

MEDIA MYTH INFLUENCE ON «OTHER» CULTURE FORMATION IN RUSSIAN SOCIETY (IN THE CONTEXT OF EXTERNAL MIGRATION)

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The topic of this article is the effect of mass media on the formation of public attitude towards migrants, becoming the image of the Other human being of different ethnicity and religion], and opportunities for integration of migrants into Russian society. In the modern-day Russian society the face of the Other, i.e. the Migrant of different culture, has been creating by mass media permanently for the last decades in conjunction to the existing economical and sociocultural problems. Mass media myths define public opinion towards migrants reflecting on after-effects (e.g. ideas of losing Russia's resources and cultural identity) of their arrival to Russia. Such media myths cause in public opinion negative emotions and intolerance towards certain ethnicities. These myths prevent migrants from integration into the Russian society and alienate them into the ethnic enclaves. The article reviews the artificial media myths and public barriers obstructing the dialogue between indigenous population and migrants.

Key words: mass-media, migration, ethnical culture, enclave.

Modern-day Russia goes through the social and institutional transformations that are connected to the process of global migration. Russian society endures an unstable migration situation, determined by uncontrollable waves of illegal migration and unsolved problems of access to the quality labor-market, to the institutions of education and public health services for legal migrants. The intolerance, tension and ethnic conflicts between indigenous population and incoming people take place in many regions of Russia. The incoming migrants are spontaneously forming the ethnic enclaves. There are minimal conditions of life and high risk of deviant behavior. At the same time the attitude of the native population towards migrants is socioculturally limited due to the historical traditions, deep-rooted habits, empirical views, and religious identifications that had formed in Russian society. But most of all, this attitude is determined by *the way* mass media represent migrants and how they explain the necessity of migrants' being in the Russian regions. Worth noting, that media don't represent migration *objectively* having mythological and simulational basis instead.

The media products are differentiated, aimed at different strata and target audiences, aimed at creating symbols and images of the social facts rather than covering the reality. The problem of the modern-day Russian society (also shared by the other societies that have hit the post-modernity) is that created media products are alienated from the end users, making the media knowledge independent from the social, culture and the possibilities of reflection on it. J-F. Lyotard pointed out that the postmodern era would see an extreme *exteriorization* of the knowledge in regard to a "knower", no matter what step of cognition he or she occupies [4]. In our context *exteriorization (alienation) of the knowledge* is one of the key features of the societies that have reached the postmodern condition.

Alienated from the recipients information still has its own power, *autopoetic* might and is able to mould the public opinion, stereotypes and impressions, existing in the Russian society, despite being of a mythological descent. By the means of mythological creation, stable social typology of migrants is being formulated and consolidated in the social consciousness. In our opinion the formation of the migrants' images is a simulational process, using J. Baudrillard's categories [1]. This process isn't founded on objective analyses or scientific researches but instead on shallow empirical material and isolated communicational experience with the migrants. Thus in the modern-day Russian society the image of the Other – the Migrant of a different culture – is being created. Many economical and sociocultural problems are connected to these symbolical images of the migrants. The understanding of the face of the Other, a person of another culture and religion, depends mostly on the narration and submitting of media images of the migrants. Negative

perception of the migrants is being constructed mostly because of the specific information found on them in both national and local media.

Russian mass media create mainly the *negative myths* about migrants and *construct* their social images stressing the criminal background. We may mark out the following media myths on migrants existing in Russia. We should once again point out that these myths form the Face of the Other, culturally different from the locals and whose expectations contradict the ones of the indigenes.

The first myth. Migration is closely connected to the *ethnic basis*, i.e. all of the migrants are of a *different ethnicity* and represent *other* culture, religion, customs etc. than those of the indigenous population. Media interprets the different ethnicity as the root of all evil for the local people, but the facts are that the groups of migrants don't differ that much from the multinational Russian regions.

The thesis of migrant's different ethnicity is represented as an apriori-based phenomenon. An overstatement of this phenomenon generates the diversity of phobias and fears of the migration processes in Russia. Despite the fact that national economy is in need of the new labor resources from neighboring countries, from Central Asia and Caucasian regions, the anti-migrants emotions, xenophobia and ethnic conflicts has seen a major spread in almost all Russian regions.

To some extent this tension is created by the weak involvement of migrants into the sociocultural life of an accepting country. Sometimes incoming people don't feel the need and willingness to follow the accepted standards, to recognize the cultural and religious traditions of the indigenous population, so they sometimes contradict the rooted habits and ethical behavior. Frequently migrants don't know the cultural and economic specific of an accepting country and the language. Unfortunately, sometimes they also don't strive for this knowledge.

However, the Russian social practices also don't encourage the integration of the newcomers into the new society and keep them out from successful adaptation into other psychological and economic conditions. The indigenous population divides the representatives of the new ethnic groups (diasporas), which are being formed under the pressure of social, economic, political, juridical, psychological, and media factors from the representatives of the same ethnic groups, that have historically been deep-rooted on the different territories of the Russian Federation. The specific perception of such complex phenomenon as an external migration by native population and municipal authorities is determined by antagonistic definitions created by mass media. The necessity of migrants are discussed in two polar notions – either as “evil” or as “welfare, blessing” for Russia.

Consequently, the identification of ethnicity proceeds as opposed to another ethnos, “*Us and Them*”. This archaic opposition is closely connected to an excessive prevalence of forms and ideas of nationalism. Many problems in social, political, and economical spheres are considered in the context of mentioned contraposition of ethnic cultures. Such identification of ethnos doesn't only take place in scientific literature, but in ethnic consciousness as well. Russian migration policy is also based on the aforementioned notion “Us and Them” and suffers from influence of public opinion.

It is important, that in this case a universal idea may originate inside the ethnos stating that a specific nation is better than the other ones, that it is opposed to a different ethnos “for a reason”, as its culture, traditions, the way of life are more “correct”. A whole complex of economic, political and social-psychological factors can be conditionally designated as “selfness”. The idea of “Us” can be within the limits of the norm distinguishing as healthy by a group or ethnic consciousness. But under certain circumstances it can get features of exaggerated “selfness” as opposed to “Them”, while “our” ethnos can be overemphasized and positioned as the best one. In this case, it becomes possible that ethnos is used for political purposes by politicians, businessmen, clan groupings, and quasireligious figures. A danger of transition to the forms of extreme nationalism lies in the overwhelming or excessive use of ideas of ethnic nationalism when excessive reference to ethnocultural uniqueness forces the ethnos to position itself as the best one, to oppose itself to other,

ostensibly “lower” nations. Here, a way out can be found in the values and norms of life of all nations that are defined today as tolerant and open-minded.

Generally speaking, in Russia the phobia of migrants has acquired the features of xenophobia because “Them” are all who had recently settled at the territories of historically native people. The fact of “alien” is mostly a provocative factor of social conflicts between indigenous and migrants but not ethnical or religious ones. In other words, the stereotype of notions’ merging is effective when the understanding of the other ethnicity is mixed with the understanding of the newcomers. The prevalence of the idea “Us and Them” in ethnocultural relationships is a basis for constructing media myths that are widespread on the empirical level.

The second myth. Media construct the images of enemies fixing upon *defined ethnicity* of the migrants. Under certain circumstances this myth can end up with xenophobia directed at defined ethnicities. Such constructs point out *which* migrants are closer to “Us” i.e. are “friends”, and which are “Them” i.e. “enemies”. In modern-day Russia the extremely negative attitude towards the migrants from North Caucasus and Middle Asia is being formed. According to the data collected by Yuri Levada Analytical Center [2] and Politech research center [3] (in 2013) «extremely negative attitude» was registered towards migrants originating from North Caucasus – Dagestanis, Chechens, Cherkess etc. and towards Transcaucasians – Azerbaijanis, Armenians, Georgians. Respondents were a bit more tolerant (app. 4-6%) towards the migrants originating from Middle Asia (Uzbeks, Tajiks, Kirghiz) and Chinese. Worth noting that xenophobia is more apparent among inhabitants of large megalopolises.

Sociological researches show that youth is more liable to the nationalistic ideas as they don't feel themselves economically and legally guarded by the state. Their search for an enemy is successful as their uncertainty and Angst (*German*) are being fed by media broadcasting constructed images of migrants as corrupted and thus economically successful. Lacking real-world physical contact with the other ethnics, youth is more liable to the external pressure, exerted by Internet and media. This liability to xenophobia, migrantophobia and extreme forms of nationalism is alarming, yet being unnoticed by the establishment.

The third myth is forming disloyal public opinion towards the migrants in perspective of the comprehension of economic consequences of migrants’ coming to the Russian regions. Media are developing the ideas of *resource loss*, i.e. the loss of economic and social competitiveness on the labor markets stemming from consolidated migrants (usually from North Caucasus). At the same time the case of “resource loss” ideas (migrants take the jobs, make profit out of indigenes, are connected to the criminals etc.) may easily be demolished with bare facts, statistical knowledge and logic at hand. E.g. it was revealed that the most positive attitude towards the migrants is registered among respondents living in the regions with high density of migrants [6]. We may suppose that the prolonged contact with the migrants demolishes the described myth.

Fourth media myth. The possibility of *loss of cultural identity* by the indigenes. This myth empowers the aversion to the migrants from Asia (Tajiks, Uzbeks, Turkmen, Kirghiz, Chinese). While the danger of resource loss is not in place, complex constructed sociocultural factors come in handy. This myth is much harder to debate as it’s irrational at its core and is based not only upon media messages or political declarations but also upon shallow personal experience, including irritation from migrants, their lack of knowledge of vernaculars, their foreign everyday culture, and so on. The myth of cultural identity loss settles on the danger of migrants forcing out the indigenes and setting their own ethnic enclaves, cultivating social norms alien to the Russian traditions, speaking foreign languages without knowing the Russian language and getting involved into ethnic gangs.

Valuable philosophical ideas allowing us to analyze socio-psychological conditions of the migrants and accepting communities may be found in phenomenology, in Alfred Schütz’ works in particular. While reviewing the media myth of “identity loss” because of the Asian migrants, we should mark out Alfred Schütz’ work “The Homecomer”, as it seems to be pretty up-to-date in the context of researching the migration processes and forming of an image of the Other in a new social environment. The Austrian thinker points out a definition of “home”, extremely important to those

who are migrating constantly for some reasons. “Home” is a count zero, null point for everything, that serves as a departing point for every human being trying to find his or hers own place in the world and as a place to return [8]. Schütz connects “home” notion to the “Us and Them” categories that are of a special interest to us concerning the problematic of migrating ethnical communities and their cultural identifications. At the unstable conditions of the constant migrations, the definitions of “home” and “Us” obtain a special worth for an individual. Interestingly, it’s almost impossible to classify the aforementioned definitions as they’re gather emotions, affects and existential experience that prevent from logical and methodological description.

Speaking from the phenomenological point of view, media myth of *cultural loss* becomes a phenomenon, more suitable to the *migrants* and not to the indigenes. A migrant leaves his home, tearing the established social continuum and maybe even leaving it for good. No one can guarantee that he will ever return home, and if he does, he will be “the Other”. The accepting “the homecomer” society will also differ from its state some time ago, so there’s a possibility “the homecomer” will be alienated from home once again. A. Schütz writes: those left the home “enters a new social dimension, not covered by the coordinates used as a referential scheme at home. He doesn’t experience living social connections that were present at home. As a result of breaching the unity of space and time with his own social group, the field of interpretation available to him converges rapidly” [8].

The social functions of one system (“home” system) may not stand against the accepting system, where a person finds himself or herself after leaving the “home”. That’s what happens in the Russian society. A new sociocultural environment perceives the newcomers as bearers of the alien norms incomparable to the “home”, as ideal of external “Them-group”, alien by default. Such perception is getting fed by the ever-present media adapting it to the current migration status. So it turns out that entire groups of migrants get into the impossible situation of not integrating culturally into the accepting society. It is also possible that a migrant may lose his own identity if he decides to return home. As A. Schütz put it, “not only Homeland will show its alien face to the homecomer, but he himself will seem strange to those awaiting” [8]. The “home” gets totally destroyed.

The fifth myth being supported by the society and even formalized by the official use is a phantom – “*a Transcaucasian national*” and “*Asian*”. We should mention that “*a Transcaucasian national*” supposes some “ethnic mix” from migrants coming from Russia-controlled Caucasus-region, Transcaucasians as well as Caucasians long ago assimilated into the Russian society. “*Asian*” supposes the Tajiks, Turkish, Uzbeks, Chinese and others. This image later transmits upon every person anthropologically or culturally different from the general body of the indigenes: from illegal migrants to ethnic minorities living in Russia and being Russian citizens (e.g. the Kalmyks, Buryats). The problem is that the Russian culture and social sciences haven’t yet elaborated the scientific category validating equality of ethnic and civic identity. The aforementioned constructs “*a Transcaucasian national*” and “*Asian*” at first sight equalize two human values – the one of citizenship and the one of ethnical. Such categories, recording the interdependence of ethnic and civic identities, exist in many megalopolises of the USA and Western Europe, but in Moscow and other Russian cities another categorization is in play, a simulative one – “*a Transcaucasian national*” replaces partially ethnic and civic identities.

Such constructed mythoreality, for example, allows Azerbaijani people to position themselves as Moskovites, because there is no other adequate category in the every-day communicative space. Sociological studies showed that Azerbaijani migrants in order to integrate into the Moscow society were more likely to associate themselves with “*Transcaucasian nationals*” than those their compatriots not going to integrate. Those who were ready for integration were also less likely to identify themselves as “*Azerbaijani*”. We have reviewed the myths emerging on real migration problems found in Russia. These myths prevent migrants from integration into the new society and alienate them into the ethnic enclaves. Impossibility (and, sometimes, reluctance) to integrate starts *the process of enclavization*. Enclaves demonstrate forms of self-organization and dwelling of people of one ethnicity following the standards of their own culture inside other sociocultural environment. Enclaves are not identical to ethnical Diasporas and are formed depending on the aims

of the arriving migrants.

Oriented at settling at a new place, migrants try to enter the new society, adapt socially and psychologically, perceive the culture and traditions of the peoples new to them. Migrants integrate and broaden their living-space culturally, economically, politically and religiously. There's *another kind of migrants arriving for a temporary stay* having an economic goal. In this case their motivation is exactly opposite. Having only economic goals in mind (to earn some money) they don't accept the sociocultural surroundings that should accept them. Accepting society is a temporary economical resource for them. It's more convenient and psychologically comfortable for them to live in enclaves, i.e. locally limited ethnical settlements. Exactly the image of the second group (irrespective of its ethnicity) lays ground to the construction of the images of hostile migrants and supporting the stereotypes of the newcomers being dangerous towards the indigenes. Such media images of the migrants cause in mass perception negative emotions, intolerance towards some ethnic groups, xenophobia and form the destructive type of an ethnic migrant connected either to illegal structures or to shadow economy. Objectively, media contribute to converting the aversion to migrants from the trivial level of empirical stereotypes typical to the receiving society to the higher level holding enough reasons to justify the motives of the Other [7]. Sure there are in-depth publications that reflect on those complex problems of migration. Nevertheless absolutization of negative effects that migration has, all the way to drug trafficking, terrorism and threat to national security, takes place and adds to the mass xenophobic hysteria.

Recent Biryulevo (October, 2013) and Pushkino (May, 2014) events in Moscow showed that Russian people are under powerful of such kind of media myths. The destructive actions of native people in Biryulevo, and earlier events on the Manezhnaya square (Moscow, 2010), and ethnic conflicts in Sagra (July, 2011), Pugachev (July, 2013), and so on let me claim that the migration policy in Russia has to be revised as soon as possible. Mass media must create positive images of migrants based on a realistic analysis and economic needs of the country in labor migrants. This is an important aim of Russian federal and local regional policy because mass media impact on social life and individual consciousness a lot.

In conclusion we would like to once again point out that our perception of the world is being vastly influenced by the media, blurring the visions of reality. Having an impressive level of trust and power on people, Russian media creates negative images of the migrants preventing them from integrating into the welcoming society. So we reviewed the "menaces" supposedly coming from the ethnic migrants, myths, laying at the base of the created stereotypes of the aggressive aliens (e.g. "Transcaucasian national"). Such stereotypes are getting caught up by the pop culture, mass media and getting transmitted further into the media space. The constant retranslation of the simulational unreal facts, images, myths, connected to the migrants coming to the Russian regions, causes anger, aversion, intolerance towards the migrants, strengthens the anxiety and alarmism in the accepting society.

There are cultural, social and psychological distances among the migrants and the indigenes. And we don't see any steps to resolve aforementioned contradictions. The lack of an effective migration politics doesn't allow the destruction of the negative myths causing the social tension and aversion to the newcomers legally coming to the country. We think it's a task for academics to involve everyone into the discussion of the current state of affairs. The problems with the integration of legal migrants into the new society can be solved in Russia through civilized ways. Government and social organization have to ruin the social and cultural barriers between native people and indigenes. The international experience can be appropriate for our state in the process of creation of civil nation. The society itself should be interested in creating such a sociocultural basis not dividing people into «Us» and «Them», «better» or «worse», when even the possibility of such media constructions vanishes, so the ethnic stratification becomes one day obsolete.

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