AN ETHNO-NATIONALISTIC MYTH: GENERAL FEATURES

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What is nationalism? Nationalism is an ideology par excellence, which plays a crucial role in establishment of intimate relationships between people that helps them to unite themselves into a politically active cohesive body. That is why the latter has a more or less distinct identity which permits in to claim a certain political, social or cultural status. What makes a core of this ideology? What ideas are mostly characteristic for it? Are they natural, primordial or just the opposite, being recently forged by particular persons or social gropus to be introduces to and disseminated among all the population in order to achieve certain political goals?

This is the issue which was being discussed for more than 20 years by the scholars who studied modern nationalism, and which is a focus of my presentation here. I will consciously avoid a problem of the nation as such: although it is a very important problem, closely connected with a problem of nationalism, it is still a separate topic. While treating a problem of nationalism I bear in mind modern ethnic conflicts which violate peace in many areas of the contemporary world. Finally, my starting point deals with the theories of Eric Hobsbawm (1983) and Benedict Anderson (1991) on the "inventes traditions" and "imagined communities", on the one hand, and ideas of their famous opponent Anthony Smith, on the other hand, who considers that the modern nations could not emerge "without heritage of pre-modern ties (memories, myths, traditions, rituals, symbols, artifacts, etc.)" (Smith, 1991: 364). I will focus my discussion on the multi-cultural state, that seems, especially, interesting and prospective in respect to the problems in question.

Let us discuss issues which were reasonably put forward by Anthony Smith (1991): is it possible to talk on the "invention of tradition" and social engineering in a pure sense, or one has to consider a certain selection among already existed traditions and their re-interpretation? Does an ethnic group limit itself with as only one version of its own ethno-history? Is it possible to appropriate the past of another community? Why do some versions of the past seem to be more persuasive to people than another and under what conditions? Why do people apply to the past at all even if a historical continuity has been broken?

It is not just a curious questions. Even a brief analysis of inter-ethnic conflicts demonstrates that are always grounded the most important components of the latter. It is well established that bloody clashes and, especially, wars are usually preceded with a special period which was called a "war expectancy" phase (Allport, 1964)

or there is an intentional psychological preparation of the conflict (Wallace, 1968). Usually people are not involved into a confrontation sponteneously. Hostility has always at least some reason, and the latter has a lot to do with how people perceive their own ethnic group, its place in the contemporary and historical context, its relationships with the neighbors and with a state in historical perspective, how they evaluate and treat their own and alien legacy. To put it differently a group solidarity, a lack of which prevents a group from active participation in the political process as a cohesive body, demands for a certain group ideology which has to be developed in advance (Shils, 1957).

What is the basis of the ideology? Where does it come from? Indeed, sometimes it contains very traditional elements, for instance, ethnic stereotypes, which can be traced from the remote past. On the other hand, while studying an ideology of the modern nationalism, it is important to bear in mind that we deal with the communities of literate people whose knowledge of history originates from the school textbooks, fiction and mass media. And all this information is produced by professional intellectuals. Moreover, while analysing a situation in the multi-cultural states like the former USSR or contemporary Russia, it is worth distinguishing between these professionals: indeed, some of them represent a dominant nationality (the Russians in our case), but others - all other various ethnic groups. Depending on specific factors involved (political situation, a nature of inter-ethnic relationships, demographic trands, etc.) these intellectuals can put forward and propagandize different ethnocentric version of history which treat and evaluate the same historical events in a very different way.

There is a widespread belief, which is inherent in the Anthony Smith's (1991: 358) concept among the others, that an ethnic group has only one particular vision of the past - a subjective "ethno-history" which is transmitted from generation to generation. In fact this is one of the myths that is characteristic for the current academic approaches to nationalism. The historical versions are very flexible. They are constructed, interpreted and re-interpreted depending on the concrete situation at any particular moment. This is just what one can observe in the contemporary world. To avoid a confusion, some historians suggest that one must distinguish between "the history" and "the past". By history they mean what professional historians really do to understand the very essense of the historical events avoiding political engagement, and by "the past" - ethnocentric conjunctural version of history (Plumb, 1965; Lewis, 1975). However, it is usually impossible to define a clear watershed between both approaches; it is arbitrary more often than not, since when one deals with such a delicate and highly sensitive topic as the history of own people, it is very difficult, if ever possible, not to be biased.

There is another myth inherent in many contemporary treatments of nationalism, which has to be overcome for obvious practical reasons. It is well-knowm what a major role historical claims (territorial, political, military and other) play in

the international and inter-ethnic conflicts. Some experts are convinced that in order to facilitate peace-making one has to cut off the historical versions in question. But a problem is that it is impossible to do that more often than not. A reason for that is obvious. One of the most significant and far-reaching effects of the world-wide modernization is a explicit trend to the cultural homogenization. Many peoples in the multi-cultural states are losing their traditional subsistence economics, customs and social organizations, folk cultures and even native language. Thus, that main and sometimes the only basis for their ethnic identity is the narratives on the great ancestors and their glorious deeds, on their outstanding cultural achievements in the remote past. Therefor, as far as the people are inclined to identify themselves as separate distinct communities (and it does not seem that this process declines; on the contrar, the great majority of experts feel that it is growing), they emphasize their past more and more. It is worth stressing that this phenomenon has by no means only "constructivist" role; it is an activity of "instrumental" importance in the struggle for an improvement of a political status, for an access for economic and financial resources, for a control over territory and its natural products, and finally for a political sovereignity. The more magnificent the representation of the past, the more persistent people are in their claims for a signifiant political role in the contemporary world. Nationalist or- ethnocentric version of history plays a major role in the legitimation of the political claims or of the already existing political rights. As it was already expressed by some author (Nisbet, 1986:23), "legitimacy is the work of history and of a traditions which go far beyond the resources of any single generation". And this is the main *raison d'etre* for an eagerness to search for a glorious past.

However, what particular past is mobilized for that? It is that very past which can be a matter of a pride without any reserve, i.e. when the people was independent, waged glorious military campaigns against the enemies, had important cultural achievements (invention of metallurgy, writing system or even beer brewing), and, if possible, its own ancient statehood. It is clear that in respect to the non-dominant peoples having been integrated into the multi-cultural states long time ago, one has to deal with a very remote past that is less-know in general because of lack of a substantial amount of requires historical documents or any documents at all. These peoples lacked their own old writing systems more often than not. That is why one has to use archaeological, linguistic, palaeoanthropological and, to a certain extend, ethnological data in order to describe the period in question.

Meanwhile, it is impossible to skip an important methodological issue dealing with what is actuall a way to define a people or an ethnic group. An approach, which is the most popular in the West, stresses primarily self-identity as the main way to reveal an ethnic group. To put it differently, if people identify themselves with some particular cultural community, it is the latter that should be treated as an ethinc group. Although this approach makes a goos point, it is obvious

that it does not permit to get deep into the past. Indeed, all the reliable evidence on the clear group identities are dated only to the very recent past. That is why ethnogenetic studies, which emerged in the West during the last decade or so, deal with very recent processes or with those ones which can be observed in our days when it is possible to trace how group identity is being formed (see, for instance, Roosens 1989). Let us call this approach an ethnic one since it emphasizes evaluation from within a group, i.e. a view of the culture bearers themselves.

Another approach was popular in the former USSR and still does in contemporary Russia where the cultural groups were studied according to the external formal traits including physical appearence, language and culture. One can trace these traits and their continuity from a very remote time. Here is a basis of the ethnogenetic studies, which have been long practiced in Russia in order to study a formation of various peoples. It is worth noting that the eminent Soviet researchers have never insisted that the past cultural groups, being the focus of the ethnogenetic studies, could be directly identified with the contemporary peoples. In time, an idea was forged in the Soviet academic circles that a history of the contemporary peoples started with a formation of an ethnic self-consciousness marked with an ethnic name, or ethnonym. Thus, one had to talk on ethnogenesis for all previous period and on the ethnic history after that point. This is a corner-stone of the external approach to ethnogenesis which is used by the Russian scholars. Let us call it an etic approach.

Now it is obvious that this approach has at least one very weak point. It tends to extend the terms like "ethnos", "ethnocultural" or "ethnolinguistic" group to the reconstructed past cultural or linguistic groups although there is no evidence at all whether those groups had distinct inclusive self-identities (amazingly enough this approach was recently picked up by Anthony Smith, 1988). However, the methodology in question led to an illusion that they had. That is why this approach inevitably stimulated an identification of an archaeological culture with a particular ethnic group. And that is why, be it in the USSR or in Nazi Germany, it was very much appreciated by ethno-nationalists who attempted to trace an unbroken continuity between the ancient cultural communities and the contemporary peoples. It is worth stressing that although the methodology in question was popular in Western Europe and, especially, in Germany before mid-1940s, it ceased to exist there afterwards being discredited with its obvious connections with the racist Nazi ideology. It is also worth mentioning that in the early 1930s the Soviet scholars were almost the only ones who stressed the direct links between this methodology and racism, ethnocentrism and territorial expansion. However, in the late 1930s the USSR turned officially to the Soviet patriotism which masked the Russian ethno-nationalism, and the internationalists were repressed (Shnirelman, 1995a). Since that time the ethnogenetic studies, based on the methodology in question, became one of the most popular fields in the Soviet scholarship and still has a high prestige

in the pos-Soviet world. Thus, a way was cleaned for a flourishment of the ethnonationalist historical mythology and, in a narrow sense, for ethnocentric ethnogenetic versions.

What version are meant by that and what are their main features? Their universal characteristic is an explicit primordialism, i.e. a belief in an everlasting continuity of the group and of its basic features, or, to put it differently, a mechanical metaphysical vision of a historical process, which is as characteristic of the ethnonationalist versions of history in general. While studying an ethnocentric mythology in the multi-cultural states, one has to distinguish between a nationalist myth and an ethnonationalist one. A nationalist myth insists on the everlasting and natural character of the given nation as a political body. It is extensively used by a state, and it makes a core of the official version of history. This myth has two main functions: it has, first, to confirm an internal integrity of the nation, i.e. to ground its loyalty to a state, and second, to establish a given nation in the world community at the equal terms. At its turn, an ethno-nationalist myth has to prove the right of the given people to preserve its originality, to help it to withstand acculturation and assimilation, and ultimately to legitimate its struggle for a political autonomy or even sovereignty.

Now, let us discuss some cases dealing with the myths which were forged in various periods by ethnonationalists among the Eastern Slavic peoples. Here I will analyse the versions which have been formulated by 1930. But one must consider that it is just these versions which we revitalized, developed and propagandized since very recently by ethnonationalists in the Slavic regions of the former USSR, especially, in the Ukraine (Shnirelman, 1992; 1993a; 1993b).

Let us start with the Russian historical myth, while bearing in mind imperial nature of the Russian people, i.e. their close links with an imperial state organization. By the way, it is just a Russian case which demonstrates clearly to what a major extent a formation of the historical myth is connected with a development of a secular education, modern scholarship and an emergence of native intellectuals. The contemporary Russian ethnogenetic mythology is rooted in the late 18th century when the Russian scholarship first came into being (Shaskol'skij, 1978). It is worth mentioning that it was Westerners, primarily Germans, who were the first academics in Russia in the 18th century. This factor was a crucial one, determining the line for a development of the Russian historical myth. The well-know in point of the Russian history is a narrative on the invitation of the Varangians (Norman princes) by the Novgorod Slovens and other local inhabitants to be their rulers in the 9th century. The German scholars, who were at the Russian service in the 18th century have drawn an inevitable conclusion that the Varangians, Scandinavians, i.e. ancient Germans, were at the root of the Russian statehood. Later, especially, in the Nazi Germany a myth was developed about the inability of the Slavs to any creative activity and about that all the main cultural achievements

and, especially, statehood, were brought to them by the Germans. Besides the Norman episode, the narratives of the early medieval author Jordanes were used for that, describing a powerful Goths' Empire as if it covered a huge territory of Eastern Europe in the 4th century.

All the construction in question humiliated the Slavs and, in particular, the Russians, making them a subsidiary, insignificant element within the European community. Quite naturally the patriotic-oriented Russian scholars could not agree with that Starting, with Mikhailo V. Lomonosov and they waged an endless struggle against the Norman theory (Shaskol'skij, 1978; 1983; Pritsak, 1981). They used to put forward the following arguments: 1) the Varangians were of the Baltic Slavs origin rather than the Scandinavias; 2) the Varangian princes were called only for a military service, and the Novgorod inhabitants controlled their activity; 3) the Eastern Slavs have built a state before the Varangians came; 4) and in general, the Eastern Slavs had very deep roots in the Eastern Europe where they have developed an advanced culture already in prehistory. Many Soviet archaeologists, especially, in the mid-20th century attempted to confirm an unbroken cultural continuity in the Middle Dnieper River Valley al least since the mid-2nd Mill B.C. (or even since the 4th Mill B.C.) through the Scythian and Urnfield culture periods up to the Kievan Rus' (Shnirelman, 1995a). This approach was originally introduced by the first explorer of the prehistoric cultures of the Middle Dnieper River area V. Khvojka (1913), whose concept was generally shared by the most famous Russian archaeologist of the early XXth century A. Spitsyn (1899; 1926; 1948).

Their Soviet followers argued that in terms of political and cultural achievements Klevan Rus' was by no means behind Western Europe, and even well in advance in some respects. From this prospective, a Tatar-Mongol conquest of the early 13th century is worth discussing. Many Russian ethnonationalists persistently treated this episode with pain and shame, and it served as a basis for open or cover prejudices against the modern Tatars. It is one of the most crucial point of the Russian historical myth. First, it has to explain why Russia fall behind Western Europe in cultural terms (an effect of 200 years of the Mongol yoke) and why she has chosen a different political route (authoritarian state, surpression of the personal rights). Second, it is also a matter of pride since Rus'is treated as if she stopped the onslaught of the "wild Mongols" and saved Western Europe of the destruction and plunder. And Western Europe has to appreciate that. this should put Russia above Western Europe as if she plays a role of an "elder brother".

This is the main content of the Russian ethnonationalist myth, displayed for the outside world. In terms of its internal message, it used to emphasize a natural and peaceful dispersion of the Russians all over the territory of the Russian Empire, any oppressions against the indigenous population being emphatically denied. On the contrary, it insisted on the symbiosis between the Russians and the local

inhabitants as if an acculturation and assimilation were a voluntary choice of the latter (Smirnov, 1892).

It is easy to notice an obvious contradiction between the external and internal versions of the myth. Whereas the former emphasized the Slavic roots of the Russians, the latter demonstrated significant biological and cultural contribution of the non-Russians and even non-Slavs to the Russian legacy. This was and is still intentionally used by the Polish, Ukrainian and Bielorussian nationalists to stress that the Russians usurped the Slavic inheritance although in fact they are more the Finns of the Tatars rather than the Slavs. That is why this problem is very sensitive fot the Russian ethnonationalists.

In the 1920s in order to solve this problem, a group of the Russian emigrants, so-called, "Eurasians", developed an idea of the ethnocultural and ethnopolitical unity of the Russian-Eurasian continent (Riasanovsky, 1967). For the sake of the Russian unity they deliberatly rejected an idea of the Slavic legacy which was common among the rest of the Russian ethnonationalists. They considered a geopolitical concept much more important: they argued that the Eurasian continent is fated to the political and ethnocultural uniformity due to its geographical integrity from the Carpathian Mountains up to the Amur River. They tried to confirm this idea with referrences to the huge empires which covered its vast territory from time to. time: the Turkic Khanate, the Mongol Power, the Russian Empire. Because of some reasons these states sometimes disintegrated, but later the territorial and political integrity was being restored once again. It is worth mentioning that the Eurasians, being affected by the Russian and by a growth of the national-liberation movements, were inclined to give an equal treatment to all the peoples of Russia in respect to history. They, especially, stressed that besides the Slavic legacy one has to recognize an important role of the Turkic inheritance, in particular, a significant role of the Mongol statehood in the establishment and development of the Moscow principality which formed a foundation for the contemporary Russian state.

Nevertheless, the Eurasians remained the Russian ethnonationalists, since they could not imagine the Russian state other than under the umbrella of the Russian people whose mission was to unite all the non-Russian ethnic groups. That is why the Eurasians opposed the separatist trends among the non-Russian peoples, whose reasons they used to ignore (Vernadskij, 1927: 229-230). Their concept was influenced by an external factor as well, which was represented by adjacent Western Europe. They insisted that Europe was a completely different world, with different customs and traditions, and its own route of development and Russia-Eurasia had its own way and own mission. It was no better, no worse than Europe, but it was different, and it makes no sense to make any comparisons.

Thus, already in the beginning of the 20th century two different approaches to the interpretation of the Russian history were formed within the Russian

ethnonationalism: a narrow one which emphasized blood ties and ethnocultural legacy, and a broad one which was focused on the territorial integrity. We will see further that both of these principles play a very important role in the formation of the ethnocentric ethnogenetic versions, while being often in a non-resolvable conflict with each other.

Let us turn now to the Ukrainian version of the history, bearing in mind that during many centuries the Ukrainians lacked their own national statehood. Moreover, they suffered hard cultural and religious oppresion while being ruled by the Lituanians, the Poles, and the Russians. It was already demonstrated that the Russian version of history was at least partly forged as a response to the German and the Polish theories which seemed to be humiliating for the Russians. The Ukrainian version was formed in a similar way as a response to the Polish claims, and also to the Russian imperial vision of the situation. A discussion became, especially tense, since the mid-19th century, when a famous Russian historian M. Pogodin (1871) put forward a theory stating that it was the Great Russians who inhabited Kievan Rus'. Later they were partly slaughtered by the Tatars and partly resettled to the north to Vladimir-Suzdal principality and adjacent areas. Pogodin treated the Little Russians, or Ukrainians, as if they came to the Middle Dnieper River region from the Carpathian area only in the 14th century.

Quite naturally this theory was evaluated by the Ukrainians as an outregeous one. The Ukrainians response, which made a basis of the Ukrainian version of history, was formulated by a famous linguist Maksimovich (1856; 1857). The other authors (Kostomarov, 1861a; 1861b; Hrushevskij, 1904; 1905) used just to polish and to expand his arguments. We know already that the Russian ethnonationalists treated the pre-Mongol population of Kievan Rus' as being dominated by the Great Russians, or in a more moderate view, by the Eastern Slavs who formed a basically homogeneous cultural body. In contrast, the Ukrainian ethnonationalists emphasized that a unique Southern Russian people (narodnost') lived in the Ukraine from immemorial times comprising such tribal groups as Polian, Drevlian, Severian, Ulich and Tiverts which covered the southern part of the Eastern Slavs' territory by the end of the 1st Millennium. Kostomarov (1861b: 115-116) made even an attempt to construct the Velhynian people of these resources. According to this concept, an Eastern Salvic language consisted of three dialects (Little Russian, White Russian an Great Russian) from the very beginning was formed. Later on, the Ukrainian version was enriched with a new argument rooted in the archaeological and linguistic discoveries: sinces some prominent scholars of the 20th century identified a proto-Indo-European homeland with the East European forest-steppe zone, the Ukrainians occurred naturally an autochthonous population of the area (Hrushevskij, 1904: 45). It goes without saying that the concept in question identified original Russia with Kievan Rus' which was inhabited mainly by the Ukrainians, and it was a Ukrainian language which was initially called a Russian

one. The further dispersion of the Eastern Slavs started from the Kievan core area that logically gave the Ukrainians a position of the "elder brother". The later message was even strengthened by the Ukrainian ethnonationalists who never ceased mentioning that the Great Russians lived in the northern territories by no means alone: they used to melt there with the "Chud", or local Finns, as if that reduced them in status. The Ukrainian ethnonationalists complained that all the glorious deeds and merits of their ancestors were later violently usurpted by Moscow. Addressing to Pogodin, Maksimovich (1857: 86) expressed the very essence of the Ukrainian vision of the historical situation in the following words: "It is insulting that now you deprive the Little Russian people, i.e. me as well, of the first and the best half of its historical life, drive it out of its native «Russian land» somewhere to Carpathian Mountains or close to that".

While arguing for a continuity between Kievan Rus' and the Ukrainians, the Ukrainian version emphatically insisted that the contemporary writers overstated a devastation made by the Mongols, that the nomadic raids were common in the area and that the local inhabitants adapted themselves to them perfectly well: they used to hide themselves in the forests and marshes for a while, and to return back to the native sites after the danger was over. At the same time, the Ukrainian version stated that Europe must appreciate the Ukrainian resistence to the nomadic onslaught that protected it against a destruction. To understand the message one has to bear in mind that, according to the Polish and the Russian versions, the Ukrainian territory became completely deserted as a result of the Tatar-Mongol invasion. In this was the Russian version intentionally used to deprive the Ukrainians of their Kievan Rus legacy. In its turn the Polish version needed this interpretation in order to confirm that the Poles began to settle all over the devastating Ukrainian lands by no means later than the Ukrainians did. Quite obviously this helped them to legitimate their claims for the lands. It is worth noting that the Ukrainian approach was shared by the Kazan' Tatars whose version was also inclined to lessen the destructive impact of the Mongol blow but for a different reason, It insisted that the Mongol rule was beneficial rather than disadvantageous for the Russians. This made the Russian conquest of the Kazan' Khanate in the 16th century illegal that gave the Tatars an important argument to struggle for sovereigniy in our days (Fakhrutdinov, 1993). Thus, the different interpretations of the Mongol episode demonstrate in what way various ethnocentric evaluation of the remote historical events are used for the contemporary political ends.

Now, let us analyse a Bielorussian version which formation was closely related to the growth of the Bielorussian national-liberation movement in the early period of this century. The version was formulated mainly in the publications of the famous Bielorrussian scholar and political activist Vaclac Lastovskij and his followers in the 1920s (Chuzhylovich, 1923; Verashchaka, 1923a; 1923b; Matach, 1925; Vlast, 1925; Sulimirski, 1925). According to their concept, the early Slavs

lived between North-West Black Sea area and Baltic Sea region already in the Bronze Age, and a mighty Dacian-Ghetic Slavic (sic! - V.S.) state flourished at the Danube River Valley in the very early 1st Millennium A.D. Afterwards the Ghetians migrated to the Upper Dnieper and Western Dvina areas, where both the Ghetians and the Dacians who followed them mixed with the local inhabitants. The Kryviches emerged out of this mixture and became the progenitors of the Bielorussians. The theory emphasized that, in contrast to the other Slavs, the Kryviches have bult their own sovereign state already in the 9th century, which was still independent and was not subjugated to the Normans. To put it differently, according to this theory, the Eastern Slavs had two early states with absolutely different roots: Kievan Rus', founded by the Varangian newcomers and an independent Kryvich state with its own dynasty. In terms of territory, the Kryvich Power was much larger than the contemporary Bielorussia, especially, if one considers the external Kryvich colonies, which extended from Poland to the Volga-Oka interfluence and farther on up to the Middle Volga River Valley in the east and Upper Don and Upper Severski Donets in the south. Initially the territories of the Novgorod Slovens, Radimiches, Dregoviches, Drevlians and Severians belonged to the Kryvich community, and their inhabitants represented local groups of "the ethnographically cohesive Kryvich people". While developing this concept, Lastovskij argued that the renowned Volats were the Kryviches' ancestors. It is they who erected numerous Bronze Age burial mounds in the Borisov area and partly Vitebsk and Mogilev areas, which are still have a folk name of "volatovki". He referred to Ptolemaeous as in the latter knew about the Liutiches-Velets in the Visla River mouth already in the 2end century A.D. Lastovskij assumed that it was just the Liutiches who controled the trade system at the Dvina and Neman Rivers long before the Germans, who forced them out of the Baltic area later. In fact, according to what is know now about these events, the Slaves moved to the Baltic area much later, and the Kryviches settled at the Bielorussian territory in the 7th century at the earliest.

The theory in question had some racist connotations. It stated that only the Kryviches and the Poles maintained a pure Slavic blood whereas the Czechs have a substantial share of the German blood and the Bulgarians - the Mongol blood. The Russians were in the poorest position since they had mainly "Finnish-Mongol" blood. At the same time, it was just the Kryviches who made a core of the other East Slavic peoples. They mixed with the Finns in the east that lead to the formation of the Great Russians and intermingled with the Turkic nomads in the south, and that is where are the Ukranians from. In brief, the Russian and the Ukranian cultures were formed at the Kryvich basis. The Russian and the Polish languages grew in a similar way out of the Kryvich one. To evaluate the theory in question one has to bear in mind that Bielorussia was divided between Poland and USSR in the 1920s,

it lost some traditional lands and the political and cultural status of the Bielorussians was by no means perfect. The facts were very paintful for the Bielorussians.

The glorious start of the Bielorussian statehood was violently broken by the colonization of the Moscovites who expanded rapidly in order to rule all over the world. Under these conditions, the Bielorussians had to work hard to restore the nation. For this end they must start with moving back to their original name "Kryviches". The Bielorussian concept proceed from the assumption that only a distinct people could have a good future. But to be a distinct one, the people had to become aware of its integrity and glorious past. And this was impossible without restoring of the original name "Kryviches" which meant "relatives", or "blood relatives". A name "Bielorussians" was brought from outside at the very moment when "a true history" of the people was borken down. This name deprived the people of its rights for the past and made it a slave of the Russians. That is why it was necessary to return to the "national" name "Kryviches", which is closely link with an original history of the independent "Kryvich" people. Otherwise the "Bielorussians" due to their very name were fated to reflect the Russian individuality. In contrast, the name "Kryviches" would make them "a distinct Slavic tribe" which would be an individuality in itself (Sulimirski, 1925: 46). It was considered very important to recognize a pan-Bielorussians national unity and to unify all the Bielorussian lands under the umbrella of the Bielorussian ("Kryvich") Power. Lastovskij insisted that "a Bielorussian name divides an integral, related by blood, great Kryvich people; "Kryvich", or "related by blood", must be a symbol of the fraternal unity of our people". It is obvious that all these ideas had to legitimate a struggle for the sovereign Bielorussia. In the late 1920s the Bielorussian intellectuals discussed seriously a problem of an ethnic name, and some of them insisted that an "originar" name "Kryviches" had to be restored.

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A comparative study of the version in question reveals the following features typical to the ethnonationalist myth:

  1) A belief in extraordinary deep roots of one's own ethnic culture and language, in general, and at the modern ethnic territory, in particular. This evidently autochthonous emphasis is directly linked to a struggle for a territory and for the first settlers'rights. This feature is explicity expressed in the Ukrainian and the Bielorussian versions.

  2) An attempt to embed the modern ethnoterritorial borders and the modern ethnopolitical situation as deep in the past as possible, and to extend the territory formerly occupied by one's own ethnic group as possible as well. This also has a lot to do with a struggle for land. The Bielorussian version demonstrates that especially, clear.

3) An unconventional identification of one's own ethnic group with a distinct language which was ingerent to her. To put it differently, a language shift, if it recognized at all, tends to be characteristic only to the other groups as if this process lessens a prestige of an ethnic. This trait is not clearly expressed by the East Slavic versions but it is evident in the recent Azeri historical versions. There is an obvious trend among the latter to search for the ancient roots of the Turkic language at the Azerbaijan territory. It is worth noting in brackets that in fact the local inhabitants were shifting to the Turkic language only since the late 1st Millennium A.D.

4) A treatment of one's own modern ethnic territory as the main area of the formation of not only one's own ethnic community but of other related of "daughter" ethnic groups who resettled to other territories somewhat later. In this way the one's own ethnic community is represented as an "elder brother" in respect to them. That legitimates her claims for important privileges and makes them "natural". This trait is characteristic both to all the Slavic versions in question and to many other peoples, that makes it practically universal.

5)Attempts to identify one's own ethnic ancestors with some famous ancient people who is well-know from written records or oral tradition. Due to the claims for Kievan Rus' legacy the Russian and the Ukrainians had no problem with that, allthought sometimes that seemed to them not enough and any tried to link themselves also with the Scythians and the Etruscans. What concerns the Bielorussians they attempted to glorify the great pioneers and colonizers Kryviches as much as possible, and at the same time tried to find some other famous ancestors for themselves (for instance, the Dacians and the Ghetians). In the extreme cases, this development can lead to attempts to change the present people's name, that was demonstrated with the Bielorussian data at hand. Recently one could observe the same trend among the Kazan' Tatars some of whom intended to "return" to the name of the famous Volga Bulgars. One of the most radical groups among the Russian ethnonationalists calls itself "the Veneds' Union" after the Veneds who are known as the Slavs' ancestors.

6) Claims for a historic priority and superiority of some particular elements of one's own group culture (for instance, wrighting) or political organization (state and the like) in respect of those of the neighbours. All the ethnonationalists consider as very important to emphasize that their ancestors were the founders of the ancient of the most ancient states. The reason is to legitimate a struggle for future sovereignty or already present sovereignty, which is challenged by someone else.

7) An overestimation of the group consolidation and cultural homogeneity in the farmost past and an underestimation of the tribal division and cultural variability. The trick makes people an everlasting community. The East Slavic versions did not ignore completely the tribal groupings, well-known from the old chronicles, but treated them as if of subsidiary importance, and constructed much larger ethnic communities of them. In this respect, it seems useful to compare the

Ukrainian and the Bielorussian versions which competed with each other for the same tribal resources.

8) Sometimes an image of a foreign enemy is being forged, whose real or illusive encroachment is believed to encourage an ethnic consolidation. At the same time the past events are treated frequently with respect to present or recent interethnic or international tensions. An enemy of the Ukrainian and the Bielorussian ethnonationalists was naturally associated with the Russian . In their turn, the Russian ethnonationalists "invented" a phanthom enemy of "Judeo-Masons", "Zionists", and during the recent decades of the Soviet Power - "American imperialism". But this is a special theme, which must be analysed elsewhere.

9) Sometimes other related or non-related ethnic groups are artificiall included into one's own community for the sake of the state integrity or the strengthen a group power. This tendency is expressed in the Eurasian concept. In the last few yearsit was also extensively used in Russia by various ethnonationalists in their attempts to win the Cossacks over their side. But it is also a special topic, not to be discussed here.

It is easy to notice that all these characteristic of the nationalist and ethnonationalist mythologies are highly functional. The first two of them have to legitimate ethnic territorial rights. The following four ones provide a group with a psychological comfort through lending it with a special prestige and putting it at the top of the ethnic hierarchy, which is inherent in an ethnonationalist myth. Their own ethnic is always treated as having a superiority over other subsidiary "younger brothers" as if this provides it with right to claim broader privileges, both in cultural and political spheres. This also make it easier to get into confrontation, while depriving an enemy of the full-human image. As it was long noticed by the experts in the abthropology of war, it is easier to people to get engaged into fighting against an enemy who is treated by them as semi-human or non-human at all. The seventh and eight features have to provide with a strong group solidarity while stating first, that the given ethnic is a natural and everlasting community, and second that it is vital to be highly consolidated at he face of an external danger. Finally, the last characteristic has to recruit allies to provide the ethnie with additional support. To put it briefly, my conclusions support a theory (Bell, 1975: 171) treating ethnonationalism as a highly instrumental strategy.

At the first glance, it seems that close kin relations between two or more ethnies their common origin, and their language affinity have to establish especially close friendly ties between them. In fact, a development of ethnonationalism leads to an opposite effect. Indeed, under the situation in question, the ethnies have to fight for the same political and cultural resources and this fighting can be very tense and violent, providing ethnic stratification is a case.

Now it is a good time to answer the questions which were asked in the beginning of the paper. It is evident that ethnocentric historical myth is being forged

quite consciously by the patriotic-oriented intellectuals who pursue certain cultural and political aims. Indeed, the already existing resources are used fot that to some extent, but first, they undergo a strong selection, second, they are being reinterpreted, and finally, an artificial building of new versions and even creation of new "facts" ("invention of tradition" after Eric Hobsbawm) play an outstanding role in this development. Attempts are even made to appropriate the past of other ethnic groups, especially, of the famous extinct peoples such as the Sumerians, the Etruscans, the Scythians, the Dacians, and the like. Ethnonationalist myth is frequently represented by several different versions which contradict each other. The meaning of this that when needed various versions are used in their turn for different goals in different ethnopolitical situations. A positive effect of the ethnonationalist myth is that it promotes an ethnic integrity, helps to preserve ethnic unity and values and to maintain cultural legacy. A negative effect is that because of its inherent chracateristics, this myth inspire inter-ethnic tensions almost inevitably and violates peace as that could be recently observed in the Caucasus (Shnirelman, 1995b).

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