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Postmodern Nomadism and Neotribalism in Today's Ukrainian Society

Abstract

The paper focuses on two postmodern phenomena known as nomadism and neotribalism. Both of them are apparent in today's Ukrainian society. The problem of globalisation and westernisation of social life is interpreted by postmodern sociology as a trace of Western European values in such areas as economy, politics and culture in most countries of the world, including Ukraine. One of the key consequences of westernisation is a postmodern phenomenon of contemporary nomadism in the form of global migration processes, characterised by tight (intragroup) and at the same time flexible (intergroup) neotribal social relationships.

Keywords: *postmodernity, westernisation, globalism, migration processes, neotribalism, nomadism, multiculturalism.*

Target setting. Nowadays social relations and postmodern phenomena are emerging, expanding and replacing the social relations, values and normative systems of the modern period. These conceptual ideas, developed by protagonists of postmodern sociology, allow us to set up a starting point and examine such

wide-ranging social processes as migration flows, cultural interactions and new forms of social relations.

Postmodern sociology, reckoned to be one of the latest theoretical achievements in sociological science and devoted to various research levels, primarily aims to disclose and interpret new changes in contemporary society. Even though postmodernism is supposed to be an international trend, one must admit that both global perspectives and postmodernist conceptualisations tend to reflect their local character – depending on national, historical and sociocultural characteristics, as well as local conditions in every country of the “global village”. One of the current national sociological communities’ tasks is to study local specific features of these global trends according to their location.

In order to understand better the latest theoretical hypotheses proclaiming new social phenomena and dynamic changes in terms of global and local processes, occurring over the past few years in Ukraine, it is important to analyse current theoretical and practical issues of social changes in Ukraine from the worldwide known sociological postmodern thought perspective (in particular, concepts suggested by Michel Maffesoli, Zygmunt Bauman, Bruno Latour, Roland Robertson and others).

Previous research analysis. The analysis is based on concepts and ideas introduced primarily by a French theorist Michel Maffesoli and a Polish post-modern sociologist Zygmunt Bauman. Ukrainian researchers have also made a significant contribution to highlighting the above-mentioned issues.

The purpose of the paper, thereby, is to analyse how postmodern phenomena of nomadism and neotribalism manifest themselves in today’s Ukrainian society. The authors rely especially on M. Maffesoli’s ideas and conclusions to make an impact on the ways of interpreting and solving social problems faced by Ukrainian society.

Literature review and some findings. A number of European postmodern theorists argue that, on the one hand, special transformations taking place today substantially influence individualistic values of the Euro-Atlantic area’s inhabitants, thereby transforming the Western world from Euro- or US-centric to multicultural and polycentric and enriching it with collectivist values inherent in oriental cultures. On the other hand, there are quite a few non-Western countries where traditional collectivist orientations typical of the modern period are being destroyed in favour of individualistic values of the West. Just as the “easternisation” elements are rapidly spreading to the Western world, so too the elements of “westernisation” are progressively reaching oriental cultures [Maffesoli, 2000: p. 224]. Thus, mutual exchange between cultural segments of the East and West, North and South is gradually taking place, bringing together the modern and postmodern social dimensions.

Both trends take part in the universal process of globalisation, but the “westernisation” has been prevalent in sociopolitical, economic and cultural domains so far. However, present-day societies are now acquiring prominent multicultural features and producing new forms of collective identity. The latter are being transformed into partial representations of simultaneous fragments with temporary dispositions. Such entities as nations, political and/or ideological movements, religious denominations, etc. are being replaced by new

entities of tribal groups, communities with different orientations, quasi-religious sects and different local movements in the globalising world. The fragmentation of identity is becoming multicomponent and polycultural. What is more, universal values that would play a significant role in the processes of identification are giving way to partial, group, “narrow-directed” identifiers [Tancher, 2018]. Maffesoli defined these new forms of collective identification as *neotribalism*. Public common consciousness seems to be “breaking” into different kinds of entities with specific identities, and the identification scale is being modified as well. It often includes “tribes” like online communities, fan and/or hobby groups with their specific preferences and lifestyles, thereby providing multicultural, fragmented basis for heterogeneous social entities instead of a single value-normative identity foundation.

International migration flows together with information globalisation can be regarded as one of the causes (and effects as well) of the rise of multiculturalism and partial identity. The phenomenon of nomadism is also both a result of globalisation and a catalyst of multiculturalism (which, in turn, may lead to the erosion of cultural identity), better seen today against a backdrop of the current economic, political and cultural situation in many countries. We can speak of another global “migration period” organised by “present-day nomadic tribes” spreading traditional sociocultural pre-modern phenomena with certain “easternisation” features to Western European space [International Migration Report, 2017; International Migrant Stocks, 2018]. Therefore, the phenomenon of multiculturalism is becoming more and more evident in contemporary societies [Tancher, 2018].

Migration is also one of the most notable consequences of westernisation — to be more precise, of popularisation and promotion of Western lifestyle, social standards, consumption patterns, etc., which are so attractive to people from poorer countries, who are seeking ways to escape from misery and survival concerns.

Yet, having assumed the form of a new nomadic movement, migration causes problems related to ethnic and cultural identity, as well as complicates the process of socialisation for a huge number of newly arrived people, mainly to developed countries. In today's world, multiculturalism often contributes to social tensions and conflicts, which pose obstacles to social integration and harmony and present new challenges to sociologists who are expected to provide a new kind of relevant sociological research addressing a critical issue: how to “re-socialise” these “new nomads”?

In addition, global demographic shifts occur against a backdrop of global sociocultural changes, while ideals of modernity, along with pragmatic and individualistic Western culture, tend to spread to “the rest of the world”. At present, Western criteria are also used for measuring a country's economic success and classifying countries according to the level of socio-economic development. However, this classification contains some antithetical points, which are partially relativised from a postmodern perspective. This can be exemplified by a number of countries including Ukraine.

The overwhelming majority of Ukraine's population, as well as the international community, regards Ukraine as a country with a low standard of living [Parashchevin, 2016: pp. 428, 498–500], and this view is bolstered by numerical data such as inflation and unemployment rate, corruption index, etc. (See Table 1).

Table 1

Country rankings by the Bloomberg Misery Index¹ in 2017

<i>Rank</i>	<i>Country</i>	<i>Misery value</i>
1	Venezuela	1872.0*
2	Egypt	41.7
3	Argentina	36.9
4	South Africa	33.0
5	Ukraine	23.8
6	Greece	22.7
7	Turkey	22.2
8	Spain	19.2
9	Brazil	16.3
9	Serbia	16.3
10	Saudi Arabia	12.5*

* The forecast for the year 2018.

Source: The World's Most Miserable Economies.

At the same time, if one takes into account other internationally recognised criteria such as Human Development Index (HDI), Ukraine, despite belonging to economically less developed countries, is far from being “the last one on the list”. On the contrary, it is placed into the second tier for human development (high), next to countries with very high HDI. The other two tiers include countries with medium and low HDI [Human Development Report, 2016: pp. 44, 212–215]. Another example is World Happiness Index, according to which such “backward” countries as Argentina and Brazil score higher than economically advanced Japan (See Table 2). These facts make us reflect on the relevance of economically oriented criteria (which are part of “modern” Western values) when it comes to studying contemporary “postmodern” realities.

The above-mentioned issue applies to Ukraine as well. Despite adverse economic conditions, almost omnipresent corruption, outdated and inefficient social institutions and other negative factors compelling Ukrainians to search for alternative places of living and sources of income, Ukraine is still far more educated country than Latin American, African and many Asian ones. Ukraine ranks 81st out of 137 in the Global Competitiveness Index overall (See Table 3 and Figure 1), but, if we look at some components of this index, our country is 35th in terms of the quality of higher education and training, 27th as to the quality of math and science education and 16th according to the percentage of people enrolled in tertiary education [The Global Competitiveness Report 2017–2018: pp. 296–297].

¹ As the authors of the article put it, “The Bloomberg Misery Index relies on the age-old concept that low inflation and unemployment generally illustrate how good an economy’s residents should feel. Sometimes, of course, a low tally can be misleading in either category: persistently low prices can be a sign of poor demand, and too-low joblessness shackles workers who want to switch to better jobs, for instance” [The World's Most Miserable Economies, 2018].

Table 2

Country rankings according to different indices

<i>Country out of 193 countries in the world, recognised by the United Nations</i>	<i>Bloomberg Misery Index 2017 ranking</i>	<i>Global Competitiveness Index 2017–2018 ranking</i>	<i>Human Development Index 2016 ranking</i>	<i>World Happiness Index 2014–2016 ranking</i>
Venezuela	1	127	71	82
Egypt	2	100	111	104
Argentina	3	92	45	24
South Africa	4	61	119	101
Ukraine	5	81	84	132
Greece	6	87	29	87
Turkey	7	53	71	69
Spain	8	34	27	34
Brazil	9	80	79	22
Serbia	9	78	67	73
Saudi Arabia	14	30	39	37
USA	101	2	10	14
Japan	123	9	17	51

Sources: The World's Most Miserable Economies; The Global Competitiveness Report 2017–2018; Human Development Report 2016; World Happiness Report 2017.

Table 3

Ukraine's key indicators in terms of Global Competitiveness Index 2017–2018 (rank out of 137 countries)

<i>Global Competitiveness Index overall</i>	81
<i>GCI components</i>	
Institutions	118
Macroeconomic environment	121
Annual inflation rate	129
Health and primary education	53
Higher education and training	35
Tertiary education enrolment rate	16
Quality of math and science education	27
Infrastructure	78
Quality of roads	130
Quality of railroad infrastructure	37
Mobile-cellular phone subscriptions (per 100 people)	37

Ukraine's key indicators in terms of Global Competitiveness Index 2017–2018

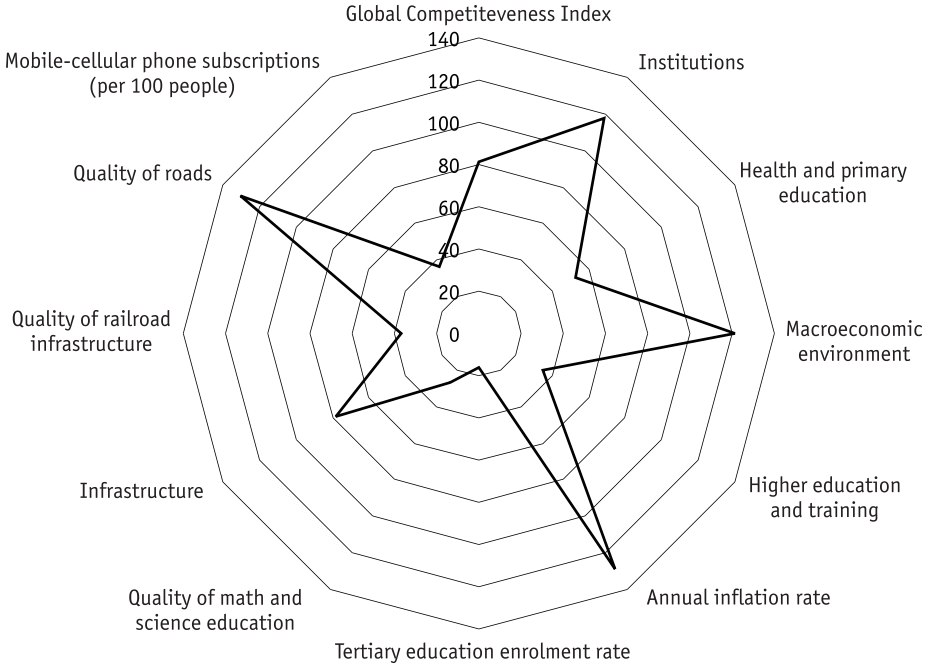


Fig. 1. Comparative indicators for Ukraine in the Global Competitiveness Report

Thus, the question arises: what kind of values should be taken as obviously crucial in postmodern society within the global “geopolitical stratification” system? If the focus is on economic and political aspects, then Ukraine gives the impression of being a “backward” country as it ranks 121st out of 137 in the stability of macroeconomic environment, 129th in judicial independence and 130th in the quality of roads (albeit 37th in the quality of railroad infrastructure). But if one takes into account such areas as education and culture, Ukraine has a chance of being regarded as one of the “leading” world countries.

Probably, one of the most frequently asked questions concerning Ukraine is how ordinary people survive and continue to “struggle for existence” in this country, which is facing extremely difficult economic, political and even war situation.

Several hypotheses within the framework of this problem are reflected in postmodern social phenomena, interpreted by adherents of postmodern sociology as processes of “easternisation”, or spreading Eastern values to Western societies (which was mentioned at the beginning of this article). Since Ukraine is geographically and mentally located between Western and Eastern sociocultural spaces, “easternisation” phenomena are gradually becoming conspicuous in Ukrainian society too, mainly in the form of *neotribalism* and *group ethics*. Some of “easternisation” phenomena were described in Maffesoli’s book “The Time of the Tribes”, first published in the late 1980s, when they had only just begun to emerge in Western societies. With the passage of time, these phenomena have not only firmly naturalised in Western sociocultural settings, but have also become

fairly noticeable in countries like Ukraine – despite the unfolding processes of westernisation. These phenomena include pervasive corruption, obedience and regional particularism. The latter two are based on a specific value-normative system, ethics acceptable (and approvable) in bureaucratic circles, but not compatible with general social rules and norms. For example, “an officer and a gentleman principle” would definitely contradict the rule of strict compliance with legal code in law enforcement services. In this case, group ethics would be opposed to general ethics.

According to Z. Bauman, a logical basis for functional division, namely belief that science and economy should be free from both tradition and religious interference for the sake of progress was offered as early as in a modern era [Bauman, 1992: p. 12]. However, nowadays a number of progressive postmodern theories contend that there is an urgent need for coexistence of all five elements of social reality: science, culture, economy, religion and nature. Traditional mind concepts (science and culture), individual concepts (culture and economy) and God concepts (culture and religion) give way to postmodernism in favour of their organic coexistence within a single social space. Hereby, there are social forms combining some archaic pre-modern cultural elements with economic and individualistic ideals of modernity, as well as with technological and civilisational postmodern influences. All of them are present in Ukrainian society and can be characterised as “Ukrainian archaeo-modernity”.

For example, archaic pre-modern elements find expression in such phenomena as:

- specific neotribalism characterised by tight quasi-fraternal horizontal relations known as “nepotism”, group ethics that differs from general ethics [Maffesoli, 2000: p. 13; Parashchevin, 2016: p. 465];
- notable importance of belonging to a certain denomination in certain localities, as well as high level of trust in the Church and clergy in comparison with other social institutions [Parashchevin, 2016: pp. 465, 543];
- unwillingness to accept “other” nationalities/ethnic groups, as well as “other” traditions and institutions in Ukrainian territory [Parashchevin, 2016: pp. 467–475].

Social elements of modernity are represented by:

- firmly established vertical hierarchy of governmental institutions;
- Ukrainian “social dream”, which involves making rapid progress and achieving tangible results in science and technology;
- rather idealised view of the Western world [Parashchevin, 2016: pp. 528–529];
- hope that liberal democracy will be established in Ukraine, human rights will be protected and European standards of living will be reached [Parashchevin, 2016: pp. 500–501].

As for social elements of postmodern processes, they exist in Ukrainian society due to:

- contemporary nomadism in the form of intense internal and external migration primarily caused by economic hardships and armed conflict in Donbas;

- a large (and ceaselessly growing) number of Internet-based networks and associations, communication devices and platforms, unrestricted access to international news media (as opposed to countries like Iran, North Korea, China, etc., where Internet is limited);
- predominantly emotion-driven voting behaviour and interpretation of major political events, tendency to make decisions which are not based on rational thought;
- tendency to reject the idea of living a “future-focused” life, hoping for political and economic changes. This idea would prevail in a modern-era society, but in postmodern one people often work out ways of personal development “here and now”.

Many postmodern theorists believe that today the Wallersteinian “world-system” is “splitting” into billions of “little worlds”, which are not interconnected. However, Maffesoli is of the opinion that such a structure of society, which entails its fragmentation into many small interacting groups, enables relativisation of rigid institutional systems and allows these groups to act autonomously in any social, economic or regulatory environment – from totalitarian to democratic – characterising tight (intragroup) and at the same time flexible (intergroup) ties [Maffesoli, 2000: p. 88].

Perhaps one of the most telling indicators of adaptation to the changing social reality is large-scale international migration, which has already become a global sociocultural phenomenon – and it is familiar to Ukraine too. According to various sources, including the State Statistics Service¹, between 4.5 and 10 million Ukrainians have left their homeland since 1991 – the year when Ukraine declared independence. This resulted in the fourth wave of immigration. The countries that Ukrainians mostly move to in the hope of living in better economic and sociocultural conditions are Poland, Italy, Czech Republic, Hungary, Canada and the USA [Proboiv, Bilets’ka, 2017: p. 55].

As for jobs being done by Ukrainian migrants, 60% of them work in the service industry, construction, transport sector and the like, 30% are employed in health care, IT, banking and finance and 10% pursue a career in science [Ukraine 2017–2018: pp. 40–41].

According to the nationwide survey annually conducted by the Institute of Sociology, a relatively stable proportion of Ukrainians – between 16.1% and 24.4% – have had an intention of moving away from their local areas (since 1994), mostly in hopes of getting a better job [Parashchevin, 2016: pp. 494–495]. Those working beyond Ukraine at the moment not only earn money to support their families, but also contribute considerably to host countries’ economies and create numerous diaspora networks, thereby popularising Ukrainian culture throughout the world [Prokhorenko, 2010; Ukrainian Community Worldwide, s. a.]. In a sense, they invest in Ukrainian economy as well: according to the

¹ As of 1 January 2018, Ukraine’s population was estimated at 42.2 million people. Given that in 1991 Ukraine had 52 million residents, about 10 million Ukrainians have left their homeland (temporarily or for good) since then, which makes up 19% of the total population [Ukraine’s Population, 2018: pp. 3–4, 12].

World Bank data, the total amount of remittances sent to Ukraine in 2017 was estimated at just under 7.9 billion dollars, which is equal to about 7% of Ukraine's GDP [Migration and Remittances Data, 2018].

Stemming from a basic human need to survive, migration is not merely a survival strategy. It has already grown into a new nomadic movement, which is unlikely to be controlled by external forces such as government policies. Therefore, migration challenges conventional social and political institutions of the modern era and necessitates new ones, which would fit well into the postmodern world. Migration reshapes the world, making political boundaries between states easily transcendable – both literally and figuratively. And, finally, it considerably transforms personal identity. In this respect, Ukraine does not seem to be an exception.

In **conclusion**, it is worth reminding that today's Ukrainian society is a good illustration of how social phenomena belonging to three different epochs – pre-modern, modern and postmodern – can exist in the same space and at the same time. Contemporary nomadism, being regarded as one of the postmodern phenomena, is manifested in the form of intense, tribe-like internal (owing to the armed conflict in Ukraine's eastern borderlands) and external (predominantly labour) migration.

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