The Mythology of Nation: The State, Nation and Immigration Processes of Late Twentyth-Early Twenty First Centuries

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Abstract: The article is devoted to immigration processes in Europe in the late 20th - early 21st centuries. The migration processes were analyzed using anthropological methods and characterization of quantitative indicators of migration growth and the dynamics of transformation in the perception of the migrants. It was shown that the perception of the migrants by host society depends on the social processes in the region and determined by the national ideas and perception distinguishing the people into “native” inhabitants and “newcomers”. The author reveals that these ideas lay in the basis of national mythology, which capable to facilitate or hinders the integration of immigrants into the host society.

Key words: Nation • Myth • Ethnic symbols • Immigration • The host society • Stereotypes • Identity • Nation-state

INTRODUCTION

The idea of the nation has traditionally been the object of mythologize, embodying people’s views on the past and present, friends and enemies, on the proper and prohibited. The myths of the nation, expressing in various embodiments, - formal, physical, cultural, religious, social and political, could not be the basis for the different human activities such as wars, acts of aggression, political events, ideology and everyday behavior based on the ideas of national culture.

Most of these ideas are reflected in the notion of the nation as discursive phenomenon widely spread in the second half of 20th century. The discourse of nation implies a belief in certain ethnic associations integrated by the common origin, history, territory, political structures, etc. Discursive nature of a nation also requires the constant appeal to the general idea of the nation and the daily renew of this idea. Failure of national unity, constantly appealed by the myth of the nation, can result in the national catastrophe. Therefore, the myth of the nation is powerful force over the last century and still exists.

If in the middle of 20th century, the myth of the nation was far from becoming a fact of the past then the several decades later, it became one of the key principles of the global development, determining the culture and politics at the global, regional and local levels. In recent years, ethno-national myth of the nation determined by the common historical heritage, language, religion, ethnic roots is most influential. Underestimation of the increasing role of the ethnic nationalism of the nation, according to Jerry Muller, is dangerous [1]. One of the factors of the ethnic nationalism is a massive influx of immigrants into the developed countries, primarily into Europe and the United States.

The ideas of a nation formed in Europe determined the development of a national myth embodied in different parts of the world. The peculiarities of nations, which are referred to different countries, for example, the United States or Canada, should support the idea of any nation based on common ideas.

Obviously, the myth of the nation can be determined as a type of meta-myth, because it includes a variety of ideas and concepts such as the myth of own territory bequeathed by the ancestors, the myth about biological identity (racial) of origin usually stipulated by genealogy of a common ancestor, the myth of political power integrating the nation, etc. However, the ideas about the common historic past and ethnic myth were the most important components, determining the existing order and supported the viability of the national meta-myth. At the same time, these two components of meta-myth of the nation are the most mythologized that makes them, on the
one hand, more flexible and dependent on the political and geopolitical situation and on the other, makes them the manipulation means of public opinion.

It is ethnic myth, filled with national symbols most often becomes the basis for confrontation. The understanding of ethnicity not only as a “biological” category and as a cultural-ideological concept affected by transformation depending on certain circumstances is important for understanding of the ideological role of the ethnic myth in the formation of the confrontation strategy [2]. Ethnic kinship is the main principle of the myth of the nation and cultural and ideological idea about ethnicity creates a favorable basis for the manipulation of this idea.

Causing the ethnic-national processes, the myth of the nation is the mobile system determining the evolution of ideas about the nation at the level of a group and depending on social-cultural circumstances and geopolitical situation. National myth, contributing to the evolution of culture, is able to “grind” and adapt those concepts which do not correspond to the idea of ethnic solidarity. The developers of the national mythology represent the national identity using ethnic symbols and ideas, including ideas about kinship, common roots of the groups in the past. The core of the ethnic identity is a mythological-symbolic complex – mixture of myth, memory, signs and symbols, which determines the persons included into a group and the features of a member of the group. The existence, status and security of a group in this case are in direct dependence on the status of the symbols of the group. Therefore, the people are fighting and dying for these characters and ready to follow the leaders, who manipulate the symbols to achieve their interests [3].

The use and cultivation of the myth of the nation was stipulated by the necessity to maintain the public unity and secured by intellectuals, who substantiated and established a national mythology and political representatives, who included the myths of the nation into political programs and objectives and ensured the introduction of the myths in the nations. In this sense, the functions of the national myth fully correspond to the purpose of any myth - it should explain the essence of the ongoing social processes and prevent the entropy of the society in the conditions of any social changes.

The status of national symbols in the context of profound social changes is particularly important. According to D. Khorovits, choosing between the maximum of own wealth and the maximum difference between the level of sufficiency of own group and another in their favor, the people tend to choose the second variant. In other words, the distinguishing factor becomes decisive in the building of a national identity. The language of this contradiction is the dilemma of legitimacy, which consists in the status of the group, which is more legitimate and maintains the traditions, the group with more rights to implement the power and law. It is the relative status, instead of economics, language, or anything else, according to D. Khorovits, generates ethnic conflict [4].

Prejudices, stereotypes, which are expressed in negative attitude and feelings to the strangers and myths that are components of mythological and symbolic complex, obviously, are a means to deprive the opposite group of legitimate status. The emotional component of these attitudes is very important because the studies show that the negative feelings to the other group play more essential role than the stereotypes in explaining of own claims [5]. Fears related with the possibility of the disappearance of social groups, are often based on demographic and statistical indicators as well as on the history of the superiority of the opposite group. Extinction danger of a group leads to a sense of fear and hostility and as a result to instability and conflict. This sense of external threat is the consolidating factor, when the group reinvents all events in terms of ethnic myths that serve to strengthen of relations inside of the group [6].

It is important to note that the more dynamic changes in society, the stronger the myth, which can be destroyed either revolutionary cataclysms, threatening, however, the disappearance of society as bearer of mythological ideas along with the myth, or the purposeful efforts of intellectual and political leaders, which must trigger and implement the relevant project. However, in the era of profound structural changes, the myth can become a reality and this explains the fact that the discrepancy of reality to one or more of the components is perceived as a threat of the reality that requires elimination. The process of elimination of this danger is often becomes the reason for the ethnic wars.

The myth of the nation-state widely spread in the 19-th-first half of 20 a century became the political embodiment of the idea of the nation. At this stage, the persistence of the myth of the nation was supported by a number of facts as a result of historical changes and the meta-myth supported by national governments and international organizations, has received the status of reality. Nationalism bore, as a rule, the liberal features and borders of the states are corresponded to the territories inhabited by the nations with some exceptions. Nationalism in these conditions plays linking role between
the state and society and the state supplying resources for establishment of the nation and nation itself supplement each other. In other words, the myth of the nation largely coincided with the reality of the nation-state, which further contributed to its establishment in the minds of Europeans.

The second half of the 20th century brought significant changes, gradually destroyed the ideas about the nation-state as the only possible form of relations between the nations and ethnic groups. The ethnic factor, according to the majority of experts, is the key factor in the socio-political and geopolitical development, becoming a global problem and referring to the “developed countries at the stage of post-industrial development” [7].

One of the reasons for the emergence of the national question in the developed countries of Europe became the mass phenomenon of ethnic migrations. The massive flow of immigrants in Europe and “open doors” policy towards immigrants conducted with some amendments until the late 1960s – early 1970s resulted in the 13 million of non-citizens [8] in continental Europe in the late 80’s and 60% of which were the permanent residents without the rights of citizenship [9]. During the 1990s, the situation worsened because the number of people living outside of the country of origin has increased from 154 to 175 million. According to the definition of Organization of United Nations provided in 2002, the migrants are people living outside the country of origin or citizenship for 12 months and more [10] and although it constitutes only 3% of the world’s population, there is no country that has not experienced the consequences of emigration or immigration and in present, every tenth inhabitant of the most developed world region is an international immigrant.

The massive inflow of migrants in the 1990s has required the active integration of immigrants discussed in the 90s. Islam was considered as a hindrance to integration from the political and cultural point of view. Immigrants, who arrived from Islamic countries were perceived as potential terrorists or sympathetic and were considered as the members of the tribal community, which is opposite to individualistic secular West-European society in a cultural sense [11].

The culture lies in the basis of this myth, which gives everything a person sees around and forms his view of the world and evaluation of the surrounding processes, offering the certain behavior models. The idea of the incompatibility of cultures using the traditional symbols however, reproduces in each new generation and renew by the mythology, containing specific “messages” and texts, understandable to those to whom they are intended.

The myth and symbol, which is a part of, thus, define the mood and attitudes to the immigrants. The content of a myth is determined by fears related with the loss of the stability that was associated with the nation-state, which for many decades provided the economic, political, social and cultural prosperity of Europe and acquired the welfare of the state in the second half of the XX century.

Rational theories, developed within the framework of conflict or political science, as a rule, are based on several assumptions, the main among which proceed from the fact that people prefer stability and they tend to derive the greatest material benefits from their activities. These assumptions can explain some types of economic behavior, intergroup interaction, etc. However, the anti-immigrant attitude, which contradicts to the logic of economic interest, lies beyond the explanatory model of these concepts.

Anti-immigrant myths like any others are emotional and full of symbols by their nature. However, the power of these myths is precisely explained by their cognitive and expressive content using the numerous metaphors. Stereotypes and associations caused by symbols determine the choice and behavior of the people and the emotions provide a form of this behavior. The emotional component of behavior, does not consider the fact that the decision or action are not the materially profitable. Thus, according to statistics, people are more likely object (write to politicians or act) against something that makes them angry or causes irritation then against the violation of their material interests [12]. As a result, emotions can often change the goals and objectives of the people, highlight the priorities and determine solutions [13].

Myths, containing the emotions and symbols and underlying identity, are the basis of anti-immigrant attitudes. At the individual level, these symbols are used to mobilize people to the movement and approve the rigidity. The desire of one group dominate the other arises and the myth about the common roots and the interest of the nation provokes people to battle against the representatives of other cultures. The myth-making causes the de-personification of the enemy that permits the use of any measures and complicates the compromise finding.

Myths and symbols, sometimes provoked and supported by the authorities are based on fears during an era of changes, crisis, or a collapse of the established ideas. Globalization and integration along with thousandth flows of immigrants with different culture
create an impression of loss and destruction of the former system of relationships, where the nation-state was responsible for the economic and social conditions of citizens.

The fear appearing as a reaction to the danger is an emotion embodied in the mythological and symbolic context. Fear is instrumental and causes the activities aimed at the destruction of the source of fear, as well as other emotions - hatred and offence, which possess the certain functions besides the instrumental. Fear, hatred and offence can be considered as a process, focused on the emotional mechanism and causing the actions aimed at protecting own identity. Fears encourage the individual to ensure own safety, hatred encourages to compensation of the historical loss and offence focuses on the different status. In contrast, the rage often causes emotions directed to the self-destruction [14]. However, the ideological substantiation of these emotions is a myth.

In other words, meta-myth of the nation confronts the complex and powerful counter-meta-myth about the immigrants. These both perform very complex functions related with general functions of any myth and are the result of the ideas based on notions about the decisive role of the nation-state in the modern society and both these include numerous myths strived for legitimacy of the appropriate behavior of politicians, ordinary Europeans and their attitude to immigrants. Whatever, the myth as the product of activity of single leaders or political layers and spread into the people masses, which are ready to transform these depending on their interests and place in the structure of society, turns into a real force and is able to determine the choice and actions of people, as well as the policy of the authorities. This myth consists of numerous elements, which could be understood only using the original concepts and perception type and therefore, it is inseparable from the ideas that are embodied in the ideology of the nation-state.

The power of this counter-myth can probably explain the high demand for relatively cheap labour migrants in the Western countries and this fact is recognized by politicians however, authorities following the public opinion are forced to limit the inflow of the visitors. However, in some cases, there is another option implemented: the tough anti-immigration rhetoric of the authorities, which corresponds to public opinion, exists along more soft immigration policy aimed at ensuring the immigrant workers the right to enter a country. Thus, the destroying system of nation-states has supported the accompanied myths. These myths reproduced in the reports of politicians and academics, widely spread in the mass media and consciousness, form the “gap” between political claims, forced to comply with the continuous mythology and reality, determined by the new challenges of the world in conditions of globalization.

REFERENCES