world is shaped. They are perfect

examples demonstrating the works of mythical mechanisms that return us to some primal unconditional state, a process which I have described above with reference to Kotakowski's thoughts.

In his book *The Social Role of the Man of Knowledge* Florian Znaniecki described a category of people which he called "sages," competent guides specializing in the problems of cultural order. Many of the elements brought up by Znaniecki perfectly fit the category of mages. Therefore: first of all, a duty of a "sage" is to "prove" with the use of "scientific" argumentation that the side which he chose in fact has access to the ultimate truth. It shows that existing institutions – religion, political structure, law, economy, customs, literature and art, system of education etc. – are wrong, since they represent signs of an older system of meaning. In the moment when the new order is decreed and takes effect, but somewhere on its margins the rudiments of the older order still exist, the role of sages-mages is to successively justify the superiority of the new order. The language they use must always refer to its magical source, since this additional creative value enables it to gain an advantage over the "normal" language that often does not claim any influence on the course of events. The language of mages seeks to "clamor down" and cover the competitive order: slogans and spells replace logical arguments.

The method applied by mages is universal and can be reduced to combining two separate systems of thinking. The truth becomes identified with everything good (for an individual and society or an individual and a nation), falsehood corresponds to everything which is wrong (e.g. the liberal concept of personal freedom and its complete autonomy that means "the absence of roots"). If the new order is good, truth becomes its immutable attribute, both the truth that is discovered as well as the truth that is constantly created anew and remembered in the form of a litany. It requires protection from attempts undertaken by worshippers of the older order, who try to interfere with it regardless of the fact that they have not mastered the truth. We must remember that a demiurge of words does not have to prove anything – the justification is included a priori in the mythical foundations of the world. Znaniecki wrote the following: „The future order is to include values which find no place in the old order and to satisfy tendencies which hitherto remained unsatisfied, but these values and tendencies must be justified by the ideal. [...] The future communist society requires new values in every field of culture and a working class morally purified of all the defects shown by the *Lumpenproletariat* as well as by the passive servants of capitalistic paternalism and imbued instead by a new type of solidarity" (Znaniecki, 1986, pp. 76–77). For Znaniecki this "justifiable ideal" means myth, one that is directed towards the future, or, we could say, a designing myth. This is the reason why "heroic" communism was so invested in mages of words: it sought to create a totalizing vision of the world that would infiltrate even the smallest element of social and individual existence.

In terms of the linguistic interpretation of the world, the history of communism can be divided into three stages. In the beginning, similarly as in the old cosmogonies, there was the Word which had the power to create a new world and destroy the old one. It was followed by Key-words, Spell-words that establish the cult of the New Era. Encasing reality with words such as "socialism," "wealth," "work competition," "the party," "leader of the nation," "working class", etc. at the same time meant that reality would remain concealed in this particular, magical sense. In the end there was also the Word, a Cliché-word that perfectly captured the powerless of language and the inevitable dispersion of mythology as it was no longer sustained by any worldview.

The fall of communism can be seen as a process of dissociation of human consciousness which is suddenly exposed to rivaling versions of the future world order. As long as the slowly collapsing system is formally still reigning, the liberating thought opposes it with a competitive system, however, at that point his system is presented only in its idealized form. That is why this historical moment brings to life and is "sustained" by the words of the mages of democracy, who – whether they want it or not – create its myth. In this context the idea of "democratic Poland" does not have to necessary hold any descriptive value. To be more precise, it should be a value, a spell, the first word of the new order looming on the horizon. The process of „transforming" into democracy is a return to the normal state of things, the final ending of semantic misuses – words and their subjective references become separated once and for all. In other words, it is a triumph of *logos* over the forces of *mythos*.

Many years ago Roger Caillois already pointed to the illusionary contradiction existing between totalitarianism (of every color) and democracy. He stated that the charismatic rule that characterizes every totalitarian state "is not only compatible with the conditions of modern political life, but even finds a particularly favorable foundation for further development, as long as it will be used accordingly" (Caillois, 1973, p. 290). One of these possibilities is born every time different visions of organizing democracy are brought out to the light. The final argument can be reduced to a choice of competitive myths. And a myth well-grounded in human psyche indeed actualizes certain archetypes, thus becoming a figure of thought that translates into rhetorical figures through language.

The contemporary world – a world in which Poland has had more than twenty years of experience with democracy – is a manifestation of the constant process of reactivating the mythical and ideological (in Geertz's sense) imagination that is deeply rooted in political, moral and cultural models of the world after communism. Seen from an anthropological perspective, Polish political life seems to be constructed on successive departures and returns to different mythologies. One thing never changes – the Past Myth is always struggling with the Future Myth.

Translated by  
Jędrzej Burszta

## REFERENCES

- Appadurai, A. (1996). *Modernity at large: Cultural dimensions of globalization*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Bauman, Z. (1992). Soil, blood and identity. *The Sociological Review*, 40(4), 675–701. <http://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-954X.1992.tb00407.x>
- Bauman, Z., & May, T. (2001). *Thinking sociologically*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Caillois, R. (1973). *Żywioł i ład*. (A. Tatarkiewicz, Trans.). Warszawa: PIW.
- Canclini, N. G. (1993). Scenes without territory: The aesthetics of migrations and identities in transition. In N. Richard & M. Murphy (Eds.), *Art from Latin America: La cita transcultural*. Sydney: Museum of Contemporary Art.
- Deleuze, G., & Guattari, F. (1986). *Kafka: Towards a minor literature*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

- Deleuze, G., & Guattari, F. (1994). *What is philosophy?* London: Verso.
- Donnan, H., & Wilson, T. M. (1994). *Border approaches: Anthropological perspectives on frontiers*. Lanham: University Press of America.
- Geertz, C. (1973). *The interpretation of cultures: Selected essays*. New York; Basic Books.
- Hall, S. (1996). Introduction: who needs identity. In S. Hall & P. du Gay (Eds.), *Questions of cultural identity* (pp. 4–10). London: Sage.
- Herzfeld, M. (2001). *Anthropology: Theoretical practice in culture and society*. Malden: Blackwell Publishing.
- Kłoskowska, A. (1996). *Kultury narodowe u korzeni*. Warszawa: WN PWN.
- Kotakowski, L. (1994). *Obecność mitu*. Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Dolnośląskie.
- Kövecses, Z. (2002). *Metaphor: A practical introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (2003). *Metaphors we live by*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Mouffe, C. (2005). *On the political*. London: Routledge.
- Papastergiadis, N. (2000). *The turbulence of migration*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Simmel, G. (2006). Obcy. In G. Simmel, *Most i drzwi: Wybór esejów*. (M. Łukaszewicz, Trans.). Warszawa: Oficyna Naukowa.
- Wrong, D. (2000). Adversarial identities and multiculturalism. *Society*, 37(2), 10–14. <http://doi.org/10.1007/BF02686185>
- Znaniecki, F. (1986). *The social role of the man of knowledge*. Columbia University Press.