

## **FROM ARCHAIC TO MODERN (POLITICAL) MYTH: THE CAUSES, FUNCTIONS AND CONSEQUENCES**

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**Branislav Stevanović**

Faculty of Philosophy, Niš, Republic of Serbia  
E-mail: [stebranis@yahoo.com](mailto:stebranis@yahoo.com)

**Abstract.** *Due to its comprehensive but also creative character, myth was the dominant form of man's spirituality from early cultures, from which later on at least three basic spiritual human activities were derived: religion, philosophy (science) and art. Mythology tries to discard inexplicable and unsolvable issues, but cannot be reduced to satisfying the curiosity of either archaic or modern man. Mythical thinking is adequate in any creative situation (Eliade), while its crucial social function is in harmonizing the community, which prevents the state of chaos, doubt and pessimism. According to its nature, myth is deeply social, which is in particular visible in the political myth whose primary role is to stabilize and spiritually unite a political community. Myth is indestructible, since every authority uses both myths and symbols as constitutive parts of the capacity of governing a society. Moreover, myth can serve to progressive or regressive politics, where the latter comes from its primarily irrational and practical character. Therefore, in facing its own mythologized past, any democratic system, including that of Serbia, has to make a certain selection among its myths by discarding the nationalist mythology, in addition to the affirmation of those myths that symbolically found the, still feeble, Serbian democracy.*

**Key words:** *archaic myth, mythical features, spiritual unity, creative potential of myth, mundane religion, modern (artificially) political myth, social conditions of political myth, human life, Serbian political myth, Serbian nation.*

*Historical distance blurs grey areas and preserves only vibrant colors*  
(Maurice Diverger)

*A nation without myth is like a person with no memory*  
(Đuro Šušnjić)

#### 1. INTRODUCTION (ARCHAIC MYTH)

Etymologically, the term "myth" comes from the term "word", not any word, but "God's word" – namely, an authoritative statement about something which is revealed, declared or sacral. In addition (and that is the most important thing in myth), *mythos* is both the *sign* of a truth and the *truth* itself! Of course, this meaning of myth is in deep collision with not only common sense logic, but also "true" or academic logic (*logos*). In Ancient Greek culture and philosophy, which bestowed upon us those two opposed notions, "*logos*" is the sign whose purpose is to mediate the rational truth based on evidence. This, however, does not hold for *mythos*, which is historically older; in it, the word does not relate to a properly depicted factual state or law that has to be rationally elaborated – it rather is a divine address of man through which the very essence of the world appears.

That this is really so may be proved by calling upon Ancient Greek epics, whose poets were largely mythical. For example, Homer starts his *Iliad* and *Odyssey* by inviting the *muses* to begin singing. The invitation of the muses, who are also goddesses, is not a rhetoric means by which the poet wants to increase the prestige of his work, but represents the very core of mythic narration. Therefore, "it is not the poets who really talk in ancient mythic poetry, but goddesses, the daughters of Zeus and the titanic-woman Mnemosyne - the goddess of memory - to whom poets lend their human voice." (Đurić 1989, 43)

The beginning of myth is impregnated with fate in the objective power of language that does not differ from the rest of "reality": inside this myth, the *object* and its *meaning* are mutually intertwined and create an immediate unity. To be clear, myth also represents the act of *secession* from "the immediately given" but in the form of words, images and icons that do not possess any autonomous meaning, but authoritatively determine what really *is* or what *must be*. The myth does not know the delineation between the ideal and the real, or the difference between the image and the object, since it is guided by the principle of *identity*. The picture of an object does not represent this object only – it is the very object, too; the picture does not simply "represent" reality – it *is* reality. To put it in another way, the myth does not have the sphere of the ideal, because within it everything is "real".

It is visible in particular in the case of a *rite* – that is even older than myth: in archaic times the rite did not have the meaning of copying or representation: it was interwoven with reality and symbolized its inseparable part. As E. Kasirer pointed out, "the cult is in fact the tool by which man subordinates the world not only spiritually but also physically. The player in the mythical drama does not act in a theatre sketch or performance; on the contrary, the player *is* a god, *becomes* a god." (Kasirer 1985, 50) What happens in cults, therefore, is not an imitative representation of a reality, but the reality itself and its immediate realization-objectivation. "Goethe's Faust says appropriately: "*Im Anfang die Tat*" ("In the beginning, there was a deed"). "Deeds" were never invented, they were made; on the other side, thoughts are relatively late became man's discovery." (Jung 1996, 86-87) While modern man equipped with logical categories sees only the signs of an object, the mythical consciousness

(with basically mystical perception) sees the exact object in the sign; the sign is not separated from the object, but "possesses" the object and directly comprehends it.

Even in some modern cultures around the world, that still include certain pagan elements, people use sorcery and various "magical words" to "defend" themselves from drought, floods and other natural disasters. The mythical and magical power of language is particularly visible in case of personal names, because archaic man believes that the name of an individual and the individual himself create an inseparable unity. This kind of belief also occurs in the case of an image, or shadow. In the mythical sense, those two represent one's alter ego – what happens to them could happen to the particular man, too.

However, none of this means that mythical thought lacks the categories of "causation" and "result". Rather, mythical causality is different from that in science. In famous Hume's (D. Hume) critique of "causal judgment of science" (which warns that something that comes first does not automatically cause what comes second; or - "*post hoc* does not mean *propter hoc*"), E. Kasirer finds the root of all mythical understanding of the world. (Kasirer 1985, 56) Mythical thinking is "polysynthetic"; it consists of one indivisible entirety of perceptions with quite unstructured internal relations. While science and its empirical judgments want to establish a distinctive relationship between *certain* causes and *certain* results, mythical thinking "freely" chooses "causes", even where the question about the origin of the whole universe is posed. In myth, everything can be made out of anything, since every thing is connected with any other thing in time and space, especially through the metamorphosis of an individual shape of thing. In numerous mythologies that explain the beginning of the universe, the world originates in various fantastic ways – from the depth of the primeval sea, from a turtle or from lotus's flower, while people come from earth, rocks, trees or something else. For mythical representation, the image of a simple process and its explanation is enough.

Therefore, it is wrong to think that myth does not know of causality. Quite the contrary, it is essentially incapable of expressing the idea of "accidental" occurrence in itself. From the archaic point of view, disasters that happen on earth, that strike people or individuals are never casual – this actually testifies to a certain kind of hypertrophy of the causal "instinct", or of the need for causal and teleological explanation. Related to that understanding of causality is also one typical trait of mythical thinking expressed in the logical error known as *pars pro toto*. In a strongly empirical view, the whole results from its parts, while for mythical thinking the whole does not have parts – a part is simultaneously a totality as well, and acts as such.

Of course, one can enumerate the logical errors of "primitive logic" ad infinitum, but this approach risks missing that which is essential in mythical thought. As the broadest base of culture and historically the earliest form of collective consciousness, myth is not a primarily cognitive category and does not serve to conceal the truth. Criticism of myth from the point of view of epistemology and logic, actually represent how inadequate for the interpretation of myth the rationalistic approach can be. Archaic myth, as well as myth in itself, expresses the *totality of human existence* in its specific way, primarily by its strong reliance on the senses. In myth, we deal with both explanations and "illumination" of reality, with psychological defence of one's personality from uncertainty.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> K. Karenji said that "mythology explains itself but at the same time explain everything that exist, not because it was created to give an explanation, but because it also has the possibility to explain things." (Karenji 1973, 326)

From the prehistoric beginning, mythical thought has always been attached to the practical act, although it does not completely rely on it. It is the most comprehensive form of experiencing reality, since there is still no difference between a thought and a practical act, between mind and matter, between something irrational and something discursive, between the universal and the particular, between form and content, etc.<sup>2</sup> Mythical man is still not aware of his "self"; he has still not manage to confront himself to everything that exists – to that which ultimately by far overwhelms him. Consequently, he sees the whole reality in a different way from the modern, rational man. Sense perceptions are deeply rooted into the immature soul of a mythical man, and completely entrench in his cognitive capabilities.

Originally, myth encompassed all culture. It was so intertwined with everyday life that any form of cultural creativity did not exist alone, independently of it and its imperatives. Because of that, both the worst and the best in myth is expressed in its *totality*, namely, in its un-dividedness that includes entire stories, collective experience, and a certain way of life which is seen in concrete ritually-cultic acts and movements. Due to its syncretic and comprehensive nature, myth was a dominant form of the whole spirituality of man of early cultures, the promoter of moral and civilizing activity as well as a ritual tool – from which at least three basic and independent spiritual human activities were subsequently derived: (a) religion and faith, (b) science and philosophy, and (c) art and game. "On the one hand, myth mediates the dimension of *the Sacred*, declares one hardly comprehensive truth, but also exposes the dimension of *the Profane*, gives to people "the truth" that they can understand; finally: myth dresses both these truths, both *realities*, religious and mundane, heavenly and human, into the suit of poetic expression." (Petrović 1995, 117).<sup>3</sup> In a rich form, all of these dimensions of myth are present in the definition by Frankfort, who claims that - "myth is the form of poetry that transcends poetry by declaring one truth, a form of thinking that transcends thinking by wishing to reach the truth that it declares, myth is a form of action, ritual attitude that does not realize itself in the act, but has to be declared and pronounced in the poetic form of truth." (Frankfort 1967, 15).

The source of the power of mythic stories lies in their indestructible totality, in the nature of myth as a totality of man's relation toward reality. "It is important that there are no contradictions in intonations of mythic narration, in the way of mythic living and regards toward reality, that there are no divided and counteracted elements, nor any

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<sup>2</sup> Accordingly, B. Malinowsky noticed that myth "is not only the story that is telling, but the reality that is experienced." (Malinowski 1971, 93)

<sup>3</sup> By accepting the proposal that language is concealed, compendious expression of a "myth", S. Petrović traces the implication of three characteristic terms in Greek language that signify "the word", and those are: *mythos*, *logos* and *epos*. (1) *Mythos* – signifies an authoritative statement about "something that is revealed, declared or sacral", including the faith in power of that word, (2) *Logos* – means a truth which has to be received by reason – which requires valid evidence, argumentation and facts, (3) *Epos* – signifies "the noise of voice", in which the very form of proclamation is important, its dimension of beauty, more precisely – how something exposed itself - and that is a poetic dimension of language. Consequently, in the first case *mythos* represents a narration about a divine, *Sacred* being that can be only foreboded, revealed, promulgated, discovered, perceived in an intuitive way, but cannot be reached by intelligence; in the second case, *mythos* carries *Mundane* references, a truth that can be comprehended by the *mind*; in the third case *mythos* has the function of *epos* and carries an aesthetic dimension; namely, in the form of telling, prettiness and selected words it causes a strong feeling, like the experience of an artwork. (Petrović 1995, 117).

dismemberment." (Slavujević 1986, 18.) *Stricto sensu*, only stories about beginnings or about gods and their actions are true myths. (Đurić 1989, 33) As a story about the origin, or, perhaps, about "the origin of the origin", "the time before time", the truth of myth tends to be absolutely valid, since it is announced, undisputable, and relates to the first (and true) causes and principles of everything, including the "ultimate mystery of being". In its deepest basis, myth is a trans-historic story that speaks about the supreme reality, about the essence of the whole universe and the true meanings of its phenomena.

The original function of authentic myths, as "way-marks and big cryptograms of purport" (Matić 1984, 12), is to enable orientation inside the world by conceiving and evaluating things and phenomena in the whole reality. The very topics of original mythical narrations prove this convincingly: they do not speak about every day life but about crucial existential issues of man, his relationship with the world, about the sense of both reality and personal existence. In their picturesque way (fitted to the archaic man), mythical stories both show and "explain" to archaic man why he has experienced something and what he can expect from the future.

In his comprehensive definition of myth, M. Eliade claims that myth:

"(1) consists of the History of the Supernatural being's deeds; (2) that History is considered as completely *truthful* (since it refers to the reality) and *sacred* (because supernatural beings have made it); (3) myth always regards to the "creation", it tells how something started to exist, or how a certain way of life, institutions and way of work originated; consequently, myths create the beginning of every significant human act; by knowing the myth one can know "the source" of things – which one can also overpower and manipulate by one's free will; it is not about the "external", "abstract" cognition but about a cognition that is "experienced" through rituals, by solemn telling of stories or by performing the rite to whom it serves as a cause; (5) the purpose is that, in one way or another, myth has to be experienced so that everyone can be possessed by the sacred, devastating power of events that has to be evoked and lived again." (Eliade 1998, 16)

At the same time, archaic man's encounter with mythical powers has the primarily *practical*, activist importance. Mythical forces rarely work alone but almost always act with or against the particular man (for example, if he did something wrong and, consequently, suffers a "deserved" punishment). Under the irrational crust of myth, its deeper rational and intentional function of giving vital "worldview" or "orientation framework" is hidden. It is important, not for archaic people only but for people as such, to find some orientation in the world - which gives them acceptable explanation of today as well as certain signposts for the future. (From 1983, 83)

How important for a person it is to find an "orientation framework" is expressed in many historical examples - in which man often even physically jeopardized his life. As Đ. Šušnjić critically emphasized, "Every war is a religious war. It is always waged in the name of a faith, either sacred or mundane. The encounter of different gods through the history always began with discussion but ended in war: as if world powers with opposite nature always tested their strength." (Šušnjić 1997, 173) Mythical stories play a role of a keeper of a collective and individual destiny in the world that is much stronger than any person, in the conflict with the powers that overwhelm many times his possibilities of control. The myth does not keep anyone in doubt, but annihilates every uncertainty and eradicates all insecurity. Below the mantle of myth, man's existence is serene, since he knows what to do, what has to fight or pray for, and what he can expect.

Precisely for this reason, archaic myth cannot be learned, but *adopted* and *lived*, as the highest purpose and the biggest secret of all existence. Mythical perception of reality comes out of direct feeling of continuity of human and other life, as well as out of its links with the totality of existence. A myth speaks from the "essence of things", it gives an overview and announces the global purport of both the universe and human life. The myth understands itself as a god's word, inspiration, providence which purpose completely impregnates the man and determines the totality of the world and the life. "The truth" of myth oversteps any human boundaries, since it is superhuman, endless, "absolute truth". Its role is to give a sense to the world, to offer the positions and values that are moral, anthropological and specifically human.

According to its own structure, mythology tries to exclude inexplicable events and unsolvable issues, it explains the less understandable by means of the understandable, the unthinkable by the thinkable, the hardly solvable by the easily solvable. Therefore, it could not be reduced to satisfaction of primitive man's curiosity; its primary function is to harmonize the community and, consequently, to prevent the situation in which chaos, incoherence, doubt and apathy can appear. Meletinski thinks that the basic purpose of mythology is to transform chaos into cosmos, in which (the transformation process) cosmos includes axiological and ethical viewpoints from the very beginning. Because of that, myths and rituals always addresses man's individual mind in order to "adjust individual to society", to "transform his psychic energy into social benefit". In its nature, myth is deeply social, even socio-centric, since its valuable matrix "determines the interests of genus and tribe, of the city and the state." (Meletinski 1985, 171).

As we can see, one can discover many and complex layers and meanings in the laminar structure of myth. Unfortunately, we cannot discuss all of these layers in this text. We have to be satisfied with a very short accentuation of only a few basic traits of "mythical truth" - that were obtained in analyses of many classical and modern explorers of myth. According to those traits, it is clear that mythology is a very powerful product of human cultural life, in whose creation not so much rational, but much more irrational and value-based aspects of human (both collective and individual) mind participated. Thanks to mythology, archaic man got the possibility to perceive the world in widest proportions and emotional meanings –making possible the overall social communication and continuity of human evolution. The mythical notion of the world represents the most general basis of all human cultural (symbolic) capabilities that included, in embryo, *in nuce*, the aptitude of developing more complex symbolic forms that appeared in later phases of cultural evolution. Because of this and other characteristics and civilized performances that could not be discussed here in detail, mythology deserves recognition indeed.

However, if mythology always announces some divine "all-knowledge" thanks to which the very human life became worthy, an appeal of its "Sirens" must be incomprehensible to the majority of modern "Odysseys". Its incapability to discern the picture of things from things themselves, its closure of man into cyclic natural movements, its fixation to the "pre-beginnings" of the universe and unquestionable faith in overall meaningful connection within everything that exists - show that myth also hides very powerful conservative, even regressive spiritual potentials.

The notion of a deity that announces an absolute truth to the people and requests unconditional obedience is, for sure, something that belongs to the past, to which we

should not return. As M. Đurić said, "Within enclosed world of myth we are feeling quite uncomfortable, since inside myth every future occurrence is already decided by the very origin, since all human acts and intentions are previously predetermined by the eternity in the ulterior total purpose." (Đurić 1989, 54) Of course, there is no danger from some "total return" of myth onto the modern historical stage – in which every thought is almost obsessed by *reasons* and justification of any claim. Nevertheless, there are many important spheres of social and cultural life in which myths tenaciously renew themselves and continue to exist, without any possibility to disappear completely. One of them is a sphere of politics, whose significant domain is covered exactly by – political myth.

## 2. MODERN (POLITICAL) MYTH

Inside the general dialectic movement of human culture, the myth usually has the role of stabilizing and spiritual unifying of some political community. Mythologizing of historical events has the function of strengthening the internal cohesion of communities, thus preserving them from dismemberment and assimilation. By itself, this role does not have *a priori* negative connotation; actually, it presents a necessity since every culture should have one common direction in development that must guarantee continuity into the process of inevitable social and cultural changes. Any type of community *de facto* implies a certain level of personal identification with the collective, as well as common feelings of its members, therefore, one a-logical, mostly mythical basis of their association. Every alliance of people impels as necessary a kind of insularity toward the "outside", and enhances uncritical thinking and behaviour of individuals with regard to their "original" group. This structural necessity, though partially, satisfies modern, in particular, political mythology.

Within Western culture, however, even that typical mythical activity as "the return to the origins", did not always have the effect that was nominally announced. By concealing behind the paroles on "roots" or "sources" to which one has to approach (archaic, primitive, antique, etc.), this activity in fact usually intended to break up with both the recent past and the current present - in order to facilitate society to go forward. The most common examples for that are the renovation of Ancient Greek arts in the Renaissance (14th and 15th century), as well as the famous *French* or *Bourgeois Revolution* (18th century) that had largely an ancient inspiration.

Thus, "return to the past", could also mean a break up with the continuity and immobility of tradition, renouncement of the unhealthy sedimentation of previous experiences, and opening a new (blank) page in the development of human culture. The return to the "absolute beginning" or to the "lost paradise" in myths, as M. Eliade masterfully noticed, implies both a symbolic destruction and convulsion of the "old world" and a birth of the new one. Hence, myth is paradigmatic for any creative situation: "It seems that, from the standpoint of archaic societies, life itself could not be restored but only created again by returning to the beginnings. Yet, the "beginning" par excellence is an astonishing eruption of energy, life and fertility that occurred during the time of the Creation of World." (Eliade 1998, 24) In itself, therefore, something "mythical" is not incommensurate with the idea of progress, because human addressing to myth, apart from its significant stabilizing function, could also mean a liberation of his genuine creative potentials.

However, in (mostly political) myths that succeeded the archaic ones, this original function of myth was often transformed into its opposite; political myths, overwhelmed with their own conservative intentions, usually detained man in existing political horizons and did not allow any extension of the boundaries of his freedom. While archaic mythology was the main pivot of inconsistent ontological position of a man in relation to natural powers, political myths that followed primarily served as the most powerful means for the spiritual domination over man, by using the different forms of the so-called "mundane religion". The concept of *profane* or "*mundane religion*" is almost synonymous with political mythology and it is defined as a – "system of ideas, feelings and actions of a group, within which believers sanctify selected aspects of social reality which, in that case, represent the highest value of the group." (Dugandžija 1980, 34) As well as "true" religion, the mundane religiousness comes out of a combination of surprise, doubt, fear, misery, privilege, conformism and authoritarianism. It characterizes those people/vassals whose aspiration of authority is stronger than their immanent human need for autonomous development and self-determination by using the knowledge of social and other regularities that rule in a concrete society. Anyway, since political myths appeared, the divine powers were not only in "the heavens" – they are now shining like stars in the political sky, too – in a form of an adored "founder of the state", "lawmaker", hero, king or charismatic leader who impressed the ordinary people.

It is paradoxical that even those movements and doctrines that want to "demystify" the social sphere, often result in a new mystification, eschatology, chiasm or soteriology - like Marx's prophetic announcement of the "solved puzzle of History" in - communism. In time that already announced "the death of God" (Nietzsche), and contrary to its own proclamations and expectations, Marxism transformed the very History into new God, in terms of inevitable advent of communism together with the "totally liberated man". The true issue at stake is whether Marxism is to be questioned because of its mythical and religious nature by itself, or because of those social and political practices that followed that nature. Or maybe those two aspects are already strongly connected in such a way that the highly placed (messianic-utopist) requirements systematically produced both the frustration of communist rulers and agony of the ordinary people. However, it is wrong to think, like many theories and "scientific approaches" (that include Marxism) did, that myth is just a certain "historically determined" phenomenon of human culture whose time is up or about to be up, by rampant revolution or gradual evolution. Myth is a genuine spiritual power created in primordial times that stands strong today as much as it did in the past. There is no reason to believe that something could change that position of myth in the cultural system as a whole in the future. As K. Jung said once,

"... science would never be capable of replacing a myth, nor can myth be understood by any science. It is not about that that "God" is a myth, but that myth represents revelation of the divine life inside of man. We are not those who contrive a myth, but, on the contrary, myth addresses us as a World of God." (Jung s.a, 335-336.)

How indivisible from man as a "culture-maker" myth is, was convincingly explained by one of the strongest critics of myth - E. Casirer. This author completely understood that - "knowledge would never overpower myth by a simple expulsion of myth from its boundaries." (Casirer 1985, 10.) There is no hiatus or "time cut" between the theoretical knowledge and mythic thought. Indeed, science itself all the time preserves its ancient inheritance, giving to it different form only. Myth is a typical way through which consciousness comes out from simple



receptivity and steps against it. Thus, not only our everyday experience but also science contains a multitude of characteristics that, from the point of view of reflection, could be named "mythical".

For example, even the notion of *causality*, namely, the general notion of "power", must first go through mythical understanding before its bringing under the mathematically-logical notion of "function". This is the same in representing the *process* as such – which is one of the essential features in the whole reality. Something that never truly "exists" (like products of logical and mathematical knowledge that always stay in identical determination) but always "becomes" and from one moment to another appears as "something else", should not be represented any differently but in a mythical way. (Kasirer 1985, 16.)

Since theses on the indestructibility of myth are shared by many authors, we will continue our consideration with another important question: Is myth always a spontaneous answer to reality, or it could be created by design, perhaps, for worshiping some explicit mundane values or persons? To put that differently, could myth be artificially, "technically" created and implemented? In his analysis of modern myth's technique E. Casirer says that - "modern myths do not arise freely; they are not barbarous outgrowths of abundant imagination. They are artificial products created by very skilled and cunning artisans." (Kasirer 1972, 275.)

Numerous thinkers have a similar attitude; they all see political myth as a very powerful means for conducting the masses. It is about the possibility of myth to annihilate one's integrity and critical distance, thus reducing people to an impersonal collective, the "spirit of a race", "nation", or to the spirit of a particular charismatic leader. In L. Riefenstahl's film named "*A triumph of the Will*", as well in A. Hitler's speeches, one can see clearly the scale and potentials of the mythical power to influence the masses. L. Mruz thinks that modern political leaders often try, at least unconsciously, to use the mechanism of myth and became "magicians". Mruz yet thinks that there is almost no difference between a tribal and religious myth and a political idea; it is visible in crucial moments of History – like revolutions. The proclamation of new political ideas (political ideology) is similar to the proclamations in the field of religion, and bears an equally transcendental character. (Mruz 1976, 93)<sup>4</sup>

Nevertheless, the thesis on the artificiality of political myth should not be taken for granted. Consequently, Kasirer also writes about *socio-historical circumstances* (of the first twentieth century decades in Germany) in which the furious mythical sense become an active political power, and compelled modern politicians to synthesize within themselves both the wizard and the artisan - *homo Magus* and *homo Faber*. "In the time of inflation and unemployment the whole economic and social system was jeopardized. It seemed that all

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<sup>4</sup> However, L. Mruz also makes a boundary between "artificially created myth" and visionary – spontaneous and "natural revelation" which is the result of the necessity of social and actual neediness. Deliberate creation of myth, for example in political parables, represents a kind of perfect and highly developed socio-technical methods which helps in orientation of social processes in certain direction. (Mruz 1976, 94) Similarly, another author, F. Jezi, differ primary (clear) myth from mechanizing, politicizing and artificially deformation of primary mythical course in political myths. As a work of art, the first one retains the balance between consciousness and unconsciousness, retains the man in condition of vigilance in order to consolidate his identity and reaffirm the humanity. The next one absorbs only those mythical pictures that stimulate outbreak of unconsciousness, uncontrolled power over the people's minds. By inducing the condition of somnambulism, it is possible to impregnate both the illnesses and culpability of myth's creators into the mind of masses in order to conduct feelings, mind and behave of collective. (Jezi 1973, 336-337)

normal means were exhausted. It was a natural ground on which political myths fed on." (Kasirer 1972, 271). Therefore, there are social, economic and other circumstances that help the birth of political myths, if current issues cannot be solved rationally. In times of crisis and various dangers that people and society face, myth has a significant function in collective memory of any nation. It contributes to the "renovation of community" via return to the "springs" and "luminous beginning" (Eliade). Mythical "repetition of cosmogony", as we already stated, is headed to the "perfection of the beginning", in order to reanimate community", to "heal it from the influence of time", to induce its rebirth and creation. That means that myth does not come from "nowhere"; it is an eternal potential smoldered in a tradition within every nation and has deep roots in collective unconsciousness. Application of the mythical components never starts from the beginning, but by reanimation of those elements of political tradition that already exist in the spiritual legacy of the particular nation or state.

"Target groups" of modern political myths are big social groups (nations, classes, ethnicities, generations, etc.), while the presence of individuals in political myths could be only symbolic. Although modern political myths are often created in the "productive imagination" of individuals (theoreticians, ideologists, propagandists or agitators), they become real only if masses become their "material forces". The power of political myth comes from its possibility to ignite political expectations of big social groups – that are, after all, the major subjects in historical events. Accordingly, the *conditio sine qua non* of any political myth is to be accepted by the nation, class, or some other social group to which it announces its "absolute", namely, emotional and psychological "truth". In desperate times, people look for desperate means: "If ratio has disappointed us, there is always the *ultima ratio*, the power of the miraculous and mysterious." (Kasirer 1972, 272). If man has lost any belief in rational foundation of his social life, he becomes confused and scared. In that case, since man has to assure some social peace and certainty of his interpersonal relationships, it is normal that he tries to find any solution, even in the obscure world of mythical stories and spectacles.

Therefore, any frontal confrontation with political myths, any discursive and practical "crusade" against them, is doomed to failure. As far as political myth has its primary existential and social character, it could not be just a plain delusion. It has its ontological foundation, since it binds the real and imaginary needs of collectivities, because it has a strong influence on collective consciousness in which individual consciousness participates. Subsequently, no one can give the final answer to the crucial question: *pro or contra myth*. In itself, a myth is neither bad nor good; the only thing that can be taken for sure is that myth is – imperishable. The ambiguous face of myth is showed by the fact that it can be used to legitimize the current social structure, but, simultaneously, to stimulate the resistance of some social groups that want to emancipate themselves. Also, myth can be headed to the past (when mystified history becomes the base of interpretation of the current circumstances) or to the future (when its highly posited abstract goals result in acceptable eschatology). Its function could be seen in the enhancement of the cohesion and solidarity in a social group or in whole society, too.

Generally speaking, the very *human life* was always the main cause of myths, including those with political implications. Man's life constantly evolves between mythologizing and demythologizing, rationalization and irrationality, unification and differentiation, concord and friction, joy and agony, freedom and some new form of slavery, etc.<sup>5</sup> The myth is

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<sup>5</sup> "Because a life is primarily a chaos in which man is lost. Man predicts that, but he is terrified to face with that

historically the first, but in some way, the eternal answer to the "human condition" *per se* and its inherent contradictions (E. Fromm).<sup>6</sup> By his birth, man is literally excommunicated from the situation determined by instincts to the situation that are undetermined, uncertain and open, often ominous. The act of born is, in its essence – a negative event, a deed of dividing from warm embrace of nature or dislodging from Elysian garden – depicted in a Bible. But, at the same time, it is also an act of freedom, act of discarding of natural or divine authority, a deed of continuing procreation that lasts ad infinitum – until the man exists. In this permanent process of procreation, as Fromm said, a man is never free from two sharply opposed intentions: the first - to comes out from the inwards of Mother Nature, to arises from slavery to freedom (that presumes uncertainty); and the next one - to goes back to the inwards, to the nature, in certainty and security.

Nevertheless, as we already noticed, just considering the last two intentions, one cannot say easily that myth always tends toward certainty, namely, to the exact return to the past and slavery. Simply, that view contradicts the brilliant insights of M. Eliade and other thinkers about the constructive, creative role of myth, about the fact that myth is adequate to any creative situation. *Logos* emerged from *mythos*, which means by the derivation of the very myth, by developing of those "germs" of rational thought that had already existed inside myth *in nuce*, as a potential. Just because the "essence of the world" was firstly manifested in the hazy mythical thought, the later proponent of the ratio could make his logical constructions. Therefore, myth is not only an older and wider entity than the logos, as its prerequisite and the broadest foundation. For the same reason, myth can neither be annihilated nor "transcended". *Mythos* and *logos* exist for different reasons, although they can supplement and enrich each other. Since the major feature of myth is related rather to the valuable-practical than knowledgeable-theoretical sense, the myth mostly depends on practical needs and interests of concrete societies, including democratic ones. Finally, although many people may disagree, perhaps any story on democracy is in fact a part of a much bigger myth (on human creativity, self-making, self-governing) which lasts as much as humankind – after its symbolic deportation from Paradise and casting into the backcountry of the historical time.

### 3. SOME REMARKS ON THE CURRENT SERBIAN POLITICAL MYTH

If we focus on the current Serbian political myth (that was noticeable in particular during the 1990ies), we can see that it includes all the elements of political mythology in itself: mythical perception of time, (epiphany and reincarnation of glorious heroic ancestors), mythological genetics (Kosovo's resolve for "heavenly kingdom" which is handed down from one generation to another), fantastic "renewal of the community" and

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breathtaking reality and tries to cover it with some operative shroud in relation to which he sees everything as clearly as a day. Yet, man does not care whether his "ideas" are valid or not; he uses them as trenches in which he buries himself in order to protect himself from the attacks of its own life, or as a hobgoblin to dispel reality." (Ortega and Gasset 1988, 140)

<sup>6</sup> "Man's evolution is based on the fact that he lost his primordial home – nature – to whom he can never go back, since he cannot ever become an animal. There is only one way that man can choose: to rise up over his primordial home, to find a new home – one which he makes, by making the world more human and becoming himself a complete man." (From 1983, 48.)

national eschatology (fulfillment of ancestors' vows regarding the unity of all Serbian lands - carried out by the leader as an incarnation of destiny), etc. Ethnically homogeneous state and its unpretentious "natural life" have many threats that tend to ruin their primordial naturalism and spiritual pureness, and those are found in Europe, the Turks, Germans, the "New World Order" or the USA foreign policy towards the Balkans, whatever. Of course, the modern Serbian political myth does not exist as a particular literary work or some other kind of text, but consists of some common fragmentary themes that are present in the totality of the cultural matrix to which they are related. Also, in igniting the very political mythology in the Balkans, the Serbs were not alone. Almost all nations in the region gave to that their miserable contribution. During the bloody dismemberment of Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, for example, common political speech in Croatia and Slovenia was full of intentions to legitimate Croatian and Slovenian political and military actions at that time by almost the same mythic stories. Two, and the most familiar of them, were story about (Croatian or Slovenian) "chosen nation" that allegedly defends civilized Europe from "Byzantines" (that are - Serbs), as well as the story about "unthankful Europe" – that does not respect the casualties which mentioned nations withstand as European "advance guard" - faced with invasion of the "barbarians" (that are also – Serbs).

Apart from this issue, the phenomenon of the Serbian political mythology is primarily noticeable in the divinization of persons and events in Serbian history, or in the worshiping of the Serbian nation. The Serbian nation within Serbs was always perceived in an organic and romantic way, as a "holy land" that consists of "blood and soil", connected by common language and tradition, and demarcated by the tombs of its ancestors. Inside the Serbian political myths considering the life and survival of the nation, the nation is often represented as a - "body, organism capable of growing and expanding, but fixed by the roots for soil, as a plant. And the roots of the nation are those that are dead." (Čolović 1997, 30.) The centuries of slavery have produced within Serbs a great loyalty to the ideals of national emancipation and self-determination. During the difficult history, those ideals were usually posted over individual interests, sometimes even in an absolute form – "the nation is everything, the person is nothing". For example, the theme of death that deeply concerned the members of modern, individualistic, civic societies<sup>7</sup> – has never preoccupied the Serbian soldier. As D. Vasić noticed, even in a battle, the Serbian soldier has never thought about death, although was often troubled "by the petty distresses of life". It was not only the expression of his fanatic love of the motherland, but rather the consequence of his optimistic nature that contributes to his heroism.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> "At that point, a death is "natural" only in tribe; as soon as we go away from tribal life, as a life of some homogeneous group, we also get distanced from this "normality" of death and therefore, approach to the true death that is death of the individual which is irreplaceable and unique by itself, a death of unique and irreversible cosmos, therefore, a real and complete death, - a death of the universe, death of the whole one world." (Konstantinović 1981, 53.)

<sup>8</sup> Fatally wounded, the Serbian soldier –Vasić wrote - "has the image of a child that is perplexed. As everyone who does not predict and does not count, at that point, he always expresses a childish naivety; he was always unprepared. Yet, for him, a death was the meaning something which is only possible, while he did not like to deal with uncertain events; consequently, without thinking about death, he goes straight to it - uprightly, freely, openly." (Vasić, 1919 [in: Jovanović 1992, 210])

One of the most prominent features of the myth on nation is also an emphasized role of the political *leader*, which legitimacy is, more or less, charismatic and nonsystematic. Inside the deepest layers of the political unconsciousness of Serbian people, the figure of ruler still signify one who harmonize profane and spiritual powers of the community and own the freedom and property of its citizens. Whereas any procedural trying of limitation of ruler's power became impossible in principle, since in medieval times all types of authority in Serbia were characterized by the Cesarist way of ruling. The ruler in Serbia is always above the laws (*princeps legibus solutus*), therefore, he can freely repeat a narcissistic credo of Louis XIV - *L'Etat, c'est moi* ("I am the State").

For as much as the concept of the organic "community" always has a priority over the legal order, the leader, like some kind of god's emissary on earth, has the right to undisputable obedience of his lieges. One of the previous Serbian leaders – S. Milošević, for example, once publicly bragged to foreign politicians and journalists that he was a kind of "Serbian Khomeini", akin to the well-known Islamic fundamentalist and religious leader in Iran. His successor as president of the former *Federal Republic of Yugoslavia* – V. Koštunica during the 2000 campaign, could hear from the people the following chant: "*Koštunica, save Serbia from the Madhouse*", in which, of course, the main emphasis was on the word – "save". The rational type of power always was lacking for the legitimacy and the stability of the political system in Serbia, therefore, the leader commonly must be a savior, rescuer – in one word – a charismatic person *par excellence*. Moreover, the charismatic person, the one who has "God's mercy", destroys the previous system and routine and establishes the new order by mystical renewal of the community. A charisma ruins the rules, adjourns the tradition in general, and instead of pietas to something which was habitual and sacral from the beginning – "imposes interior submission by something that still does not exist, which is absolutely unique and thus celestial." (Weber 1976, 206)

The trouble with charismatic leaders lies in it that their success is never definite, because the charisma can transform into "something ordinary" (Weber) and connect with traditionalism, against which it was primarily established. Inasmuch as the charismatic persons do not demonstrate their supernatural features from time to time, and do not defeat their political opponents, lose wars or cope with economic difficulties, they will inevitably suffer the loss of their authority. Consequently, since "God abandoned them", the people discard them too – as quickly as their divinization was.<sup>9</sup> At the end, and that has confirmed in Serbian history numerous times, if citizens consist of authoritarian myth-maniacs, they do not care so much about the concrete ruler/god, but about whether he does or does not provide the illusion of something which is allegedly "the best for the people". The leaders as such appear only in interaction with other people, namely, with their followers who allow them to promote themselves – by using the weaknesses of the people, or submission, or disinterest in politics, or even - *consensus* – "which means do

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<sup>9</sup> Something like this happens to the former Serbian ruler Milosevic, in span of the famous "Eight session" of the *Central Committee of the Serbian Communist Union* (when in slashing incursion his party's fraction got prevailed), via the celebration in Kosovo's place "Gazimestan" in 1989 (devoted to the 600 years old jubilee of the famous Kosovo's battle – in which he become undisputable Serbian leader), and series of the military and diplomatic defeats (verified by NATO air strake on Serbia) that he has experienced latter, contributing to his dethrone and prosecuting at Hag tribunal due to "war crimes".

not think and be prepared always to follow the pattern or the opinion of other people." (Carlton 2001, 11-12)

Inasmuch as delusions have gone, pietas and admiration easily transform into hate and open contempt, thus, charismatic ruler could be happy if after the overthrow he may keep his head on his shoulders at all. The reasons for that lie in the fact that an authoritarian person, by definition, gets power to act by leaning on a "higher might" that no one can attack or replace. For the authoritarian character, the loss of power is always an unarguable sign of guilt and inferiority, hence, "if the authority in which he believes shows signs of weakness, his love and respect will transform into disdain and hate." (From 1984, 122.) In the political culture of the Serbian people, a convertible and ambivalent relationship toward leaders comes from uncritical, black-and-white political sense that judges with no clear criteria, in an irrational and spontaneous way. In times of crises, with which there comes a feeling of national and personal risk - "love of the leader transforms into hate, demonization, satanization and opposing of previous merits." (Butigan 2000, 30.)

What can be seen in the previous sentence is a big political immaturity of the Serbian people, but also an infantilism or fear from "killing the father" or "patricide" – which is, as it is known from Freud's *psychoanalysis* - one necessary symbolic act into the process of growing of young man - by which adolescents discard the (basically) irrational father's authority and start to live their own life without his protection. It seems that Serbs always have the fight with the father, but they never win ultimately. "If patricide happens, which is familiar in our history too, the killer becomes a tyrant and the circle repeats (we could not reach the real democracy). In that way, the story of patricide is actualized again." (Marić 1998, 53) But, in that way, the magical circle of the *authoritarian political culture* is closed again too. Consequently, some of the passionate supporters of the LDP (Liberal-Democratic Party) that do not like the actual Serbian premier (Vojislav Kostunica) can freely continue to exclaim what they have already shouted after the election in Serbia in January 2007: "*Kostunica, save Serbia and - kill yourself!*"

Behind the inclination to glorify their leaders, Serbs are amenable to any lie and manipulations of the politicians, which words and promises rarely confirm. In doing so, they are expressing in full extent their tremendous naïvety and shortness of memory. The theme of giving (false) promises and failing to fulfill current ones, actually represents one of the most common places in the Serbian political scene, since Serbia became an independent state. After The Second World War and the "socialist revolution", the ideological system of deceits almost reached perfection; this system in point of fact never needed either the elections or voters, but only zombies that could only confirm the supremacy of the *Yugoslav Communist Party* and, later on, *The Communist Alliance of Yugoslavia*. What that system looked like, became visible in November 1996, when one of its derivatives – the Milosevic regime brutally "altered" the results of the local government election in all major cities in Serbia (for a bigger "remodeling" of the citizen's free will at the state level, took care an earlier shifting of the electoral units, or so-called "gerrymandering"). The story from 1996 almost repeated in 2000 September election, but this time the most politically active part of the Serbian people flooded Belgrade and successfully physically defended their electoral will – that both army and police had to respect and avoid the conflicts with protesters.

*Summa summarum*, the political myths, as we stated several times, usually occur in times of crisis, but also exist in the times of relative stability. Therefore, they do not appear and do not disappear together with crises that enhance their growth, but rather represent latent constitutive elements of the symbolic power that is found in every authority. Namely, parallel with the monopoly over physical compulsion, political power regularly arms itself with collective images and symbolic signs, too, since this field of the imaginary and symbolic is crucial for any authority. It is concerns to the need of certain "doubling of power" by fusion of the psychic and symbolic domination that no power can resist, including the democratic one.

Subsequently, the critics of the political myths could not reduce themselves to the conviction of political mythology as such. That approach can be only a variant of the logical error known as a *reductio ad absurdum* - and would lead to the discard of any political symbolism. For, even democracy cannot escape the need for its own symbolization; abandonment of any identification and normative consolidation would lead democracy to the verge of disappearance. So, if one scratches deeper beneath the surface of the contractual-procedural hull of modern democracies, their constant require for purport becomes visible, including mythology and mysticism. As M. Abeles stated once, "Every authority, either a traditional monarchy or the American presidential system, builds performance but also a fallback for public, by sophisticated ceremonials that are a necessary constituent part of the society managing proficiency." (Abeles 2001, 145)

Therefore, in facing its own mythologized past, any democratic system, including the Serbian one, stands before only one possible alternative: to perform a kind of critical "selection" of myths. That means getting rid of nationalist mythology and preserving those myths that symbolically found the, still emerging, Serbian democracy. In that way, myths about Serbian rulers, religious leaders and the very nation could be transformed not only into the symbols of the right to an independent state, but also to the imperative that this state must be internally righteous, namely, democratic.

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## **OD ARHAJSKOG DO MODERNOG (POLITIČKOG) MITA: UZROCI, FUNKCIJE I POSLEDICE**

**Branislav Stevanović**

*Zbog svog objedinjujućeg ali i kreativnog karaktera, mit je bio dominantan oblik duhovnosti čoveka ranih kultura iz kojeg su se kasnije izdvojile bar tri osnovne duhovne ljudske aktivnosti: religija, filozofija (nauka) i umetnost. Mitologija se trudi da isključi neobjašnjive događaje i*



*nerješive probleme, ali se ne svodi na zadovoljavanje radoznalosti arhajskog ili savremenog čoveka. Mitsko mišljenje je primereno svakoj stvaralačkoj situaciji (Eliade), dok je osnovna socijalna funkcija mita u harmonizaciji zajednice, čime predupređuje stanje haosa, sumnju i pesimizam. Po svojoj prirodi, mit je duboko socijalan, što je naročito vidljivo i u politickom mitu koji ima ulogu stabilizatora i duhovnog ujedinitelja jedne političke zajednice. Mit je neunistiv, jer svaka vlast koristi mitove i simbole kao sastavne delove umeća upravljanja društvom. Takođe, mit može služiti kako progresivnoj tako i regresivnoj politici, a ovo drugo proističe iz njegovog pretežno iracionalnog i praktičnog karaktera. Stoga u suočenju sa svojom mitologizovanom prošlošću, svaki demokratski poredak, pa i srbijanski, mora da izvrši izvesnu selekciju svojih mitova, time što će odbaciti nacionalističku mitologiju a afirmisati one mitove koji simbolično zasnivaju, jos uvek nekaku, demokratiju u Srbiji.*

*Ključne reči: arhajski mit, mitske karakteristike, duhovno jedinstvo, kreativni potencijal mita, svetovna religija, moderni (veštački) politički mit, socijalni uslovi političkog mita, ljudski život, srpski politički mit, srpska nacija*