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Instrumental influence of political myths on the formation of the political and cultural space

Abstract: The essence of political myths, their structure and key functions have been analyzed in the article. The peculiarities of the political myths' creation in the Ukrainian society have been also characterized. It has been determined that political myths are an effective tool of influencing the political culture and consciousness of the citizens and that they are being used by the present-day Ukrainian politicians in order to gain and keep power. The attention to the predominantly destructive role of political myths in the development of modern Ukrainian society has also been drawn in the article. The authors claim that with the development of the information society a political myth is becoming more adaptive and gains the ability to create an illusion of reality and its manipulative influence is becoming more masterly and less noticeable. This influence often leads to the simulation of the democratic principles, depression and passive attitude of the citizens. It is possible to minimize the social consciousness manipulation through raising the level of the political culture and consciousness of the citizens, forming an open communication system between authorities and citizens, developing independent mass media, etc.

Keywords: political myth, political myth creation, mythological consciousness, archetypes.

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Crisis phenomena in the Ukrainian society, the military conflict in the East of the state, the intense development of an information society, the absence of the state ideology, the conflict of values cause the growth of the role of myths in the political space. Political myths may play a destructive as well as a constructive role. On the one hand, the highest value of a mythological worldview is its ability to unite human personalities into one totality without which the collective activity does not function. Myths can unite citizens, show them the ways for collective creativity, they activate their energy in order to achieve a certain sociopolitical goal, ideal as well as give hope and confidence in the future.

On the other hand, a social mythology is one of the most dangerous enemies of the society in conditions of an acute social and spiritual crisis, when a typical lifestyle is ruined, stereotypical decision-making mechanisms do not work anymore, the society lives in considerable unpredictability. Social actions, based on the declared myths, of different influential personalities and power structures, led to civil and international conflicts, peoples and states met in military conflicts, cultures and civilizations were ruined. Such a dualistic nature of political myths actualizes the relevance of studying their influence on the consciousness and the political culture of modern society.

A considerable number of scientific papers are dedicated to the analysis of the issues of mythological consciousness and myth creation. These are the works of ethnographers, historians, philosophers, psychologists, political scientists, where they studied the myth theory, semiotic aspects of myths, issues of mythological consciousness (L. Abramyan, K. Abraham, D. Arabadzhev, J. Bierlein, W. Wundt, O. Donchenko, M. Eliade, R. Girard, V. Ivanov, S. Kara-Murza, E. Cassirer, J. Campbell, K. Kerényi, L. Levy-Bruhl, C. Levi-Strauss, V. Lysenko, A. Losev, Y. Lotman, M. Muller, C. Jung, C. Huebner, Y. Shaygorodskiy and others).

Despite the existing considerable amount of scientific works on the stated problem, the analysis of the role of political myths (constructing political images, behavior models through the development and introduction of a political myth) as an influential instrument on

the social consciousness of the Ukrainians is exceptionally necessary today (in the context of political events in Ukraine). That is why the aim of the authors in this article is to characterize the modern myth creation process, which is a certain type of reaction to modern political events in Ukraine as well as an instrument of technological influencing the political culture and the consciousness of the citizens.

One of the leading researchers, S. Kara-Murza, describes the influence of a myth on social consciousness in the following way, “Having been introduced in the consciousness of people and having been deeply rooted there, a myth can substitute reality for a long period of time. As a result, the recipient perceives it through the myth’s explanation and acts accordingly. A myth takes away the necessity for the recipient to think intensely and analyze the world around her”¹.

Myths, which dominate the conceptual field of a person carrying out its secret motives, provide the sense of a person’s existence, determine key parameters of existence, ensure successful search for the “right” answers, are embodied in values, ideals, are fixed in norms and rituals. In other words, they become that part of life which we usually leave unnoticed. They determine behavioral motives, interpersonal relations, relations between the state and the society, and between various social groups. They fix existing illusions or create new ones, they either preserve or ruin social and political links, give the feeling of righteousness. All this proves the thought that each civilization is characterized by its own set of mythologisms, which systematically “form” their own variant of reality, reflected in the culture, science and education.

Just as a myth rules a person, so does the state rule the myth. For “that who rules the world, that... creates its myths”². To a certain extent, the power depends on the public opinion, on those senses, which underlie the life of people. That is why the authorities should control and do control myths in order to control people through them.

¹ С.Г. Кара-Мурза, *Манипуляция сознанием*, Москва 2010, р. 196, 205.

² А.В. Ставицкий, *Универсальные функции социально-политического мифа*, Симферополь 2003, р. 6.

And if the authorities do not pay enough attention to this issue they risk losing everything. The authorities have no other choice but to perceive a myth as “a specific phenomenon of the ideological practice, a special type of spiritual activity of creation, dissemination and preservation of political illusions, which are deliberately produced by the elite in order to manipulate the masses”³.

Unlike a traditional myth, a political myth is viewed as a simplified model of perceiving the political space that does not allow any critical analysis of the reality and arouses as a result of an unconscious activity of a person or is a figment of imagination. This is always a rational component created by political technologists. From this perspective, a political myth is viewed as one of political technologies, “a desperate measure, used by the authorities to manipulate the consciousness when all the other resources are exhausted”⁴.

Quite a widespread point of view is that a political myth is irrational by nature. M. Shestov defines it as a “stereotype, which has an increased emotional weight... and changes it according to the properties and requirements of a concrete stage of the political process”⁵. Other researchers understand it as a “non-scientific form of reality perception”, “a unified understanding of reality that unites the real and the mystic, carries an important irrational component”⁶.

In our opinion, a political myth should be viewed as a value and a manipulation technology, a tool for purposeful influencing the public consciousness with the aim of forming the necessary images, evaluations, and attitudes. In this context, we may say that a political myth is a rational phenomenon (a deliberate tool of reality construction) determined by an irrational basis.

³ А.В. Ставицкий, *Современный миф как объект научного исследования: основные подходы к проблеме*, «Вестник СевГТУ» 2004, No. 56, p. 134–135.

⁴ Э. Кассирер, *Техника современных политических мифов*, «Вестник Московского университета» 1990, Серия 7. Философия No. 2, p. 59–61.

⁵ Н.И. Шестов, *Политический миф: теперь и прежде*, Москва 2005, p. 27.

⁶ С.Г. Кара-Мурза, *Манипуляция сознанием*, Москва 2010, p. 22, 205.

It would be logical to look at the structure of a political myth which contains value (ideas based on archetypes), social (the exact content layer that reflects the picture of social existence), cognitive, emotional, evaluative and symbolic components. Space and time frames, the presence of a hero, who has typical characteristics and is the carrier of the archetypical information, are all singled out in the myth structure. Consequently, different levels of political mythology are singled out. In this research we are interested in the myth creation process planned by the authorities, so let us study the propaganda level, which is being implemented through concepts, programmes, strategies, and state policy.

Nowadays, the programmes of political subjects are primarily built according to the classical rules of mythological consciousness, namely: eschatological intimidation of citizens in the programmes of parties and leaders; the “development” of “the enemy of state” image in order to explain difficulties and reasons of sociopolitical problems and take the responsibility off themselves; the creation of a personified “hero” image; usage of the archetypical symbols (images of father and mother, using self-glorifying images such as image of a state, Motherland) etc.

The following myths may be singled out as the most wide-spread myths that are used in modern Ukrainian politics: the myth about the existence of a “moral politician”, whose aim is to achieve common good and obtain justice, who gives up his own interests for the sake of the state, etc. The effectiveness of this political myth is explained by the peculiarities of social consciousness, which is trustworthy, wants to hear pleasant things and looks for simple answers. Conceptually close to the previous group are myths about the uniqueness of certain politicians who can lead the country out of a crisis. These myths are sometimes also called myths about a hero (the archetype of a Ukrainian Kotygoroshko) which still keep leading positions in electoral campaigns. The image of a hero is constructed on understanding the basic problems of people. The hero must quickly defeat the enemy, radically change the existing situation and quickly solve all problems. That is why the image of a hero is “eternal” in public consciousness.

Such a politician is a Hero and a Messiah in the eyes of citizens. This was clearly demonstrated by the events which took place in 2004 and in 2014, when there appeared to be a need for a bright personality, a hero, a savior. This role was attributed to Viktor Yushchenko in 2004. Of course, unwinding the myth and returning to reality is a considerably painful process for the society. The now sitting President Petro Poroshenko also made a number of promises during his electoral campaign, one of them was to stop war in Ukraine by May 25, 2014, which also became a myth quite quickly.

Another myth is about the existence of a true democratic society, the basis of which is obtaining and ensuring justice, freedom, the equality of people, etc. Almost all political forces in Ukraine state the wish to build a truly democratic society, but after their coming to power we may hardly find any results of real embodiment of these ideas. A semantically close to the previous one is the myth about the European integration that promises rapid growth of prosperity, high salaries, high standards of social security. The majority of political forces have built their electoral campaigns on this, not telling about the negative sides of the Union and the inability to carry out the stated action plan quickly due to a big number of objective reasons. This myth was so well-received and so well-advertised that V. Yanukovych's declaration of the change of the state foreign political course led to indignation and mass protests of the citizens.

Another myth is freedom of speech or mass media pluralism, which has been analysed by H. Schiller, "this is the myth which ensures the success of the manipulation"⁷. The Reporters without Borders International Organization have published the annual rating of World Press freedom of 2014, where Ukraine has 127th place and is between Columbia and Afghanistan⁸. Some analytics note that Ukrainian mass media are becoming more and more controlled by the authorities and a phenomenon of gradual "limiting the de-

⁷ Г. Шиллер, *Манипуляторы сознанием*, Москва 1980, p. 36.

⁸ *Украина ухудшила позицию в рейтинге свободы слова*, «Сегодня», <http://www.segodnya.ua/ukraine/ukraina-uhudshila-poziciyu-v-reytinge-svobody-slova-583423.html>, 12.01.2015.

mocracy” may be observed, for example, the shutdown of a popular political talk show *Shuster LIVE*.

At present four draft laws (#1317, 1768, 1824 and 1889) that pose a certain threat to the freedom of speech are being discussed in the Verkhovna Rada. The adoption of the aforementioned draft laws will allow the National Television and Radio Broadcasting Council of Ukraine to stop the validity of a license and shut down broadcasting of any TV channel or radio station for six months at its own will without any judicial decision. For any broadcaster that means actual annihilation. All this will happen exclusively on the basis of the National Council’s personal evaluation of the content of a broadcaster. In other words, a few people from the authorities will subjectively decide how exactly journalists must love their Motherland, criticize the authorities and politicians⁹. A sugarcoated censorship of the freedom of speech will lead to the situation where political myths will be formed exclusively by the authorities and then rapidly installed and rooted in the society due to the unlimited influence. Because of the tightened control of the state, it will also be quite hard to ruin them.

The next myth is “the enemy”, which has long ago proved its effectiveness in many societies. This myth divides the people into “us” and “them”, carrying out the compensatory function, consolidating “us” in order to solve any kind of problem. It is natural that social consciousness associates all the misfortunes and political crises, increase of discomfort, military conflicts, poverty and other troubles with “them”. For instance, “Five years of “orange” rules have put Ukraine on the verge of an economic and social catastrophe. From the previous authorities we have inherited: a 15% fall of the GDP, a 22% inflation rate, depreciated hryvnya, a 4 times increased external and internal state debt. The leonine gas contract has caused the increase of household bills and the fall of industry’s profitability” [10].

⁹ Украинский телеканал «Интер» выступил против запрета на свободу слова, <http://www.tvc.ru/news/show/id/60616>, 2.02.2015.

¹⁰ Передвыборна програма Партії Регіонів, <http://www.parliament2012.com.ua/programa-partiiregionov>.

Another example: “You have a low salary? A scanty pension? You are unemployed? Your business is being taken away from you? The prosecutor and the judge defend bandits? You can’t get anywhere without a bribe and there is no justice anywhere? Your language, history and culture are being destroyed? These problems have been created by the authorities. The opposition gives a chance to solve them”¹¹.

The present day conflict in the East of Ukraine is also fed with enemy images from both sides. For Ukrainians today these enemies are Russia, separatists, Donetsk bandits. For the opposing side the enemies are “banderivtsi”, “the military junta”, “Ukrainian fascist”, “the Right sector”, etc. During the Presidential electoral campaign in Ukraine a myth about Ukrainian nationalism was developed in Russia, and Russian mass media supported it through broadcasting something even literally false information, e.g. that the leader of “the Right Sector” D. Yarosh and not P. Poroshenko won the elections. Because of the specially selected and content limited information many Ukrainians have developed a feeling of hatred towards all the Russians and people from the Donbas region. On the one hand, these images facilitate the integration of a certain part of the society, enhance patriotic feelings and to some extent take the attention off some burning social and economic problems. But such myths do not provide any in-depth analysis of the reasons of the conflict, the characteristics of its sides or their motives.

Archaic symbolism is actively used today, which generally narrows down to the images of a “supreme rule of law” and “Motherland” (archetypical images of a “father” and “mother”). Another quite constant myth is the myth about three “eastern Slavonic brotherly nations” but in reality this myth does not correspond with historical reality. As for the common things, that theoretically “unite” Ukrainians, Byelorussians and Russians, they are quite general in character and are determined by the relatively recent events. Thus, at the times of the Kievan Rus while colonizing the present-day Belarus

¹¹ Передвиборна програма Програма Всеукраїнського об’єднання «Батьківщина», <http://byut.com.ua/news/11910.html>.

and “true” Russia the Russian-Ukrainians have Slavized the local people, have established the orthodox church there and the Slavonic language of church services as well as have spread a number of their cultural values. This has become the ground for “the unity of the eastern Slavonic peoples”.

After the fall of the Kievan Rus, fates of these nations have gone their separate paths. In general, we may state that the “unity” of the Russians, Ukrainians and Byelorussians is determined by the fact of being a part of the Russian Empire and then the Soviet Union. The considerable differences lie, firstly, in a different mentality of the “brotherly eastern Slavonic nations”, so we may hope that we will soon be joined by our true “blood brothers”, i.e. the Slovaks, the Czechs and the Polish¹².

Various political forces have built their electoral programs and determined the external political course of the country on this myth. This myth, to a certain degree, made it difficult to accept the difficult and complex relations with the Russian Federation. For quite a long period, the citizens of Ukraine could not believe in the annexation of the Crimea and in the fact that the military conflict in the East is supported by the “brotherly nation”.

Lastly, let us remember such a myth as the necessity of Ukraine’s accession into NATO as a guarantee of state security. The essence of this myth is as follows: if Ukraine gains membership in this organization, the military conflict in Ukraine will end as NATO members will provide arms and overall support. This myth serves as a basis for many political programmes that promise a quick solution of sociopolitical problems.

On the other hand, Russia, which is interested in keeping Ukraine in the sphere its influence, has developed a number of myths about the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation in order to discredit this institution and not to allow the Ukrainians a higher security standard and level of welfare:

¹² П. Кралуєк, *Міф про три «братерські східнослов’янські народи»* «День. Інтернет газета», <http://www.day.kiev.ua/uk/article/ukrayina-incognita/mif-pro-tri-braterski-shidnoslovyanski-narodi-prodovzhennya>, 20.02.2014.

- Gaining membership in NATO will cause a wave of terrorist acts on the territory of Ukraine;
- Ukraine will be transformed into a foreign military camp with foreign soldiers (even though NATO does not have its own military forces, only the armies of member-states);
- As a member-state Ukraine will be forced to send its soldiers to participate in military operations (but only professional military people participate in such operations. For example, the losses of the USSR in Afghanistan were 14 thousand people; the losses of NATO in Kosovo and Afghanistan were 181 soldiers).

Due to the abundance of these myths not all the members of the Ukrainian society have understood that NATO is an international organization of equal independent states in which all decisions are made by consensus. Taking into consideration the new challenges and threats the Alliance has transformed from a military-political organization into a political-security structure that unites the majority of the Euro-Atlantic region countries in a system of collective security.

Just as artificial and exported to Ukraine from Russia was the myth about Russian as the second official language in Ukraine, the introduction of which will solve all the problems of the Russian-speaking citizens of Ukraine. This is an inert myth, a recurrence of a Soviet myth.

Nowadays, political mythology primarily manipulates the citizens' consciousness, is elusive and destructive by nature. The effectiveness of political mythology is ensured by people's emotions and feelings. In order to reach to them, various metaphors, symbols and illustrations that influence social consciousness are used. The following mottos, used by political subjects, are well known: "From stability to welfare", "Ukraine is a multimillion European state of successful people", "Education is the investment into the future", "A fair state – a prosperous life", "Ukrainian identity – European choice", "This is your chance to prove that you are the one who determines the fate of the state" etc. These symbolic constructions serve as one of the key factors of a stereotype formation, which make up the basis of myths.

Thus, a political myth is a figurative political and cultural scheme of symbolic representation of state-society relations, which models an emotionally convincing picture of the world of politics, substantiates demands of the subjects of politics to gain power and motivates the political activity, giving it a reality emphasis and becoming a part of it. The societies that are undergoing transformation periods have a rapidly developing social consciousness that is why there is a constant need for tools for its formation, which would produce quick explanations for the changes in ideology and values. Positive myths carry out the function of political regulators and may be used for the introduction of necessary social changes, realization of urgent state goals and tasks. Mythological practices often play a role of system-formers in the political and cultural systems of transforming societies.

With the development of the information society a political myth becomes more adaptive, gains the ability to flexibly create an illusion of reality and its influence (a manipulating one for the majority of technological myths) is becoming more skilled and less noticeable. This often leads to the simulation of democracy principles, the suppression and passive attitudes of citizens. In modern Ukrainian society political myths have predominantly a destructive character and are used by politicians to gain, support and keep their status and power. The effectiveness of political mythology as a technology is guaranteed by the developed mythological consciousness of citizens, which supports the popularity of certain political leaders. Basically, modern political myths simplify the reality and, playing with people's emotions, deceive people and do not stimulate the development of rational critical thinking.

Several technologies that are used, namely, in the Ukrainian society, while creating and planting the myths, may be singled out. Among them are numerous repetitions of positive, from the point of Ukraine, events; creation of an illusory reality; manipulating with the peculiarities of the national character, mentality and applying them in the necessary aspects and situations.

During the myth construction process, contrasts and antagonisms are used. In practice, the mythology implementation is reflected in

a special manner of information presentation. The contraposition principle also lies at the basis of creation of a positive image of authorities: every hero must have his or her enemy, fighting this enemy is the essence and reason for his activity (if we speak about the present political elite, these are terrorists and oligarchs). The modern myth creation process “disarms” people, creates new illusions, people wait for miracles.

To sum up, we may say that political myths are an effective tool for construction of the political and cultural space, with their help the authorities form the optimal behavior models, social and political climate, strengthen the existing stereotypes, moods, values (justice, fairness, etatisme, paternalistic attitudes). Moreover, myths serve as an additional tool for the authority legitimization, creating an illusion of citizens’ participation in the political process, an image of an open dialogue between authorities and people through appealing to public opinion.

The phenomenon of political myths and mythology is little studied and due to its versatility and ambiguous influence on the society it requires further studies, particularly from the point of view of rationalizing political consciousness.

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Instrumentalne oddziaływanie mitów politycznych na kształtowanie przestrzeni kulturowo-politycznej

Streszczenie: W artykule poddano analizie istotę mitów politycznych, ich strukturę oraz podstawowe funkcje. Opisano także cechy ukraińskiego mitu politycznego. Mity polityczne rozumiane są jako skuteczny instrument wpływu na kulturę polityczną i świadomość obywateli, do których sięgają współcześni ukraińscy politycy w celach walki politycznej lub utrzymania władzy. Artykuł skupia uwagę na destrukcyjnej roli mitów politycznych w rozwoju współczesnego społeczeństwa ukraińskiego. Autorzy utrzymują, że wraz z rozwojem społeczeństwa informacyjnego mity polityczne stają się bardziej adaptacyjne i nabywają umiejętności tworzenia iluzji rzeczywistości, a jego manipulacyjne oddziaływanie staje się coraz bardziej dyskretne i mało dostrzegalne. Taki rodzaj wpływu często prowadzi do symulacji zasad demokracji, przygnębienia i bierności obywateli. Minimalizować manipulacje świadomości społecznej można m.in. za pomocą podniesienia poziomu kultury politycznej i świadomości obywateli, tworzenia otwartego systemu komunikacji między władzą a obywatelami czy rozwoju niezależnych mediów.

Słowa kluczowe: mit polityczny, mitotwórstwo polityczne, mitologiczna świadomość, archetypy.