

Political identity and national memory: The conflict of contemporary political narratives

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For citation: Zavershinskiy K. F., Koryushkin A. I., Czajowski A. Political identity and national memory: The conflict of contemporary political narratives. *Vestnik of Saint Petersburg University. Philosophy and Conflict Studies*, 2022, vol. 38, issue 1, pp. 82–93. <https://doi.org/10.21638/spbu17.2022.107>

The article examines the place and the role of political narratives of national memory in the processes of political identification of modern political communities. The authors prioritize contemporary socio-cultural research strategies of political phenomena, which interpret political identification processes in the methodological context of the dynamics of national memory's symbolic structures. The proliferation of such communicative practices as storytelling, political performance, post-factual politics and political imaginary complicates the problem of political identification and its narrative design in modern society and gives rise to multiple nationalist, populist, and ethno-political discourses. In this context, the significance of the theoretical understanding of national codes of communal political identification and an ability to forecast the symbolic contours of a new, more stable narrative of national identity based on codes of solidarity and civic patriotism increases. The study of the impact of symbolic configurations of legitimating profiles of national memory on specifics of everyday political narratives and the discourses of civic patriotism as the semantic core of national identity is particularly important in the study of contemporary political identification. The description of the profiles of the national memory legitimation necessitates a study of the conflict dynamics of the symbolic contours of the national memory, which includes competing semantic components (images of the past, political characteristics of elites, typology of the heroic, priority strategies and practices of fighting “enemies”). In turn, these processes determine the nature of the emergence and multiplication of identity conflicts. Using methodological premises of the cultural and sociological analysis of the dynamics of modern political cultures as symbolic forms of national memory, the authors propose new theoretical approaches to the study of the political identification processes and conflicts among basic political narratives in the realities of contemporary political communicative practices.

Keywords: political identification, political narratives and political story-telling, national memory, national memory legitimation profiles, patriotic discourses.

Introduction

Increasing fragmentation of a geopolitical order and the dramatic increase of an ambivalent influence of cultural and symbolic resources on institutional and organizational dynamics of this process necessitate a closer analysis of the role and place of political narratives in sociocultural dynamics of political identification in contemporary political

communities. A discussion of political identification as an outcome of exclusively institutional and organizational dynamics, or as a result of goals and aspirations of political elites striving to dominate domestic and international affairs, would be myopic and reductionist.

A new authoritarianism that accompanies the rising influence of populist discourses is growing in a context of emerging contemporary “global fault-lines”. A communicative sphere of international political solidarity, based on practices of “being together,” “acting together,” and “feeling together” and that assumes a value of national communities as self-evident, continues to erode [1]. A crisis of political trust necessitates a search for new political narratives that provide a necessary level of political solidarity. Grand political narratives ensure symbolic structuring of communities by explaining a current political reality as well as its future developments. Through articulation of certain political concepts while symbolically deflating other categories, these narratives give order to meanings, contents, and the interplay between collective understandings of reality [2, p. 3–6]. Political narratives are different from semantics of a binary coding of collectively meaningful concepts. By aligning our collective actions with ultimate questions of the everyday life, these political narratives order collective understanding of a temporal order of political events and provide answers to questions “who are we?” and “where are we from?” [3, p. 14–24]. Political narratives are discursive practices of justifying political events as an irreversible sequence that aim to de/legitimize a current political ordering of time.

In a context of rising levels of conflict in political communications, global liberal-democratic narratives of political identity and solidarity are increasingly scrutinized and questioned. To a large extent, this is caused by a crisis of domination of meritocratic elites, intergenerational conflicts of identity, and disillusionment regarding institutional and ideological universality of integration models of the EU or of American globalist projects [4]. There is a growing criticism of theoretical models that forecast the disappearance of nation-states as viable models, “Europeanization” and “cosmopoliticization” of elites, erasure of political egoism of a “new global class” under the egis of USA or through “realist liberal cosmopolitanism” [5]. Political elites of many countries blame a global pandemic of COVID-19 for challenges of supra-national political integration. However, the pandemic didn’t give rise to challenges and conflicts of identification, but simply strengthened them. These tendencies could be observed over past decade prior to the global pandemic and were an outcome of a crisis in liberal globalization and cosmopolitan identity, a growth of nationalism and disappearance of borders between democracy and authoritarianism [6, p. 8–9]: “Covid-19 has infected the world with cosmopolitanism, while turning states against globalization” [6, p. 71].

Given practices of a global domination of nation-states’ alliances that legitimate their dominance through a discourse on universality of liberal values, a conflict of political memory narratives in international and domestic politics becomes more pronounced and increases risks of political-cultural conflicts and legitimating violence as a solution to political problems. Decentralization or dispersion of a “right to sovereignty” in contemporary political practices (“bio-political spread of sovereignty”) gives rise to more devious forms of elites’ control, “state custody” and “disciplining” of the political everyday life [7, p. 17, 57, 186]. A study of symbolic specificity of conflicting political narratives of memory and solidarity that are increasingly leaning towards a greater articulation of national identification and national political culture is gaining a greater significance.

A study of the “reversal” and theoretical reconstruction of national codes of identification in contemporary political communities that aim to limit violence within national and other large political areas are important and helps to map out trajectories of risks and an increasing erosion of contemporary political order while identifying outlines of emerging, more stable political regimes [8, p. 87]. A change between political generational cohorts and a contemporary communicative asynchrony of differences that give rise to divergent understandings of social time [9, p. 27–40] and that inflate significance of political events and people’s ability for mutual adaptation make this research all that more important.

Luhmann’s remarks on processes of identification and socialization are particularly relevant in this context. Luhmann pointed out that identities and their discursive projections are “thought of to connect expectations” [10, p. 413]. These expectations are constructed through their inclusion in temporal symbolic structures of communicative events (i. e., social memory) and ensure stability and relative permanence of dynamic reproduction of an entire set of such expectations. Therefore, people identify and socialize not only through their own actions, but through their inclusion in symbolic structures of events, connecting expectations that can generate (mis)understanding [10, p. 319–321, 413].

In this context, the development of interdisciplinary analysis of political identification and legitimation of national positioning is of primary importance in understanding national political narratives and discursive practices of political narratives. This article aims to answer a set of questions relevant for understanding specifics of national identification process in a context of contemporary political communicative practices. Which communicative processes and symbolic structures determine specificity of political identification in contemporary society? How do symbolic structures of national memory characteristic of particular political communities influence social constructions of political narratives of national identification? Finally, what role does a discourse of civic patriotism play in a socio-cultural dynamic of symbolic structures of national memory and political identification in contemporary societies?

Communicative dimensions of political identification

Never-ending political storytelling and performance, frequently based on unproven facts and invoking basic emotions, increase their political impact on people and expand their identificational potential by reminding participants of a given political process about “which side they are on” [11, p. 55–71]. By so doing, a problem of political identification in contemporary society becomes more acute and stimulates the growth of eclectic populist and ethno-political discourses. Contemporary populism then is not only a consequence of a crisis in institutions of “the state of common wellbeing” but is impacted by a general degradation of political culture and erosion of political identification given that contemporary populists are not oriented on outlining grand political narratives and delineating clear boundaries of political communities. It is primarily realized through “storytelling” practices that do not invoke grand narratives [12, p. 99]. Instead, populists appeal to marginal groups and individuals without a clear political identification meanwhile having no clear understanding of their political identification or ideas of future developments.

Communicative expansion of “post-truth” and post-factual politics among contemporary political and cultural elites easily replace facts with “fake news” in processes of

political decision-making indicative of the present transformations in the political sphere, as many analysts concur, a political elites' wide use of subjective, and oftentimes irrational media products for political legitimation of their actions gives rise to "fake" forms of political identification on a basis of political hearsay, gossip, mystifications, and scandals. An ongoing COVID-19 pandemic reinforces and deepens this process.

Luhmann's critical discussion about the specificity of communicative processes in a sphere of contemporary information exchange in which "systems of consciousness" are present in "billions of singularities" that are functioning simultaneously is particularly relevant in this regard [13, p. 114–115]. In such communicative realities, requirements of "truth" vis-à-vis cognitive and symbolic production of any communicative system (legal, political, mass media, etc.) and elites' political rhetoric or political news and commentaries become problematic and lead to simplified explanations based on semantic demands of given communicative practices. As Luhmann points out, messages in contemporary mass media are determined not only on a basis of "true/false" dichotomy but on a basis of "information/disinformation" classification and are dependent on a set of selective criteria on a basis of specific communicative codes formed within the context of this communicative practice and that might be at odds with other communicative practices [14, p. 23–41]. A society continues to "invest" increasingly more hopes, expectations, and disenchantments and produces symbolic products that generate illusions about a political system among its constituents [15, p. 190–192]. Such "political illusions" exist and are multiplied by political elites without references to pre-existing political narratives.

The role of emotive components of political identification also becomes reinforced in communicative processes. Such concepts as an "iconic experience," "iconic consciousness," "social subconscious," and "sensual consciousness" have received considerable attention in political anthropology. These concepts are mediators between abstract symbolic representations and everyday understandings of reality. The power of iconic images and symbols is predicated on a possibility to turn rational and abstract sacred forms of symbolic representations of the political into an everyday reality thereby transforming them into a mythical narrative as a form of communicative practices. As Alexander writes, "in traditional societies, iconic objects are tightly intertwined with sacred scripts, their producers with their consumers, and there are no critics. In complex and modern, and even more so in postmodern societies, the elements of iconic performance have become separated and defused from their producers and consumers. Thinking about them is often concentrated and separated. Production is in one place, design another, and display, advertising, and publicity are all somewhere else. Absorption by the viewer—which may be consumption, adulation, or appreciation, depending on the social arena—is so separated from these other elements that it is often not available for public scrutiny, and seems entirely contingent and arbitrary" [16, p. 34–35]. Therefore, in contemporary societies, a process of iconic images creation and reproduction escapes control of the state and official institutions.

Bottici makes a similar argument in her work as she resolves a dichotomy of subjective and objective aspects in perceptions and descriptions of political interactions and introduces concepts of the political "imaginary" and "imaginal". These concepts can describe processes of reproducing collectively meaningful political symbols and images and that form a sensory source of a political reality and "political corporeality". Political communications, Bottici argues, have reached a critical level in their quantitative and qualita-

tive transformations in processes of reproducing imaginal images and now they not only mediate a political activity but become the politics instead of political actors [17, p. 178; 18, p. 433–441].

Political everyday life is no longer a compilation of life statuses, sensory-emotive experiences of communal subjects necessary for a creation of more complex forms of political solidarity but becomes a “fabrication of self-evident and familiar through a localization of a distant and the unknown” [19, p. 144]. Such methods of citizen mobilization are an important instrument of the political influence of marginal politicians and groups that give rise to socio-political movements and organizations (both formal and informal) that espouse controversial political actions. Such actors and methods of civic political mobilization reinforce the unpredictability of political communications and marginalize political communities. Therefore, research of communicative risks in political identification processes in contemporary societies and a search for communicative foundations for a reconstruction of symbolic structures of national identity and a forecast of potential stable political narratives attains additional significance and warrants closer attention.

A place and a role of national memory in a symbolic construction of political identification

An increasing dynamic of contemporary political communications and their symbolic representations necessitates a study of political culture not as a way of rationalizing a process of defining value-based orientations but as a dynamic form of political memory. Within this analytical paradigm, a political culture could be interpreted as a historical form of political memory, i. e., as a dynamic complex of collectively meaningful “scenarios of positioning” of social commonality and its symbolic representations. These representations not only “anchor” a “real” past but are continually “building” in the present forms of communication in the future by introducing a “certain minimal level of mutual imputability of justification for actions”, an experience of “live empathy” and solidary coexistence [20, p. 55–58].

“Meanings rather than events provide a sense of shock and awe”, George Alexander points out [21, p. 72]. In the nucleus of this semantic process, “real” and “urgent” things are correlated with those that give them meaning, i. e., “systems of symbols” that give rise to sacred objects [22, p. 29–89]. Phenomena that are considered within a given society as “facts” are realized as such not due to their actual hazardousness or an objective stridency. They are determined by a degree of their perception and a level of their impact upon collective identification. As another political anthropologist points out, “states rule the memory, but memory rules the states” [23, p. 17]. Such political governance could often be a result of a “traumatic demand” for an emotional, institutional, and “symbolic compensation” that not only returns memory but allows to view historical and political events differently, by reassigning roles and responsibilities of actors according with a new vision [24, p. 6–30].

Within a traditional framework of analysis of classical sociology or political science, the concept “political culture” allows one to deduce dynamics of value-based orientations of social identification. However, analysis of national identity phenomena as a semantic and categorical focus of “national memory” allows one to examine the multiplicity of rationalization and emotive-sensory representations of the collectively meaningful.

Then, one can analyze the role that these representations play in practices of national identification and legitimation of national political systems. National memory as a historical modification of political memory that has a long temporal life span (if compared with earlier forms of memory) preserves a leading role in legitimating social institutions and constructing socio-political accession orders [25, p. 210–226]. That is why a study of symbolic dynamics of processes of social construction and evolution of contemporary national identity in a context of communicative processes of national memory requires analysis of temporal regimes and examination of changes in historical forms and levels of national memory [26] as well as the pragmatics of its mnemonic processes and projection of its symbolic codes of public spaces and political solidarity [22, p. 29–89].

The ability of national memory to produce and destroy national identities and identities of its constituent communities is an important characteristic of this phenomenon. A study of socio-cultural specifics of national memory with particular attention to the interplay between symbolic configurations of the past and present is particularly important in this context. This interplay is determined through a conflict between various versions of memory, competing genres, and legitimation profiles [23, p. 36–76]. To describe profiles of national memory legitimation, one needs to research a conflict dynamic between a variety of symbolic contours that include various competing semantic components (images of the past, political characteristics of the elites, typologies of the heroic, notions of duty, guilt, and responsibility, preferred strategies and practices of fighting with “enemies”) that determine the rise and growth of identification conflicts. Methodological foundations of this type of research are particularly well articulated in socio-cultural anthropology and, in particular, in Giesen’s work who articulated four basic symbolic figures that serve as a foundation for political identification — a triumphant hero, a tragic hero, a victim, and a perpetrator [27]. Giesen used this typology to interpret processes of symbolic creation of boundaries of socio-political memory and the dynamics of (de)sacralization of ideal-typical identities coinciding with processes of triumph and trauma, heroization and victimization.

Research of communicative dimensions of a process of political identification in semantic and categorical focus of “national political memory” provides answers to questions about how a choice of communicative structures and their symbolic representations determines specifics of political narratives in a given political community and how multiplicity of civic discourses influences the pragmatics of political identification of elites and legitimation of national political systems. By so doing, one can theoretically operationalize a process of political identification as a dynamic process of production and recreation of national memory symbolic representations and narratives directly related to constructions of space of political solidarity.

Communicative dimensions of discourses on patriotism as a semantic nucleus of national memory

Many researchers of historical evolutions of contemporary political culture and changes in elites’ political rhetoric point out that patriotic discourse is an important symbolic component of national memory and its narrative structures. Slogans used by leaders of the geopolitically and ideologically dominant states are telling in this regard. Contemporary American political leaders employ the rhetoric “Make America Great Again” or

“Bring Back Global and Moral Leadership of the US”. These slogans appeal to conservative, liberal and “left” narrative versions of national patriotism. Similarly, comments of the Russian leader engage a message that “we do not have and cannot have any other unifying idea other than patriotism” [28].

An ideological distinction between positive (“constructive”) and negative (“destructive”) patriotism is telling in this regard. Unlike the latter, positive patriotism presumes an ideological consensus between conservatives and liberals; it is less ideologically constrained (or is “ideologically analytical”) and is based on civic participation values, liberally oriented researchers argue. These assumptions are based on assertions that individuals who subscribe to authoritarian and conservative ideals exhibit higher levels of negative patriotism while those who subscribe to more liberal ideas espouse constructive patriotism [29, p.63–77]. Liberally oriented researchers use these premises to criticize “patriotism of Trumpism” and its various manifestations that cultivate false versions of patriotism as a form of national narcissism [30, p. 1–22]. In such patriotic discourse, ideas about a combination of national patriotism with positive cosmopolitanism are based on a premise that the political principles of a national community cannot be built upon an all-encompassing doctrine. Such discourse should avoid ideological sectarianism and should be able to ensure a moral consensus between “reasonable doctrines” based on recognition of a fair political order as a moral value [31, p.211].

We find a different set of sociological approaches better articulated. These scholars aim to answer the following questions: What are socio-historical manifestations of patriotism as a phenomenon that ensure its longevity in contemporary practices of symbolization of political reality? What communicative roles does patriotism play in contemporary society? Which symbolic representations could serve as a foundation of patriotic beliefs and practices? A sociologically oriented study of patriotism would postulate that any national version of patriotism (regardless of its ideological explications) could have both positive and destructive aspects. In this theoretical context, patriotism is defined as a final result of group identification on a basis of defining group-specific ideas about a place of an individual within a group (“integration” of private understandings) and the socio-territorial location of a group in this regard [32, p.61–68]. Patriotic ideas play an important role in practices of legitimation and self-legitimation of political elites in the context of the state institution building. In its extreme forms, patriotic behavior could be seen as a way for citizens to abstain from satisfying some of their needs or exhibit sacrificial behaviors and readiness to sacrifice their life for the sake of collective safety within their national community [33, p. 45–614; 34, p. 61–68]. In its nature, patriotism is an integrative emotion that emerge out of a synthesis of multiple particular forms of love to a state, a city, a region, and that motivates one to serve common interests and gives rise to sacrificial altruism. Similarly, patriotic discourse is a meaningful political narrative [31, p.207–213]. National narratives explore such themes as challenges that were to overcome, readiness to co-exist and withstand hardships for the sake of common future. Through sensory symbolic imagery evident in these national narratives, patriotism as a discourse provides continuity of national identification.

While it is important to acknowledge the significance of contemporary research of specificity of patriotic beliefs within a context of value-normative axiomatics and through a prism of pragmatic “*usus*” of patriotic discourses in contemporary mass-media, there is an urgent need to develop interdisciplinary sociological models of sociocultural dynam-

ics of patriotic narratives. Eisenstadt and Giesen's work that integrated analysis of social differentiation and distribution of control of value construction and institutionalization with an understanding of symbolic specifics of temporal and spatial aspects is particularly instrumental in this regard [8, p. 72–102; 35, p. 3–12]. A “civic code” manifested in patriotic behavior that encompasses modifications that it has endured during the evolution of national political systems and profiles of legitimation of national memories remains central for national identification.

There is an apparent tendency to switch from semantics and symbolism of the heroic to the semantics of victimization. Giesen pointed out that due to the sacralization of national identification processes, the “Western civilization” right after World War II, disables the narrative of “triumph” and the “heroic” and replaces them with the semantics of a “trauma” and “sacrifice” [36, p. 75–90]. We argue that such tendency dilutes clear marking of political events and political elites' understanding about their responsibilities, muddles clear typologies of the “heroic”, “the criminal”, and “the sacrificial”, and weakens a discourse of civic patriotism in a context of growing political phobias. At the same time, in societies that have a stronger orientation towards collectivist and hierarchical forms of political solidarity this process is considerably more organic and does not follow the same dynamics as outlined above.

A value-based discourse of patriotism is not only a product of the ideological and propagandistic activity of political elites, but always exists in time and space of collectively meaningful ideas about politics (“political memory”). In this context, patriotism can be defined as a network of solidary communication and congruent political expectations, evident in citizens' political activity and in their preparedness to limit preexisting expectations (including an ability to sacrifice one's life) to ensure the continuing existence and development of their community. Expectations in this case imply not only subjective motivation of political actions but structures and institutions that create “solidarity of expectations” and “ensure a possibility that a given action will be completed” [37, p. 212].

Conclusion

Political identification as a factor of destruction/creation of a semantic unity (political understanding) cannot be reduced exclusively to the goals of those who are engaged within this process. Their actions, interests, and motives during communication receive new meanings. Due to temporal and spatial diversification, contemporary political communications are dynamic and unpredictable that could further shake up a narrative space. The proliferation of such communicative practices as story-telling, political performance, post-factual politics, and political imaginary sharpens a problem of political identification and its narrative forms in contemporary society and stimulates the growth of nationalist, populist, and ethno-political discourses.

Growing dynamics of contemporary political communications and their symbolic representations make research of political culture as a dynamic form of political memory all the more important. The political memory and national memory as its historical manifestation make political history forecastable and explain symbolic schemes of the past and future events as performed by social actors. This political memory provides structuring of “horizons” of political expectations that could create/destroy political identities and political narratives. The contents and persistence of political narratives of national memory

are dependent on its symbolic configurations (“profiles of legitimation”) and include such components as symbolic schemes of marking collectively meaningful events, typologies of the heroic, ideas about responsibility, guilt, and duty of political elites, prioritized strategies, and practices of domestic and foreign affairs. These characteristics of national memories determine the specifics and directionality of potential conflicts between national identities. National memory is a dynamic process that creates symbolic boundaries of identities and systems of political narratives through which these identities are expressed and within which they are debated.

Over the last decade, due to a crisis of liberal globalization and failures of the social construction of cosmopolitan identity, there is a tendency to search for more stable narratives of national and supra-national political identification as an alternative to growing populist and nationalist movements that marginalize spaces of the political culture of contemporary societies and give rise to conflicts of identification and among political narratives. Communicative actors are striving to reconstruct more stable national codes of identification that aim to limit violence within the national and large political spaces and that allows forecasting contours of new, more stable narratives of identity and codes of civic solidarity. Contemporary socio-cultural analysts define political patriotism as a network of solidary communications and political expectations that shape and are evident in citizens’ political actions and in citizens’ ability to limit earlier established expectations (including an ability to sacrifice one’s life) in order to ensure the existence and development of a given society. Within the political space of Europe and Eurasia, a conflict of political narratives and tensions between politics of memory as a consequence of competition among profiles of legitimation of national memories can easily be observed.

Unfortunately, dreams about a universal political culture of a democratic society in which political narratives are founded upon “common emotions and symbolic responsibilities” at both national and international levels [38, p.278] and where a public space offers a platform for unification of narratives and symbolic codes of individualistic and collectivist solidarity remain utopic at best. There is hope, however, that an ongoing and deepening dramaturgy of national identification narratives and patriotic discourses will be resolved in the future not as a consequence of overcoming a traumatic past but in a course of a constructive communicative dialogue.

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Received: October 1, 2021
Accepted: December 27, 2021

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Политическая идентичность и национальная память: конфликт современных политических нарративов

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Для цитирования: *Zavershinskiy K. F., Koryushkin A. I., Czajowski A.* Political identity and national memory: The conflict of contemporary political narratives // Вестник Санкт-Петербургского университета. Философия и конфликтология. 2022. Т. 38. Вып. 1. С. 82–93.

<https://doi.org/10.21638/spbu17.2022.107>

В статье исследуются место и роль политических нарративов национальной памяти в процессе политической идентификации современных политических сообществ. Приоритетной исследовательской стратегией авторов является современный культурно-социологический анализ политических феноменов, который позволяет интерпретировать процесс политической идентификации в методологическом контексте динамики символических структур национальной памяти. Умножение таких коммуникативных практик, как story-telling, политический перформанс, постфактическая политика, политической имаджинерии (imaginary), обостряет проблему политической идентификации и ее нарративного оформления в современном обществе и стимулирует расцвет националистических, популистских и этнополитических дискурсов, в связи с чем возрастает значимость теоретической реконструкции национальных кодексов идентификации политических сообществ и прогнозирования символических контуров нового, более устойчивого нарратива национальной идентичности на основе кодексов солидарного гражданского патриотизма. Важную роль в исследовании политической идентификации современных политических сообществ играет изучение влияния символических конфигураций профилей легитимации национальной памяти на специфику базовых политических нарративов и дискурс патриотизма как семантического ядра национальной идентичности. При этом ядром символического кодирования национальных сообществ являются «большие» политические нарративы и символические коды, предполагающие доминирование гражданского кода. Описание профилей легитимации национальной памяти предполагает исследование конфликтной динамики символических контуров национальной памяти, включающей разнообразные конкурирующие смысловые компоненты (образы прошлого, политические характеристики элит, типологию героического, представления о долге, вине и ответственности, приоритет-

ные стратегии и практики борьбы с «врагами»), определяющие характер возникновения и умножения конфликтов идентичностей. Используя методологические посылки культур-социологического анализа динамики современных политических культур как символических форм национальной памяти, авторы предлагают новые теоретические подходы к изучению процесса политической идентификации и конфликтов базовых политических нарративов в реалиях современных политических коммуникаций.

Ключевые слова: политическая идентификация, политические нарративы и политический story-telling, национальная память, профили легитимации национальной памяти, патриотические дискурсы.

Статья поступила в редакцию 1 октября 2021 г.;
рекомендована к печати 27 декабря 2021 г.

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