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SELECTED CONTEXTS OF THE CONTEMPORARY IMAGINARIUM OF EUROPE. METAMORPHOSES AND ACTIVATIONS OF POLITICAL IMAGES AND MYTHS

This article reflects on contemporary images and myths of Europe as well as on those that accompanied European political discourse, or funded it. The choice of specific elements of the imaginarium is dictated by their rank and their political and social impact, as well as their links with the recent and current political and social reality (the Cold War period, the transformation years in Central and Eastern Europe, the ongoing migration crisis). The author considers the sources, transformations and activation of political myths and the specificity of political stories and structures, as well as the political and social functions that they perform. The significant motif of this article is related to the thought of Hans Blumenberg. The work on political myth is linked with the 'socio-political' need for significance and understanding of the processes, phenomena and events taking place in the social and political domain.

Keywords: myth, political myth, work on myth, image, map, imaginarium of the political sphere, social imaginarium, European myths, Europe.

MARIANNE IN A HEADSCARF

These considerations can begin with a significant image which, as *pars pro toto*, represents the mythical narrative behind it. In 1985, the French magazine *La Figaro* placed a bust of Marianne veiled with an Islamic headscarf on its front page. This was accompanied

by an article containing false demographic data, based on which it was suggested that in thirty years there would be a Muslim majority in France. Opponents of this political message also referred to the national symbol of France, but emphasising its multi-ethnic character. Part of this pictorial conversion was an exhibition entitled *Mariannes d'aujourd'hui: Hommage des femmes des cités à la République*. It was a collection of thirteen oversized colour photographs of young women suspended across the facade of the Assemblée Nationale. Ten of these women were of Arab or Sub-Saharan ethnic origin, and all of them wore variations of the Phrygian cap (an icon of the French Republic also worn by Marianne on the 1792 seal). The photographs were accompanied by short texts in which each woman explains what Marianne, as figurehead of the Republic and icon of French womanhood, means to her.¹ It is worth noting that the national icon of France from 1792 (when Marianne replaced the image of the monarch on the new coin of the Republic) to modern times underwent visual and semantic metamorphoses reflecting the political and social changes taking place, as well as political and social demands. Since 1793, Marianne has been a secular goddess, a 'figure of freedom' – her image is a counterbalance to the image of the Mother of God, as well as a tool to fight Catholicism. Delacroix concretises the image of freedom in the image of the people's revolutionary, Marianne; Daumier's painting *La République* shows her in an athletic, androgynous form, although at the same time as a stable mother who nurtures and feeds her child-citizens. During the nineteenth century – with the following revolutions, *coups d'état*, the Paris Commune, the Dreyfus affair and the wave of anti-Semitism – Marianne's image experienced various metamorphoses reflecting social and political antagonisms. After World War II, it became a symbol of national unity. During de Gaulle's rule, her image was marginalised, but at the same time Marianne was increasingly identified with women's political awareness and participation, and her image penetrated the world of pop culture. Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, Marianne is no longer a white French woman (previously her image was modelled on the images of Brigitte Bardot and Catherine Deneuve, among others), but a woman of North African origin – this image of her symbolises a modern, pluralistic, multicultural France, in which five million French citizens

¹ S.K. Mitra, L. König, *Icon-ising National Identity: France and India in Comparative Perspective*, „National Identities” 2013, vol. 15, no. 4, p. 6.

are Muslim.² In 2009, the National Front used Marianne's image in its rhetoric against the European Union.

As has been said, the image of Marianne in the headscarf implies the mythical foundations from which it grew, and which it represents. In the interpretation of C. Bottici and A. Kühner, we are dealing here with a significant exemplification of the political myth: that of the 'clash of civilisations'.³ As they note, the symbol of the political axiology of the Republic (freedom from domination, secularism, anti-traditionalism) clashes with the political-cultural image, in which the covering of a woman's head is a sign of subordination. The narrative of the 'clash of civilisations', as is well known, was introduced by Samuel Huntington in the 1990s. Bottici and Kühner point out: 'Particularly after the terrorist attacks that took place on 11 September 2001 in New York and Washington and those that followed in Europe, this narrative became one of the most powerful lenses through which many people across the globe looked and felt about the state of the world.'⁴ The political myth of the 'clash of civilisations' condenses existing discourses. Following Edward Said's view, they can be described as 'Orientalist' discourses:

Books and articles are regularly published on Islam and the Arabs that represent absolutely no change over the virulent anti-Islamic polemics of the Middle Ages and Renaissance. For no other ethnic or religious group is it true that virtually everything can be written or said about it. The 1975 course guide put out by Columbia College undergraduates said about the Arabic course that every other word in the language had to do with violence, and that the Arab mind as 'reflected' in the language was unremittingly bombastic. A recent article (...) in Harper's magazine was even more slanderous and racist, arguing that Arabs are basically murderers and that the violence and deceit are carried in the Arab genes.⁵

This is how the image of the East and the Islamic world is created. At the same time, it is necessary to consider the various 'occidental' discourses that create and perpetuate a specific image of the Western world:

The view of the West in Occidentalism is like the worst aspects of its counterpart, Orientalism, which strips its human targets of their humanity.

² *Ibidem*, p. 6.

³ See: C. Bottici, A. Kühner, *Between Psychoanalysis and Political Philosophy: Towards a Critical Theory of Political Myth*, „Critical Horizons“ 2012, vol. 13, no. 1.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 105.

⁵ E.W. Said, *Orientalism*, Vintage Books, New York 1979, p. 287.

Some Orientalist prejudices made non-West people seem less than fully adult human beings; they had the minds of children, and could thus be treated as lesser breeds. Occidentalism is at least as reductive; its bigotry simply turns the Orientalism view upside down. To diminish an entire society or a civilisation to a mass of soulless, decadent, money-grubbing, rootless, unfeeling parasites is a form of intellectual destruction.⁶

The myth of the 'clash of civilisations' persists through various pictorial, visual and popular culture artefacts (comics, films, paintings referring to medieval crusades, etc.) As Christopher G. Flood points out, 'we are constantly exposed to static or mobile visual images which accompany narrative texts or represent scenes from myths'.⁷ It should also be noted that the mythical image has an impact not only on the conscious and transparent structures of social life, but above all it organises the field of 'social unconsciousness' (I use the formulation proposed by Bottici and Kühner here⁸).

The image of Marianne in a headscarf clearly shows the power of the political and social imaginarium. J. J. Wunenburger, presenting the concept of the imaginarium of the political sphere, notes that socio-political life becomes understandable only when we discover the power of symbolic and mythical languages that complement or refute the rational language supposedly governing institutions and manifestations of public life.⁹ This observation harmonises with Bronisław Baczko's position on the key role of imagination in creating socio-political 'ideas-images'. 'Since the dawn of time – as Baczko writes – societies have constantly created global imaginations of themselves, that is, ideas-images, with the help of which they give themselves an identity, perceive their internal divisions, legitimise their power and develop models that are a pattern for their members to follow (...) These are images of social reality, not simple reflections of it.¹⁰

The images, as will be shown below, constantly show their presence and their power in the political and social domain but ultimately, at the most basic level, they relate to the anthropological dimension. An assumption is made here that can be called the 'anthropology of the

⁶ I. Buruma, A. Margalit, *Occidentalism. The West in the Eyes of Its Enemies*, Penguin Press, New York 2004, p. 10.

⁷ Ch.G. Flood, *Political Myth. A Theoretical Introduction*, Routledge, London – New York, 2013, p. 10.

⁸ See: C. Bottici, A. Kühner, *Between Psychoanalysis...*, pp. 101–105.

⁹ See: J.J. Wunenburger, *Filozofia obrazów*, trans. T. Stróżyński, słowo/obraz terytoria, Gdańsk 2011, p. 220.

¹⁰ B. Baczko, *Wyobrażenia społeczne. Szkice z nadziei i pamięci zbiorowej*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 1994, p. 14.

image' in reference to Hans Belting's proposal:¹¹ it is impossible to define the human being without considering its imaginal (and pictorial) activity (which, in the social and political domain, can bring about various effects). María Noel Lapoujade, the author of *Homo Imaginans*, writes: 'The human species is an imaginary species. There is a power of imagination in it. It is the force that determines individual, social, natural life; a force pushing both to creation (art, science, technology) and destruction (gallows, guillotine, crematorium furnaces, wars, the Holocaust).'¹² Another anthropological point of reference that is of great importance when it comes to the issue of myths (including political myths) is Alasdair MacIntyre's characterisation of human being as a 'story-telling animal'. He argues:

I can only answer the question 'What am I to do?' if I can answer the prior question 'Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?'. We enter human society, that is, with one or more imputed characters – roles into which we have been drafted – and we have to learn what they are in order to be able to understand how others respond to us and how our responses to them are apt to be construed. It is through hearing stories about wicked stepmothers, lost children, good but misguided kings, wolves that suckle twin boys, youngest sons who receive no inheritance but must make their own way in the world and eldest sons who waste their inheritance on riotous living and go into exile to live with the swine, that children learn or mislearn both what a child and what a parent is, what the cast of characters may be in the drama into which they have been born and what the ways of the world are (...) Hence there is no way to give us an understanding of any society, including our own, except through the stock of stories which constitute its initial dramatic resources. Mythology, in its original sense, is at the heart of things.¹³

As Anna Siewierska-Chmaj notes, the stories that build our identity, both individually and socially, do not have to be only political myths, understood as an element of political actions, but can also be certain images or symbols spontaneously appearing in people's behaviours.¹⁴ These stories form a 'social imaginarium' (C. Taylor¹⁵), and their carriers can be individual and collective memory, literature, symbolic and cultural orders present in the family, school or popular culture.

¹¹ See: H. Belting, *An Anthropology of Images: Picture, Medium, Body*, trans. T. Dunlop, Princeton University Press, Princeton & Oxford 2011.

¹² M.N. Lapoujade, *Homo Imaginans II*, Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla, México 2017, p. 17.

¹³ A. MacIntyre, *After virtue. A study in Moral Theory*, University of Notre Dame Press, Indiana 2007, p. 216.

¹⁴ See: A. Siewierska-Chmaj, *Mity w polityce. Funkcje i mechanizmy aktualizacji*, Aspra-JR, Warszawa 2016.

¹⁵ See: C. Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, Duke University Press, Durham 2004.

Various stories can be activated as political myths (which will be discussed later in the context of the so-called work on political myth).

The proposed reflection will proceed in this text – one could say – in a two-dimensional way. On the one hand, it will be a reflection on contemporary images and myths of Europe, and on the other hand, on the images and myths that accompanied European political discourses or even funded them. These considerations will be selective, and it should be emphasised that the choice of specific elements of the imaginarium was dictated by their rank and strength of political and social impact, as well as significant links with the recent and current political and social reality (the period of the Cold War, the years of transformation in Central and Eastern Europe, the ongoing migration crisis). In the context of these considerations, which, owing to the vastness of the theoretical-problem field, would be more likely to have the character of ‘thematic cross-sections and probes’ (Baczko¹⁶), there will also be motifs regarding the sources, transformations and activation of political myths and the specificity of political stories and structures, as well as the political and social functions that they perform. The subject of reflection will also be a certain group of images that make up the imaginarium of Europe and their political ‘rhetoric’ (in other words, this is a study of *what images say* – that is, the ways in which they seem to speak for themselves by persuading, telling stories, or describing¹⁷).

THE WORK AND METAMORPHOSIS OF A MYTHICAL TALE

One can start here with an obvious statement that myths are primarily stories with their heroes and a specifically organised plot. The presence (creation, repetition and modification) of these stories, as already signalled, plays a significant, not to say crucial role in both the anthropological and socio-political fields. According to Hans Blumenberg’s proposal (‘work on myth’¹⁸), to which Bottici and Kühner also refer, the myth appears primarily as ‘a process of elaboration of the possible variants of a story’.¹⁹

¹⁶ B. Baczko, *Światła utopii*, tłum. W. Dłuski, Wydawnictwo IFIS, Warszawa 2016, p. 16.

¹⁷ W.J.T. Mitchell, *Iconology. Image, Text, Ideology*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago – London 1986, p. 2.

¹⁸ See: H. Blumenberg, *Work on Myth*, trans. R.M. Wallance, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass. – London 1985.

¹⁹ C. Bottici, A. Kühner, *Between Psychoanalysis...*, p. 97.

Staying with Blumenberg's thought for a moment, it is worth exposing the anthropological dimension and meaning of mythical stories. Blumenberg writes about the 'absolutism of reality' regarding the natural state (*status naturalis*) when the human being must confront a hostile and 'nameless' reality (this state can be compared to the Hobbesian state of nature²⁰). It is the myths and images produced and reproduced by a human that make it possible to overcome the destructive sense of uncertainty and fear, and to constitute order, which – thanks to the 'work on myth' – becomes 'our' world. Blumenberg writes:²¹

What is archaic is the fear not so much of what one does not yet know as merely of what one is not acquainted with. As something one is not acquainted with, it is nameless; as something nameless it cannot be conjured up or appealed to or magically attacked (...). So the earliest and not the least reliable form of familiarity with the world is to find names for what is undefined. Only then and on the strength of that can a story be told about it.

Myths as stories are existential and meaningful points of support for our 'being-in-the-world'; they establish a hierarchy of meanings and allow us to connect our actions into a certain significant whole. The primordial 'archaicism', however, is an ever-present possibility hidden under the tame, transparent and orderly surface of social, political and cultural life. This is a permanent challenge for man, and requires his increased invention – here the work on myth is of key importance. Blumenberg argues:

Myths are stories that are distinguished by a high degree of constancy in their narrative core and by an equally pronounced capacity for marginal variation. These two characteristics make myths transmissible by tradition. Their constancy produces the attraction of recognition them in artistic or ritual representation as well (as in recital), and their variability produces the attraction of trying out new and personal means of presenting them. It is the relationship of theme and variations, whose attractiveness for both composers and listeners is familiar from music. So myths are not like 'holy text', which cannot be altered by one iota.²²

'Work on myth' is therefore a modification of the narrative core of a given story in connection with the anthropological disposition to construct meanings and the need to be rooted in an unfamiliar reality.

²⁰ See: R.M. Wallace, *Translator's Introduction*, in: H. Blumenberg, *Work on Myth*, p. VX.

²¹ H. Blumenberg, *Work on Myth*, p. 34–35.

²² *Ibidem*, p. 34.

Myths, as Bottici and Kühner argue, are the stories that respond to the human need for significance. Their narrative core does not have a fixed form but is modified according to the individual and social contexts. '[I]n each context the same narrative pattern is re-appropriated by and responds to different drives, needs and exigencies. A narrative core either produces a variant that fulfils this task in the new context or it ceases to be a myth and becomes a simple narrative.'²³

As Henry Tudor points out, political myth, like other forms of mythical narratives, 'explains the circumstances of these to whom it is addressed. It renders their experience more coherent; it helps them understand the world in which they live'.²⁴ Political myth, as a 'different interpretation of the ongoing History',²⁵ is a narrative that organises political-social experiences in a certain way:

1. mythical perception is saturated with values, emotions and gives a sense of participation;

2. the reality presented in mythical terms is a black and white world – the world of struggling powers, dramatic events, but a tame, intimate world;

3. this black and white world is built through antithetical and antagonistic images (sacrum and profane, chaos and order, light and darkness, good and evil; friend and enemy, peace and war, 'before' and 'after', virtue and misdeed);

4. political myths use 'narrative techniques' (Hayden White²⁶) generating different images of the same events and thus different ways of interpreting them;

5. myth, explaining reality, creates certain 'intellectual rigors, makes it understood by everyone in the same way';²⁷

6. myths are not only the means of inspiring political-social conformity, but they can also produce voluntaristic energy, as is evident in the context of the thoughts of Machiavelli, Sorel and Gramsci;

7. myths can therefore seek to 'freeze' society within one privileged story (myth, as Barthes writes, transforms History into Nature²⁸), but

²³ Por. C. Bottici, A. Kühner, *Between...*, p. 97.

²⁴ H. Tudor, *Political Myth*, Praeger, New York 1972, p. 139.

²⁵ A. Siewierska-Chmaj, *Mit polityczny jako fundament ideologii. Próba analizy*, in: *Przekazy polityki*, Wydawnictwo Wyższej Szkoły Informatyki i Zarządzania, Kraków – Rzeszów – Zamość 2009, p. 15.

²⁶ See: H. White, *The Narrativization of Real Events*, in: W.J.T. Mitchell, *On Narrative*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1981.

²⁷ S. Filipowicz, *Mit i spektakl władzy*, PWN, Warszawa 1988, p. 58.

²⁸ Roland Barthes points out: 'In passing from history to nature, myth acts economically: it abolishes the complexity of human acts; it gives them the simplicity of essences, it does

also offer themselves as stories calling for change (destruction and/or creation);

8. the mythopolical narrative is created by specific political and social groups, although it wants to be seen as only a true story, in which, as if in a mirror, the whole society is viewed (it is a story about its past, present and possible or even inevitable, future);

9. political myths often function in the dense form of several images or even a single image. It is a moment of synecdoche:²⁹ a linguistic image, a painting image, a song, a film or an advertisement crystallises, represents and implies (as a kind of 'nodal point') all the work on political myth that stands behind them;

10. what makes a story a political myth is neither its claim to truth nor its content – the most important is the functional criterion, i.e. whether the story responds to the political-social need for significance.

SOME EXAMPLES

The activation of political myths takes place primarily in moments of political and social crisis, rapid changes, political transformations or revolutions. As Bottici and Kühner point out, 'A political myth is the work on a common narrative that grants significance to the political conditions and experiences of a social group'.³⁰

Raoul Girardet, in his famous study *Mythes et Mythologies Politiques*, concludes that 'the political turmoil during the last two centuries of European history was followed by surprisingly strong mythological exuberance'.³¹ This statement should be illustrated with a few examples from the domain of the European imaginarium. Ken Jowitt, describing the fragmented and shattered identity of the so-called 'post-communist' countries, claims that it resembles the

away with all dialectics, with any going back behind what is immediately visible; it organizes a world which is without contradictions because it is without depth, a world wide open and wallowing in the evident, it establishes a blissful clarity: things appear to mean something by themselves'. R. Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. A. Lavers, Vintage, London 1993, p. 143.

²⁹ As Cassirer writes, „all mythical thinking is governed and permeated by this principle', but, as he stresses, 'the part does not merely represent the whole, or the specimen its class, they are identical with the totality to which they belong'. E. Cassirer, *Language and Myth*, trans. S. Langer, Dover Publications, New York 1946, p. 92.

³⁰ C. Bottici, A. Kühner, *Between Psychoanalysis...*, p. 98.

³¹ Milošević K., Stojadinović M., *Understanding for Contemporary Political Myth Through the Prism of National Identity*, „Facta Universitatis Series: Philosophy, Sociology, Psychology and History" 2012, vol. 11, no. 1, p. 79.

'void and without form world' from *Genesis*.³² A time when the old political and social axioms organised around divisions (East–West; people's democracy–bourgeois democracy; socialism–capitalism) is also a period in which reality shows its archaic, formless face. It is the time of work on political myth. The biblical Yahweh sets boundaries for an amorphous and empty world and gives names to beings in the act of creation. Similarly, post-Leninist politics must bring an answer to a world that will be increasingly hostile, confusing and threatening, and which will face the challenge of establishing new boundaries and giving 'names' to new beings. One attempt to deal with the chaos of the post-Leninist world is the idea of the 'end of history' proposed by Fukuyama. In post-communist countries, the narrative of 'return to normality' quite quickly turned out to be a mythical story that was not strong or universal enough to tame and assimilate into the economic, social and cultural novelty. The post-communist landscape begins to be populated by various myths of a compensatory nature. Thanks to them the world becomes a more 'our' world, although, as it turns out, this construction is based on stigmatisation, exclusion or even a call for physical annihilation.³³ It can be seen in the example of the political myths of the post-Yugoslavian nations. Katarina Milošević and Miša Stojadinović – by using Raoul Girardet's approach to the four main myths (myth of the Saviour; the myth of the Golden Era; the myth of unity) – describe Serbian national political myths.³⁴

Mythopolical activation, as has been said, occurs during periods of transformation, crisis and revolution. A significant element of the work on political myth is then the 'inventing' of the Enemy, which consists of an imaginal, pictorial and semantic intervention. It is particularly evident in the European imaginary of revolutionary movements and events, totalitarian ideologies and the context of ethnic conflicts. The dualistic character of the imaginarium – the images of Night and Day, Darkness and Brightness, Darkness and

³² See: K. Jowitt, *New World Disorder. The Leninist Extinction*, University of California Press, Berkeley 1992, p. 264.

³³ See: V. Tismăneanu, *Fantasies of Salvation: Democracy, Nationalism, and Myth in Post-Communist Europe*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ 2009.

³⁴ The myth of conspiracy is the revelation of a global conspiracy against Serbia; 2. The myth of the Savior – the Serbian Savior combines the 'fighting spirit', state wisdom, firmness, perseverance and many other qualities, including erotic attractiveness. 3. The myth of the 'Golden Age' – this story in the Serbian interpretation says that Serbia is experiencing its period of the 'Golden Age' right now and should be a role model for the whole world. 4. The myth of unity – the mythical unity of the Serbs dates back to the Battle of Kosovo Field, in which they fought against the Ottoman Empire. K. Milošević, M. Stojadinović, *Understanding...*, pp. 85–86.

Light, Death and Resurrection – in the era of the French Revolution reflected the division of society into two antagonistic camps, that is, the people and social groups belonging to the *ancien régime*. Images of the Enemy (internal or external) triggered collective passions, constituted a kind of ‘revolutionary fuel’, and legitimised and sanctified terror.³⁵ Both the figure of Napoleon – this illustrious exemplification of the ‘myth of the Saviour’ – and the myth of *La Grande Nation* eliminate differences within the whole of society from common enemies. The myth of Mussolini – the leader and Saviour, the initiator of the permanent revolution – identifies decadent forces undermining the order of the fascist state. As Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi writes, the reign of the fascist narrative implied various mythical, symbolic and ritual forms that, in a chronological sense, preceded and formed the doctrine of the movement.³⁶ Stalinism is immunised by mythical images of the leader that refer to Christian-Orthodox symbolism (the icon of Stalin transmits the truth of Marxism-Leninism) and properly created collective memory (references to Ivan the Terrible and Peter the Great). Political-social dichotomies manifest themselves in a mythical-religious matrix: they are hagiographic images of the leader, the Bolshevik and the proletarian, and demonological images of the ‘pest’ (left-wing extremists, Trotskyists, kulaks, etc.).³⁷

Examples related to the work on political myth can be given a lot more. It is worth remembering the Polish contexts (the myth of Piłsudski), French (the myth of Joanna d’Arc), or German (the myth of Barbarossa). In contemporary Europe, political myths and images are activated and organised as socio-political imaginaries, especially in the face of the migration crisis and war.

IMAGES AND MYTHS OF WESTERN EUROPE

The mythical foundation turns out to be something very significant for European identity. The construction of a European identity – the identity of a united Europe – cannot take place without the political myths accompanying the ideas of prosperity, harmony, cooperation, peace and justice (which were at the root of European integration).

³⁵ See: K. Morawski, *Imagaria polityczności. Obraz i hegemonia*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, Wrocław 2019, pp. 108–146.

³⁶ See: S. Falasca-Zamponi, *Fascist Spectacle: The Aesthetics of Power in Mussolini’s Italy*, University of California Press, Berkeley 1997.

³⁷ K. Morawski, *Imagaria...*, p. 146.

The work on political myth can be revealed through multiple images. C. Bottici takes up the problem of mythopolical images that are a carrier and support of European identity through illustrations, reproductions of frescoes, posters and caricatures. According to Bottici, various images of Western Europe turn out to be crucial in the work on political myths shaping the identity of this part of the continent.³⁸ It could be an image of Europe as a beautiful Phoenician princess abducted and 'raped by a bull', or an image of Europe sitting on a bull that totters between different political options and attitudes (which is supposed to reflect the inconsistency of the European Union member states regarding their involvement in the armed conflict in Iraq). It could be an image of a Europe that is 'sensual and prosperous' or of Europe as a 'promised land'. However, Europe as a 'land flowing with milk and honey' turns out to be this way only for a few, as one of the German cartoons from 1994 shows. Europe as a 'fortress' becomes a symbol of politics that, striving to weaken internal borders, strengthens external borders at the same time.

Benoît Challand, in his analysis of French, German and Italian history textbooks that appeared between 1950 and 2005, shows, as he writes, 'narrative sequences' supporting European identity and the perception of Europe as a specific economic, political and cultural project (these sequences were surrounded by maps, paintings, or posters).³⁹ The presence of the 'external Others' appeared in these sequences in different ways. In German textbooks it ran from 'one to many Others'. It was related to geopolitical, social and cultural changes taking place from the division of Europe into two antagonistic camps (the 'communist Other' in textbooks from 1961) to advanced European integration (the 'multiplicity of Others' associated with 'world challenges', i.e. poverty, fundamentalism, terrorism and globalisation, in textbooks from 2003). In turn, French textbooks about the twentieth century from the 1960s emphasised the need to build a European identity, anti-American and anti-communist, as a 'third way' between the two superpowers. In contrast to the West German narrative, the European project, especially in its economic dimension, has often been criticised, which was associated with the strong position of the French Communist Party. At the end of the 1990s, the tension around

³⁸ See: C. Bottici, *Myths of Europe. A Theoretical Approach*, „Journal of Educational Media, Memory, and Society” 2009, vol. 2, no. 2.

³⁹ See: B. Challand, *European Identity and External Others in History Textbooks (1950–2005)*, „Journal of Educational Media, Memory, and Society”, Autumn 2009, vol. 1, no. 2.

the communist Other was decreasing, although the anti-communist (or anti-totalitarian) narrative was visible in the perspective of the hegemony of European liberal democracy. Italian discourse on the threat to the European project coexisted with both anti-communist and anti-capitalist narration (which, as in France, was associated with a significant Communist Party presence in official structures and institutions and the sphere of civil society). In this sense, European identity could not be constituted only in opposition to the 'communist Other', but also in opposition to American imperialism. In the latest Italian textbooks, Europe is presented as a cultural identity whose roots go back to antiquity and the Middle Ages. This way of identifying Europe as a cultural community generates new enemies in the form of Islamic culture.

THE POWER OF IMAGES AND MYTHS: THE CONTEXTS OF CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

As has already been said, the time of transformation of post-communist societies intensified the work on political myth. Of course, political images and myths had already solidified and accompanied the official communist ideology. It is enough to mention the myth of *Übermensch*, which functioned both in folk mythology and among high-ranking members of the Bolshevik Party. The first object of worship was, of course, Lenin. After his death, so-called 'Lenin corners' were created in factories, offices and villages – small chapels designed according to the party's guidelines. The myth of Stalin was based on elements taken from folk-Christian symbolism. Soviet fairy tale writers reached for political purposes to the world of magic and demons. In the end, it was no longer the dynamics of the economic base so much as Stalin himself – functioning as a phantasmatic image and myth – that became the organising centre that for the social structure, and had qualities close to divine omnipotence. A particular example of the power of images is Romania. First, attention is drawn to mass mobilisations, which were organised according to a strict pattern (the number of mobilised, the number of portraits at the rally, the content of 'spontaneously' chanted slogans, control of the *Securitate*). Interestingly, Romanian cinematography also used erotic images to reinforce the ideological message, although nudity, eroticism and sexuality were to be marginalised in socialist society according to

Ceaușescu's directions.⁴⁰ In the 1980s, the tube of official propaganda was a nationwide television station broadcasting a two-hour programme in the evening devoted entirely to the ruling Ceaușescu couple.

Political myths come with all their force in the post-communist period, which could be explained in the light of the 'ideological inadequacy' of emerging liberalism. The export of Western European liberal ideological and economic ideas concerned countries that lacked strong liberal political traditions. According to Tadeusz Biernat, 'ideological inadequacy' to the real needs of society is an important mythogenic factor'.⁴¹ A political myth thus bridges the gap between an ideology and society (although it can represent and reinforce an ideology). The 'ideological inadequacy' of liberalism implemented in post-communist countries thus generated political myths questioning liberal solutions. Political myths, often identified with 'populist excesses', certainly showed the fragility of Eastern European liberalism.

According to Tismăneanu, the myth of ethnic nationalism is the strongest alternative to liberalism in Eastern Europe. Often political mythologies are characterised by syncretism. They combine the longing for social equality typical of communist society with the authoritarian or even fascist tradition, while rejecting the democratic order, parliamentary rule, minority rights, women's rights, etc. Myths thus glorify the cultural and social values of both the communist and pre-communist periods; both those customarily identified with the worldview of the left wing (social, not cultural) and the right wing (for example, in the sphere of historical politics, morality, national axiology). The myth of a great Russia binds narratives referring to Tsar Nicholas II and Stalinist policy.

In post-communist societies, traditional identities and ideological certainties have disintegrated, and new ones have not become obvious and common ways of social identification. In a situation of 'ideological inadequacy', syncretic mythologies and images were meant to unite a fragmented society. With the growing erosion of the communist system, the ruling elites exposed national symbolism and began to use the image of the nation as a homogeneous community in the face of a common enemy. In Serbia and Romania, social and political

⁴⁰ See: C. Turcuș, *On Socialist Eroticism. Building and Subverting Propaganda in Romanian Cinema Before 1989*, in: *Bodies in Between. Framing Corporeality in Cinema and Visual Culture*, Special Issue of „Ekphrasis – Images, Cinema, Theory, Media” 2014, vol. 12, no. 2, pp. 60–69.

⁴¹ T. Biernat, *Mit polityczny*, PWN, Warszawa 1989.

images referring to the slogan 'the homeland is in danger' were used. The imaginarium of post-communist nations as 'communities' is created by a range of mythical or mythogenic motifs: the Golden Age, sacrifice, betrayal and conspiracy, salvation and the coming of the millennium, charismatic saviours or a state of ultimate happiness.

MAPS AND MYTHS

The theme of 'Europe on the map'⁴² could be framed not only in geographical terms but also in the context of the myths and images associated with it. It can be said that the dividing lines drawn on the maps involve the sphere of the political imaginarium, which – as can be seen from the examples of maps of the ancient world – expresses the supremacy of one geopolitical and cultural circle over others. Maps, as a form of symbolic representation of space, therefore have a strong mythopolitical dimension. It seems that this can be captured by using Edward Said's concept of 'imagined geography'. In its light, space is saturated with permanent traces of (imperial) history, hidden hierarchies, constructions of the Other as the Enemy, projections of images and counter-images (East and West).⁴³

Bottici and Challand write: 'Back in Antiquity, travelling Greeks drew a circle and placed themselves in a very centre. Their maps belonged to the insignia of power.'⁴⁴ It is worth noting that Herodotus uses the terms 'European' and 'Europe' for the first time in relation to geographical location. From this point on, Europe begins to be seen as an 'opposite land' (*antipéran*). At the same time, the concept of a separate 'continent' is born. It is related to the identification based on the category of 'difference', which is characteristic of classical Greek geography and anthropology. In the *Histories* by Herodotus and the *Persians* by Aeschylus, Europe merges with Greece and Asia with the 'barbarian' world of the Persians. In the light of Thucydides' work, the basis for the identification of Europeanness becomes modernity understood as maritime expansion, the development of trade, technical progress, urbanisation and the permanence of relations. Modernity, understood in this way, functions only in the Greek world, while the

⁴² See: T. V von Gaal, *Jak stworzyć europejską narrację. Dom Historii Europejskiej – przygotowania*, in: *Historia świadomości europejskiej*, wybór i oprac. A. Arjakovsky, tłum. A. Kozielska, Wydawnictwo Znak, Kraków 2019.

⁴³ See: B. Ashcroft, P. Ahluwalia, *Edward Said*, Routledge, London – New York 2001, pp. 61–62.

⁴⁴ C. Bottici, B. Challand, *Introduction*, p. 6.

culture and civilisation of the Orient are still in the shackles of what is anachronistic. Greek modernity initiates the universalist mission of Hellenism, guiding the conquests of Alexander the Great, which – not without significance – were accompanied by a mythical discourse about the journey of Cadmus and Europe.⁴⁵

In the centuries of early Christianity T-maps reflected the theocentric and eschatological order. In these maps, Europe, Asia and Africa were located around the Mediterranean Sea, and their central point was Jerusalem. In the following centuries, the centre of the map moved north. The maps then depicted Europe as a large continent while showing other areas as small. At the same time, the world expanded thanks to the expeditions of northern European explorers. Here, Europe became the lady who kept court to receive the gifts of the coloured continents, a myth that became deeply rooted in minds of the Europeans. The ruthlessness with which merchants, explorers and missionaries subjugated other peoples, and with which European powers divided the world among themselves appears in illustrations and in the colouring maps.⁴⁶ Maps from the Cold War period – to take another historical example – showed the world and Europe from a highly antagonistic perspective. At the same time, they were accompanied by political myths taking the form of propaganda images of a highly polarized, Manichean reality. In the Cold War context, political myths favoured the conspiracy-saviour formula. In its emotional impact, this type of political imaginarium generated strong, negative feelings and emotions such as fear, distrust, hatred, ‘collective paranoia’ and ultimately radical acts of violence and exclusion.⁴⁷ Currently, we cannot ignore alternative historical and mythopolitical perspectives, as well as alternative maps of the world. As Said points out, ‘today writers and scholars from the formerly colonised world have imposed their diverse histories on, have mapped their local geographies in, the great canonical texts of the European centre’.⁴⁸

Maps are not neutral representations – ‘they always reflect a *choice* of what is worth representing’.⁴⁹ This choice often implies a mythical dimension:

⁴⁵ M.F. Baslez, *Od Europy do Europy – od mitu do historii*, in: *Historia świadomości...*, pp. 87–88.

⁴⁶ C. Bottici, B. Calland, *Introduction*, p. 6.

⁴⁷ A. Fătu-Tutoveanu, *Cold War Media Mythologies: Conspiracy Myth, „Red Scare” and Blacklisting in The Front*, „Caietele Echinox” 2015, vol. 28, *Media Mythologies*, p. 227.

⁴⁸ E.W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, Vintage Books, New York 1994, p. 53.

⁴⁹ C. Bottici, B. Calland, *Introduction*, p. 2.

Maps represent how reality should be. This renders them the natural allies of myths (...) Maps of Europe have to large extent often been supported by a mythical image in the stories they tell. The mythical elaboration of Europe has gone hand in hand with continual work of its spatial representation (...). The images that myths and maps convey remain in the reservoir of collective imaginary, ready to be mobilized when new occasions arise.⁵⁰

WHAT STORY?

In this article, an attempt is made to recognise both selected myths and images of Europe, as well as such elements of imaginarium that support or even constitute European political discourses. The work on political myth appeared as a response to the 'socio-political' need for significance and understanding of the processes, phenomena or events taking place in the social and political domain. The changes taking place in Europe have entailed and are entailing metamorphoses of mythical stories. Therefore, it would be possible to undertake a further reflection on the transformations of mythical stories, not only in European contexts but also in the conditions of globalised reality. One could show their multidimensionality, multicultural character and mutual penetration, as well as the presence of myths in popular culture.

As Anna Siewierska-Chmaj writes, 'even if it is impossible to understand the world through the prism of mythology, this image in a distorting mirror is still easier to accept than the rational arguments of political experts. Even if the answers are too simplistic or even off-topic, they give us a substitute for feeling that we know something, we understand something.'⁵¹ That is probably why the political myth is a permanent and inalienable dimension of politics as such. Myths and images have created and create a European identity; they show and constitute political enemies, cement a political community and are a call to change the *status quo*. Myths and images, as Stanisław Filipowicz puts it, 'create the infrastructure of power'.⁵² The presence of myths and work on political myth can also be traced in symbolic representations of space (codes, signs, maps).

Political mythology is often a reaction to abrupt change or even to defeat or failure. At the same time, political myth 'is almost always an idea of a better world, of unfulfilled potential, and as such fits into

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 3.

⁵¹ A. Siewierska-Chmaj, *Mit polityczny...* p. 58.

⁵² S. Filipowicz, *Mit...*, p. 138.

the desire of most people to improve their fate'.⁵³ In 2012, Zygmunt Bauman wrote about Europe as an 'unfinished adventure'. Europe is something that must be created and built. Perhaps it is an assignment that never ends, a perspective forever unattainable.⁵⁴ These words take on a special meaning nowadays, especially in the context of the migration crisis and the ongoing war in Ukraine. One could ask what kind of story Europeans need and what kind of story about Europe would allow us to face the growing sense of uncertainty and fear.

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⁵³ A. Siewierska-Chmaj, *Mit polityczny...*, p. 59.

⁵⁴ See: Z. Bauman, *Europe: An Unfinished Adventure*, Polity Press, Cambridge 2004.

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