

THE MYTHS SURROUNDING

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The article is dedicated to the investigation of the myths which surround everyone in contemporary world, and especially in Ukraine. It gives brief reference of the main traits of the myth in general and present-day myth particularly and contains an attempt to explain the spread of myths and the urge of the Ukrainian people towards them on this ground. The author offers the ideas about the positive and negative meaning of various myths and ways of reaction to this phenomenon.

Keywords: myth, mythological consciousness, Ukraine, political technology, national identity.

Статья посвящена исследованию мифов, которые окружают каждого в современном мире, особенно в Украине. Дана краткая характеристика основных черт мифа в целом и современных мифов, объясняя их распространённость среди украинцев. Автор излагает свои идеи по поводу позитивного и негативного воздействия различных мифов и предлагает своё видение реакции философов на это явление.

Ключевые слова: миф, мифологическое сознание, Украина, политическая технология, национальная самоидентификация.

Стаття присвячена міфам, що оточують кожного в сучасному світі, зокрема в Україні. Подається коротка характеристика основних особливостей міфа взагалі, та сучасного міфа, пояснюється їх поширення серед українців. Автор викладає свої ідеї з приводу позитивного та негативного впливу міфів та пропонує своє бачення можливої взаємодії філософів з цим явищем.

Ключові слова: миф, мифологічна свідомість, Україна, політична технологія, національна самоідентифікація.

The polemic issue of a myth draws attention because of the popularity of this term. It is widely used, starting with “ten myths about sex” and going on with “myths of democracy”, “myths about USA” and so on. There is also a diffused opinion, that an informational war is on, which implies spreading the myths.

Furthermore, the process of nation formation and national identity developing in Ukraine is still in progress. So, the problem of national-consolidating myth and “the myths about Ukraine” in general is of immediate relevance. So, it is necessary to study contemporary myths carefully to know how to live surrounded by them. As the problem of myth was profoundly investigated by many wide-known philosophers, the given article is based on the theoretical achievements of E.Cassirer, M. Eliade, C. Lévi-Strauss, R. Barthes, E.Miletinsky and others; among recent Ukrainian studies, the book by O.P. Polysaev “Architectonics of modern myth” makes a great contribution to exploration of this phenomenon. Curiously enough, the problem was reflected in tabloids and daily papers, and some information was derived from newspapers. The articles from the newspaper “Cheloveck” were used for this investigation.

The research aim is to investigate the problem of growth of the number and the role of myths in contemporary Ukraine. As a first step in accomplishing this goal, we list the characteristics of the myths. In addition we highlight some peculiarities of a contemporary myth. At last, we try to apply these theoretic data for the interpretation of the situation in present-day Ukraine. Let us start with the definition of the notion “myth”. Great amount of versions was generated in various schools. One of the positions is to interpret the myth as the sacred story which tells of the events that took place in bygone days [4: 9]. It is regarded as an integral symbolic system next to language, art and science. The myth is also defined as a special mode of comprehension of the reality. According to structuralistic theory, the myth is a semiotic phenomenon of a super-linguistic nature. This variety of definitions is so impressive, that sometimes the phenomenon which is considered as myth by one group of scholars, can not be recognized as such by another one. We stick to D. de Rougemont opinion, who defines the myth as a symbolic story which is a common denominator of an infinite set of more or less similar situations [qtd.in 9: 22].

Let's consider the main features and functions which are characteristic for myths. A myth has consolidating or integrating function, it unites some members of the society with identical world-view and collective actions of ritual form [11: 15]. A myth establishes some models for imitation while doing rites and for all the important activities in different spheres of life, like family life, work and arts [3: 8]. One of the important peculiarities of a myth is the ability to motivate, to give a powerful energetic impulse. This function correlates with magical function of the speech, which dominates in contemporary political myth, like in an archaic one. It is described by Cassirer: the words are used for enchanting and making people obey, not for just naming things [2: 256]. Sorel described a myth as an ensemble of images which can exert influence on people to make them instinctively act in required way [12: 129]. As Lévi-Strauss pointed out, a myth is a special way of understanding the reality which solves some real contradiction in an unreal space of a myth. It explains the past, the future and the present [5: 248].

The French anthropologist compares an archaic myth with the political ideology. He assumes that in contemporary society the second one replaced the first one. When the historian describes, e.g. the Great Revolution, he refers to the range of the past events which are present in nowadays life by means of their irreversible effects. And the Great Revolution is still an actual

scheme which helps to comprehend processes in contemporary world and forecast the changes. A myth gives a pattern for understanding [5: 231]. The notion of a myth is closely connected with the notion of mythological consciousness. It is based on the visual, sensory images and simple notions, particular ones, as the abstract ideas are not made out; it is emotional, affective; the cause-and-effect relations are replaced by association or analogy; the mythological consciousness is not critical and it can not be criticized, because the person who belongs to some myth and who believes in it considers it to be a reality, and can not take it for some fabrication.

A contemporary myth is investigated by M.Eliade but it would be better to call it "a myth nowadays". It concerns the manifestations of some ancient mythological archetypes and patterns in individual perception in dreams, imagination, arts, and also their appearing in new interpretation. E.g., according to M. Eliade, Marxism takes up the idea of redemptive part to be played by 'the elect', 'the anointed', 'the innocent', 'missioners'; in our own days the proletariat whose sufferings are invoked to change the ontological status of the world [4: 91-92].

Present-day myths as artificially created ones are mentioned by E.Cassirer and R.Barthes. The interpretation of this phenomenon by G.Sorel significantly differs from others. Most of the researchers are convinced, that contemporary myths, especially political ones, are constructed and spread with the express purpose of manipulation. We agree that among contemporary myths, unlike among the archaic ones, we can find artificially created. But we consider that there are also myths which were formed in a similar way as the archaic ones which were formed spontaneously in the collective consciousness.

B. Malinowski, E.Cassirer and C. Flud and others emphasized that the necessity of myth appears mostly in crisis situations, in difficult social conditions [11: 108]. This is the position in which our country fell. That's why most of the Ukrainian people crave for myths. Here's a bright example of that: the historians from the informational project "Likbez. Historical front" tell that often people write to them in a hope to prove, to legitimize their beliefs in "theories" about exceptional antiquity and importance of Ukraine, like the one about Jesus Christ's Ukrainian origins. The scientists explain that with the help of such myths the citizens attempt to overcome the crisis of national identification, to prove to themselves the completeness and adequacy of their state [6: 15]. The mythologisation of the Majdan events also serves for such self-affirmation. The mythological interpretation of the Majdan seems to be spontaneously formed myth which people produced to endure serious social disaster, not the one especially worked out by some political forces. New myth gives birth to new ritual. It can be reciting "Glory to Ukraine!" – "Glory to the heroes!" or the tradition of meetings for "Russian language supporting", or other gestures. If there is a myth of Majdan as some righteous and just battle for the truth, there is a temptation to act in such a way regularly without analyzing, whether it is appropriate or not, like it was an ancient rain-calling ritual.

There are a lot of popular myths. Among them is the one about EU being our redemption which will save us and help the Ukrainian people. Also, there is a myth of the USA being a sponsor and a mastermind behind the conflict in Ukraine. The mythologem, widely used by the politics, is an image of a suffering hero, fighting against injustice. There is a myth of Ukrainian culture being countryside-style, which gives birth to the phenomena of "sharovarnyztvo": that the Ukrainians are people who only eat lard (salo) and drink horilka. There is a myth that Ukraine, Belarus and Russia are brotherly nations which have much in common. And, vice versa, there is an attempt to mark out our own nation by mythological contraposition "friend and foe": "Ukraine is not Russia". We should mention Taras Shevchenko who was called the creator of nation consolidating myth, as well as A.Mickiewicz, Dante Alighieri, M.Cervantes and J.W. Goethe [9: 15]. His myth is still in force, as claims O.Zabuzhko. Even more, G.Grabowicz insists that Shevchenko worked out the "mythological program for his own nation" [7: 55]. But, according to it, Ukraine is a miserable, ill-fated land, where freedom and happiness are unattainable, which survives with difficulty in a constant confrontation with the Russian empire. It is sad to think that this program is operating indeed, and the Ukrainian people carry it out somehow. We consider the role of author's personal myth which can be set forth in belletristic literature (and, we believe, in movie, advertisement or internet as well), an important issue to study. There are also large-scale myths. Even the notion "people" itself in political discourse is considered to become a mythologem. There is a myth about a leader who fatherly cares about people; this one was spread in the USSR. The mythologem of a struggle of opposites is used in politics and PR (even the competition between Coca-Cola and Pepsi is the example of it). Various mythologems are widely used in advertisement; that is why it produces such a great impact on the audience. Maybe, there is at least a certain amount of truth in each of them. But the problem is that the events are taken not as the facts, not consciously, but in a mythological way, and they distort the person's vision of the situation and, in general, the world view.

Also, it is worth to mention that among myths, some contribute to nation formation and develop national identity and some impede them. E.g, the first ones are the myths about Majdan or Sky Hunded ("Nebesna sotnja") as their mythologems. And the second ones are about "Gayrope", "Hunta" or "Vatnik", "Sovoks" or "Benderovetzs" or about all our troubles coming from the Soviet Union, or about the Soviet Union being the golden age of happiness.

So, as we see, numerous myths exist in Ukraine. Not all of them are just production of mythmaking as the political technology. Some of them have positive effect on Ukrainian people, and the others are destructive. But all of them bear powerful energetic impulse, imperative; they use images and emotions, explain some events by special mythological logic. First ones have important functions: national consolidating and motivating, giving the models of behavior in the hard times. Obviously, it is not relevant to talk about deconstruction of these myths, the substitution for rational reasons, not only because of the peculiarities of a myth, such as resisting the reflection of its content and its debunking, but also because they are necessary at this stage. There is an idea that these myths should be used. For example, the article "Reprogramming Ukraine" [10: 10] tells about the writer M.Prasolov, who wants to create a new myth of the Cossacks to support the Ukrainian people in their struggle for independent and developed state. And another researcher recommends using some of the investigated myths to create a new positive world view system [8: 9]. But we believe that this would bring us too close to propaganda. If we make people think mythological and give them a myth to believe, they would get used to live in the myths, not in the reality. They

would get accustomed to follow and not to analyze. Though neither of us can completely avoid mythological thinking and live absolutely rational, we can decrease its applying. Destructive myths, especially when they are synthesized for manipulation, should be analyzed, disarmed, their action should be neutralized. Various specialists can take part in this work, from psychologists and philosophers to politicians and journalists, and even ordinary reasonable people. We consider helpful for this reason, particularly, R.Barthes' method of myth interpretation [1: 192].

In his opinion, a myth consists of the form (it is like an appearance of some idea), the concept (the idea, which is put into the myth) and the meaning (which is the unity of other components). And only the last one is given to the "reader", is "seen" by an ordinary person and it is the myth itself. For example, if we observe a poster of happily smiling strong healthy soldier under the national flag, this is the form, the concept is – a strong national army, and the meaning is – we have a good army, it will protect us, and it is luck to be in its ranks. A French philosopher offers three ways of myth interpretation.

1. If we focus on the form, the concept will fill it and we'll get literal sense. Then we'll get a symbol or an example of an idea. Barthes tells that this way of adaptation is widely used by press editors who take a concept and find the form for it. Thus, a soldier on the poster is a symbol of the army.

2. If we distinguish between a form and a concept, and take into account that the form changes the perception of the idea, the meaning will be destroyed and we'll regard a myth as a deception. So, we'll understand that the poster was made to influence us; maybe we'll even admit it but consciously.

3. If we take a myth as an inseparable unity of the concept and the form, we'll become the readers of the myth and fall under its impact. We'll accept it as a direct representation. We'll consider this soldier to be a representative of the National Army. We'll take the idea for granted, even not being aware of it.

We believe that this technology makes it possible to resist the influence of constructed myths (as a part of ideology) while they are just spread, when they are not yet acting in mythological consciousness, not included to our world view. It could be useful to set up a project of educational program, which will include publications in the Internet and on the pages of newspapers and magazines, TV reportages, in which the particular myths will be described and it will be given the method of analyzing the myths in common. And, sure, "natural enemies" of the myths are increase of education, which results in reasonable perception of information, and stabilization of situation in the state, which reduces the need in myths.

Additional studies will be required to define the mechanism contemporary myth appearing. Further analysis could help to distinguish the myths created for manipulation from "natural" ones and to elaborate the corresponding criteria of differentiation.

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