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Folktale aspects of the Ukrainian policy (a foreigner's opinion)

Abstract

The paper deals with folktale narratives of political life in Ukraine. The author shows their place in the post-Soviet mythologised consciousness and demonstrates the relationship between archaic aspects of such consciousness and authoritarian or totalitarian political practices. She defines evolutionary tendencies of the above-mentioned narratives and proves the fact of their destruction under the current political situation in Ukraine in the context of total de-mythologisation.

Keywords: *narrative, folktale model of Being, Trickster, the Dragon Fighter Hero, eschatological myth, de-mythologisation*

For a long time I have been intently observing the processes occurring in the socio-political life of Ukraine. This is the country where I have passed through my "universities", where I matured as a specialist in the area of social psychology. However, besides personal reasons for such rapt attention, there is a purely political reason which is consists in the Polish-Ukrainian relations at the present stage. As is known, in spite of certain troubles in the past, historical fates of these countries are closely connected. Poland is looking at the processes in Ukraine as at its comparatively recent post-socialist past. Poland appears as an image of Ukraine's future (I hope rather near) and as a lobbyist of its further advance towards Euro-Atlantic structures. Moreover, these countries are united by their common attitude towards Russian aggression and Poland's readiness to help Ukraine in the repulse to this aggression.

All these (probably obvious) considerations explain the necessity of tracing the main **tendencies** in the evolution of Ukrainian political system and policy as such. However, the main problem through which I am going to examine some as-

pects of the above-mentioned tendencies is announced in the header of this paper. So, before I state this problem I would like to explain in brief the reasons for thematic localisation. Generally, the problem of social mythology is so "grandiose" that it is impossible to discuss it within one article. We shall us only note in this regard that the foundations of any society cannot be free of certain mythological stratifications. For example, the idea of a "universal history" is a variety of mythologised historiosophy, but socio-political experience of Western civilisation as well as Eurocentrism as a type of ideology were based on this idea.

A lot of mythologemes are contained in the basic principles of the Western socio-political life, although it is, in Max Weber's opinion, the space of "rationality" [Weber, 1994]. We will not analyse these mythologemes in detail now but try to explain why the weight of folktale varieties in social mythology of the western-type societies is much less than in the authoritarian or totalitarian ones. The point is that the social mythologies in Europe and in the Western world as a whole have their roots in the Enlightenment philosophy and may be supported by "metaphysics", while authoritarian or totalitarian systems reject the Enlightenment postulates and plunge into mythological archaism. Therefore, their mythological basis appears in the form of reanimated and modified cosmic, eschatological myths or those related to an agrarian calendar, etc.

The images of politicians, which should correlate with these narratives, are also transformed in accordance with these myths (which in turn oversaturate collective consciousness). In contrast to Western representatives of high-level authorities, the state leaders of the above-mentioned systems govern a country up to the end of their life. Thus, they are associated with the Leader or Chief. The general type of relationship between him and the masses was clearly analysed by Slavoj Žižek (Zhizhek) who has demonstrated that the Chief and the Masses are in relationship that can be characterised as a mutual "legitimation", i.e., the Leader appeals to the masses with the message "I implement your will", and the masses (the Public, Nation or Class) do not exist without help of fetishistic representation of this authority by the Party or its Leader [Žižek, 1999: p. 147].

According to Max Weber's terminology, such type of power-holding relations belongs to the "charismatic" ones. He contrasted them both with traditional (belief in the sacred order of old traditions) and rational ones (belief in the indispensability of legal establishment in the form of bureaucratic institutions). In comparison with these types of power the charismatic reigning provides for personal devotion, going beyond the limits of the ordinary one, caused by the presence of sacred talent or valour of a certain person and trust in the order which was found or established by this person [Žižek, 1999: p. 569].

Therewith, it should be noted that not all varieties of political folklore are based on the archaic myth, i. e., political folklore is more extensive than its fabulous substrate. For example, a well-known Polish researcher of political folklore Wojciech Łysiak thinks that any form of "political extremum", being the most effective form of political folklore, appears as a basis for political folklore. Łysiak analyses folklorisation of such political figures as Władysław Gomułka, Joseph Stalin, Edward Gierek, general Wojciech Jaruzelski, Urban and Sivák in the Poles' consciousness. But it is not evident from his analysis that such folklo-

risation occurs on the Polish ground in the cradle of the archaic myth, which takes place in the lands of the former USSR.

One does not have to look far for examples of such archaic mythologisation of the Leader image. Like a Chief in archaic tribes the totalitarian Leader has a direct relation to the cosmic processes. Propagandistic verses of the Stalin epoch have left an interesting evidence of such "cosmologisation" of the Leader image:

> *The sun is shining brighter*
> *Now on the Earth,*
> *It might have visited Stalin*
> *In his Kremlin Palace!*

These lines may be interpreted as a variety of literary metaphor, while the statements of North Korean ideologists that the death of Kim Jong-il has evoked the sorrow of nature itself, that the Sun has diminished its light as a token of such grief, that a glacier near the Leader's native village has broken up and a stork which untimely flew to Korea to share this cosmic sorrow has died of cold are far from being figures of speech, but are sincere beliefs of collective consciousness. When adducing such examples, we practically approach the problem of folktale model of Being and politicians as characters of the above-mentioned type of narrative. First of all, the matter concerns functions of the Dragon Fighter Hero and Trickster as two major types of such characters, which are often united into one. Thus, a Leader / Chief and politician in general within the framework of mythological coordinates turns into the "actor" in a twofold sense of the word — the "actor" as a figure and the "actor" as a hypocrite of political theatre, who reincarnates into his role.

As early as the mid-1990's Levon Abrahamian, the Russian researcher who had written a rather scandalous article "Lenin as a Trickster" [Abrahamian, 2005: p. 68–88] discussed very successfully the mythological-folklorical model of Being. He noted in this article that in the post-Soviet Russia a myth becomes "political reality", which gives birth to special "mythological leaders". In the author's opinion, these periods coincide as a rule with the epochs of revolutions, "Time of Troubles", transition periods, etc. On the basis of these observations we can indicate the necessity of founding such scientific discipline as a "political folkloristics", or "study of political polklore", which would investigate *functions, roles* and mythological *images*. With the help of these images politicians try to "build themselves" into mythological *narratives* which are encoded in the collective memory of a society's members.

In other words, the above discipline would consider the actual political struggle as a struggle of "fictional antagonists"; it would see in this struggle an endless movie where a Hero gains a victory over Monsters, gets treasures protected by ghosts and monsters (power, material resources, virtual "people's welfare", or happiness for future generations may play the role of such treasures). For example, one of the most popular characters of the theatre of political folklore, as we mentioned before, is Trickster, whose the most general characteristic is a certain "medium position on the scale", i.e., he is ambivalent, he "commits both good and evil deeds", embodying "polar properties of twin brothers" [Berezkin, 2007: p. 285]. Elements of a carnival and buffoonery may be an outward trait of his behaviour, though it is not necessary. Taking into consideration the fact that his

Twin may be presented by a "folkloric fool", a true Trickster need not correspond these clichés. (A figure of Nikita Khrushchev may serve as an example of the "folkloric fool". However, he was not able to become a true Trickster; case in point is only in his image in the collective consciousness).

Thus, the basic sign of a Trickster is rather the aim at *a trick* (that follows from etymology) than availability of exterior attributes, but the trick should be successful. Hence it should be noted that **trickster is a successful character, his failures are, as a rule, temporary and fleeting!** A classic example of a trickster-politician is the figure of Lenin, and we completely agree with Levon Abrahamian in this case. Elements of behaviour typical of a trickster are also observed in the figure of Stalin, whose image (despite the widespread idea) is not totally deprived of the scenario of "political tricktership"; it is distinguished by carnival features, that is clearly defined in the works by Vladimir Kormer [Kormer, 2009: p. 125]. However, Stalin extends considerably the mythological component of his own image, pretending to the role of the "magician-in-chief" who is able to transform reality in accordance with his Plan. When clarifying this idea, a contemporary researcher Michail Weiskopf states that Stalin also aspired to exercise control over natural phenomena. The example of such socio-natural phenomenon was the "record harvest" that also could be achieved (within social imagination) thanks to magic abilities of the leader-tzar. This theme was developed by J. Frazer in his classical works.

Stalin's treatment of his political opponents (or "enemies of the people") is an interesting aspect of entire cosmologisation of social consciousness. The author (M.Weiskopf) interprets them in the light of symbols present in the agrarian calendar. There he notes, in particular: "Taken at an angle of the symbols related to an agrarian calendar, his (Stalin's) battles with opposition as if illustrate the fight between Spring and Winter, frequently described in folklore and represented respectively as cheerful youth and senility crawling in the dusk" [Weiskopf, 2002: p. 327]. Agrarian motifs also come to light in other mythologised interpretations of social phenomena assuming really grotesque forms in today's comprehension. For example, how can one analyse such a phenomenon as "the kulaks", using such a symbolism? That is as follows: "As is the custom, the chthonic evil spirit wakes up in spring, together with all the nature. At the beginning of 1928 Stalin announces that 'the kulak' sprouts out of soil like all seeds" [Weiskopf, 2002: p. 340].

The above-mentioned agrarian mythology, or "vegetative forms of the perception of life" appears in the main as a projections not only to negative social phenomena (that is "enemies of the people") but also to the life of society as a whole: "Basically, life in the Soviet Union represents some kind of continuous circulation of cadres which rise from the earth and, passing through their sacral concentration, come back to its depths in order to give place to their improved successors" [Weiskopf, 2002: p. 341].

The theme of total mythologisation of social consciousness and political life in Stalin's epoch is rather interesting, but we cannot devote so much attention to it. Before passing on to illustrations of similar processes in Ukraine let us note that the further Soviet and Russian history is also rich in mythological components, although deprived of its total and all-embracing character. As it was previously mentioned, Nikita Khrushchev tried to reproduce the features typical of a

trickster. Later they were successfully inherited by Boris Yeltsin. The image of Belarusian leader Aleksandr Lukashenko has undoubtedly such features (they were indicated by a Polish researcher Jan Prokopiuk in terms of a wider context of the folklorisation of this image) [Prokopiuk, 2001; p. 37–47]. The current president of Russia Vladimir Putin, in the framework of the Russian eschatological myth, has assumed the role of the Dragon Fighter Hero, who is fighting nowadays with the chthonic forces personified by the United States, Ukrainian fascists, "Jews-Banderaists", etc. Thus, the example of Russia clearly demonstrates how dangerous can be the total mythologisation of social consciousness and what catastrophic consequences can it lead to. But the current Russian reality is rather a separate theme, that is why we return to Ukrainian realias.

In my opinion, the fictitious plot about Power in Ukraine started from the movement "Ukraine without Kuchma" and rested upon the following mythologemes:

1. Myth about theft. This myth started its life in the USSR in the last years of "perestroika" (restructuring) period and obtained the name of the "lumpen myth about Power" (this term was first proposed by O.V. Chernyshov and supported by S.Yu. Nekliudov, a well-known specialist in the study of folklore). The matter concerns, first of all, the theft of the material welfare from population; the Authorities (Power) and bureaucracy as its visible embodiment appear in the role of thieves. Taking into consideration the precondition of universality of this mythologeme in all the territory of the former USSR, we can say that the Opposition project in Ukraine was exclusively based on this myth, transformed into the thesis about the "gangsters' power". This thesis enjoyed a great success during the presidential campaign of 2004.

2. Myth about a "false Tzar" and the future Dragon Fighter Hero. In addition to the myth about theft, collective consciousness fed on the myth about the Rescuer who gives back the stolen welfare, as it is in the narratives about the Hero. Evidently, they bore in mind not only a purely "material" aspect of the stolen welfare but also its symbolic aspects. In particular, there was a motif of the "stolen country" as a Bride stolen by the false Groom, that is the "gangsters' Power" as Koshchei, the lord of "the Dark Kingdom".

Leonid Kuchma was an ideal figure for the role of such Koshchei (I repeat that we rather say about the character of the social mythological narrative than about the real politician). The movement "Ukraine without Kuchma" is the best evidence of such folklorisation of the socio-political life, thinking about social renovation in the symbols of the cosmic-calendar cycle of nature. Thus, in the framework of such thinking protest actions coincide with the rites of banishment of Winter and invitation of Spring. Similar actions took place in the situation of so-called "public trial" on Kuchma during Shrovetide, when a straw man which personified Kuchma was burnt like it was in the rite of burning the straw figure symbolising Death / Winter.

3. Eschatological myth and folk utopia about the advent of the "Kingdom of Good". At last, the messianic expectations could not help but rest on the eschatological myth about the final duel with the Forces of Evil and transition to the Kingdom of Good and Justice, to the mythological Golden Age. In the con-

text of this eschatological expectation collective consciousness waited for the advent of the Fairytale Hero who would perform his Dragon-Fighting mission. These expectations were "materialised" in the figure of Victor Yushchenko (however, a short time later he demonstrated absolute discordance with this role). But in the period of Maidan-2004 he could manage this role, while Yulia Tymoshenko played the part of a "smart Bride", abandoning the role of the Virgin Warrior (Jeanne d'Arc).

In the above context, we can interpret "Maidan-2004" as Utopia of the realised "Golden Age", as celebration of experiencing "communitas" state and carnival "millenarian liberation" where the anti-structural, absurd origin was contrasted with seriousness of the Structure, which was demonstrated in classical works by Victor Turner [Turner, 1983]. Millenarian symbolism of the Maidan reveals itself in the fact that the latter was congregated almost ***unexpectedly*** and social transformation was ***instantaneous*** (which corresponds completely to the typological characteristics of millenarian consciousness presented by Igor Kon, a well-known researcher of the millenarian myth). This instantaneous transition from the "aeon of Evil" to the "aeon of Good" was favoured to a certain extent by collective messianic expectations, their projections to the figure of V. Yushchenko. Such moods have made to perceive all the events as a Miracle granted by Higher Forces (this peculiarity was also noted in I. Kon's typology, as a ***miraculousness*** of the "communitas" state).

Besides the general "mythological frame" of social thinking in Ukraine of that period and Maidan-2004 as its highest manifestation, there were also concrete, real figures which acted in Ukraine; collective consciousness identified them with mythological characters. Yulia Tymoshenko, who had several mythological masks-images, was the brightest among these figures. But Trickster, which could simply take the image of the Dragon Fighter Hero under certain conditions, was undoubtedly a dominating one. (We have already pointed out that "authentic" fictional Trickster sometimes performs this function). Just this feature makes it possible to compare Yulia Tymoshenko of that period to Lenin, as her faultfinders did it.

For example, realisation of the fact that no laws work in history determines the hate of any Trickster against "twaddle" and propagation of the "cult of action". Just so, Tymoshenko advocated Lenin's principle "Let us engage in a scuffle, and we shall see when the time comes", propagated a necessity to start something immediately and always "seize an opportunity" (Lenin said "The 24th is too early, but the 26th will be late", and Tymoshenko's permanent refrain is "Everything is being decided today, something must be done"). They both also had an ability for "dialectical combination of the incompatible", e.g., combination of the "right" and the "left" in Tymoshenko's party project and accentuating one or another component depending upon demands of the time. For example, she announced: "We are centre-leftists!" but a bit later her party was integrated into centre-rightist and conservative European People's Party. We can give lots of examples of such behaviour which is typical of a trickster, but lack of place does not give us such an opportunity.

Note only that besides the above-mentioned attributes of a political trickster, his essential feature is the so-called "Kulturträgermission", or aim at "chang-

ing the world" and realising the "utopia of justice". In this context Tymoshenko's interest in problematics of justice, being rather of almost cosmic than of institutional character, is significant. Thus, in the context of this "distributive utopia", Tymoshenko's slogan "Justice exists, and it is worth fighting for" looks rather natural. (It is known that Tymoshenko's appeal to address the problem of justice was qualified by politologists as a manifestation of populism. But one can make such conclusions only if ignoring the mythological component of the "Tymoshenko's project" and how it is comprehended in collective consciousness). However, while allowing for the trickster "nucleus" of her image as a ***people's politician,*** who acts without regard for conventional rules and, using some tricks, solves instantaneously and miraculously all social problems, the above-mentioned populism acquires absolutely other symbolic attributes.

Conclusions

I have very briefly described some mythological and folktale aspects of policy in Ukraine and, partially, in Russia. What conclusions can we make in the light of this (too incomplete) analysis and our initial thesis that the folktale model of Being and such political practices mainly take place in authoritarian and totalitarian systems or in the so-called "transition societies", that is in those ones where social and legal institutions do not work; thus, all social hopes and expectations are entrusted to the mythological projects and mythologised political figures? First of all, the fact that the example of present-day Russia, where the violent mythologisation of the image of Putin and all Russian policy occurs, unambiguously confirms our thesis. Here we can also add as an example the figure of Aleksandr Lukashenko who, as previously noted, remains not only the last dictator in Europe but also the last Trickster in the post-Soviet space. So, we can emphasise once more that true democratisation is impossible without de-mythologisation of collective and political consciousness, and I agree in this respect with Polish researcher Joanna Lepperiada who considers political folklorisation as "a threat to democracy" anyway [Lepperiada, 2006: p. 58–72].

And how can we evaluate political processes in Ukraine, i. e., in the country where the second Maidan has happened, in the country that dreams of integration into European Union? From our viewpoint, these processes lead towards the successive de-mythologisation of its political field and, despite all the complications, we can estimate them rather positively. In our opinion, these processes began during the rule of Viktor Yanukovych who was elected due to the chronic tiredness of millenarian illusions and mass disappointment in the first Maidan. He favoured to a great extent the de-mythologisation of social consciousness himself, because he had built an overtly criminalised system without any "clearance" for mythologised ideas, since everything was absolutely clear.

The imprisonment of Yulia Tymoshenko has shown that her former image of Trickster / the Dragon Fighter Hero and Mother-Patroness underwent essential transformations, since the blatant injustice of her punishment did not cause a new Maidan where at least 2–3 thousand people might have congregated. This fact meant not only and not so much a disappointment in her figure as the process of de-mythologisation of the foundations of social consciousness. As a result of these processes, we can note that the second Maidan was deprived of any features

of mythological millenarian holiday, but looked like a revolt aimed at the removal of Yanukovych from power. In other words, Maidan-2014 was more "technologic" and severe in character, which was confirmed by numerous victims among protest participants.

It is significant that politicians which came to power after Maidan, in contrast to Yushchenko and Tymoshenko of 2004, began acting in already de-mythologised field. None of them was identified with the folktale character, there were no messianic expectations entrusted to any of them, and discontent with some of them did not reach the level of ideas about current rulers as representatives of any cosmic or universal Evil. Similarly, there were no mythologised ideas concerning leaders of the opposition which, as we remember, stood on the rostrum and controlled the process. The ideas about the Dragon Fighter Hero were not projected to none of them, even to Volodymyr Klychko, who, though not for a long time, embodied expectations of Maidan participants as a charismatic leader, but has not managed to play this role.

The return of Yulia Tymoshenko, who went to Maidan immediately after her release from prison, was also significant. This return was not triumphal, her speech was frequently interrupted, it was evident that the feedback, which she personally expected, has failed. It was as a result of de-mythologisation of social consciousness, as we stated before. Strictly following the logic of this process, Tymoshenko did not appear as a Trickster, or fictitious Hero-Liberator, or Mother-Patroness but as a politician who had suffered unfairly from the system. And that is all. One should understand only in this sense that her time (or the time of "folktale policy") is up. The new times have come, and their tendencies are to be comprehended.

The significance of the above-described processes can be traced using the example of the war with Russian aggressors and local separatists in the East of Ukraine, which may be interpreted not only as a war of political projects, but also as an opposition of two "models of Being": eschatological model ("Russian World" and "the Sacred War with the West"), which is characteristic of folktales, and de-mythologised one (in its framework the war waged by Ukrainian Army for independence is rough and pragmatic in character, being deprived of connotations of "the last duel"). The availability of such model may be confirmed with metaphors used by the ATO (Anti-Terrorist Operation) participants to identify themselves. For example, the self-name "cyborgs" invented by defenders of Donetsk airport is generally known. Obviously, this name is borrowed from mass-media semantics or Hollywood blockbusters and has no concern with the archaic symbolism of fairy tales.

Moreover, such names have certainly ironical connotations, therefore they are close to the "common sense". Such a nickname as "the Bloody Pastor", which was "awarded" to Oleksandr Turchynov, a former acting President of Ukraine and the current Secretary of the National Security and Defence Council, is also the sign of ironical distancing. It is characteristic that Turchynov plays up to this ironical self-name with pleasure, which is is also a sign of deconstruction of folktale socio-political myth in the Ukrainian political space.

Surely, political reality of Ukraine is much more complicated than, for example, in Poland, where collective consciousness was not so much permeated with archaic archetypes, that is why the process of its de-mythologisation occurred

relatively quickly. But in my opinion this process is irreversible and serves as proof of the fact that the Ukrainian nation is maturing inwardly, getting rid of the infantile complexes of "sovok"[1] and Post-Soviet Man and moving towards the European future.

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[1] "Sovok" is a term in post-Soviet slang derived from the word "Soviet". It is a sarcastic and critical reference to people with an ideology that was widely promoted by the socialist governments of the Eastern bloc.