

Forming and Positioning of Neoheathen Organizations in Socio-Political Processes in Ukraine in the Years 2000s

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Abstract: Neoheathenism represents an extremely heterogeneous and changeable phenomenon, the forms which it generates by cooperation with radical right-wing and extremist groups may threaten public and national security that makes for necessity to study this phenomenon. The study brings to light the problem of changes of neoheathen ideas in the period of the socio-political conflict in Ukraine and embedding them into ideology of ultra-democratic groups acting in “euromaidan”. The leading approach to investigating this problem is an activity approach that implies the determinant of narrowing of differences tendency and duplicating activity of neoheathens and radical right-wingers. On the whole, the results of investigation allow to suggest rapprochement of neoheathen ideology with extremist groupings, forming of neoheathen subculture in the environment neonazi groups and ideological break among neoheathen associations. The materials of the article can be useful for historians, political scientists, students of religion, sociologists, state apparatus workers.

Key words: Neoheathenism, rodnoverie, cult, sect, moral security, Ukrainian crisis, euromaidan

INTRODUCTION

In the course of social and political conflict in Ukraine a number of social phenomena, earlier kept in the shade, appeared to be in the limelight of specialists. One of such phenomena are neoheathen associations, the followers of which became marked part of force segment of “euromaidan”. Before the fact of “eurorevolution” the different manifestations of political activity of the neoheathens could be not regarded as in the marginal phenomena of interest only for narrow circle of historians, sociologists, students of religion and political scientists (Gaidukov, 2006; Rogatin, 2012). Since the year 2000, neoheathenism in Ukraine has been going through an intensive forming process that developed in full in the period of disturbances in Kiev when the neoheathens were in the detachments of militants and in the end in many respects, due to their actions against “Golden Eagle” and the other militia units the victory of “euromaidan” became possible. They also played an important role in forming of the “battalions of area defense” taking a very active part in Kiev operations in Donetsk.

Active forming of neoheathen associations taken place in the first 10 years of the considered period has come to the level of actual demonstration exactly in the conditions of socio-political escalation, since the year

2013. Practically from the very beginning of existence, “euromaidan” drew attention of various neoheathen formations. There one could see the flags with the neoheathen symbolism in them and the advertising posters of various neoheathen formations: “RUN vera”, “The Cult Ra”, votanists and the others. Similar activity of the neoheathens in the “euromaidan” and the period of so called “antiterrorist operation” of Kiev authorities attracted different mediae.

The neoheathen formations in Ukraine as well as the neoheathen formations of the other countries are extremely changeable and unstable (Shizhensky, 2010) that manifested in the example of conversion of their belief by many neoheathen organizations in Ukraine owing to the “euromaidan” and “eurorevolution” events. One of such aspects is a deliberate work of the neoheathens on substantiation of acts of force of all descriptions against enforcers and civilian residents of separate regions, the dissatisfied of national language policy of the center. Next aspect of belief changes of the neoheathens displayed in the renunciation of some neoheathen organizations of the ideas of Slavonic unity (Ukraine, Russia, Belarus) for the sake of nationalistic slogans “Above all Ukraine” (Ukraine in the first place) or paneuropean ideas. The neoheathens in Ukraine also always develop the subject of “nazification” of the Ukrainian culture, compile the statistics on morphology of the tripiltsy, the Slavs and the

Scythian to “prove” their “aAryan” origin and similar to Spanish and French neoheathens have a number of cultural adoptions a kind of national and ethnic appropriation (Francois, 2007). Thus, having decided to add swastika (or wolf’s rune) to their armory, they will insist that they do not by no means copy Germany but reproduce a traditional Slavonic-Aryan symbolism that was in due time compromised by Hitler. One of such characteristic manifestations is the borrowing by the Ukrainian neoheathens of the script of stylized runes. In spite of the fact that the Cyrillic alphabet and the Glagolitic alphabet (one mentions about lines and cuts) are characteristic for the Slavonic script.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

By investigating the following tasks were set:

- To analyze the neoheathen and radical right-wing organizations
- To trace what groups of the neoheathens that are disposed to faith conversion
- To generalize the material of neoheathen evolution during socio-political conflict in Ukraine

The investigation for disclosure of crystallization of a process is concentrated in three flats: in the first phase, it was analyzed the activity of the neoheathens during “euromaidan”, their being organized in combat elements and their participating in revolutionary events in the second phase the neoheathen movements and their ideas in the zone of “antiterrorist operations” were observed; in the third phase the received results were summarized, the explored materials were systemized and documented.

The neoheathenism is to be understood as the whole set of religious, parareligious, socio-political, historical and cultural organizations and movements that in their behavior, appeal to pre-Christian beliefs and cults, ritual magic practices and deal with their revival and reconstruction (Gaidukov, 2006). The prefix “neo” points to a tradition gap that after long period of Christianity dominating and then dominant atheistic ideology has continued fragmentarily.

Considering the institutionalization of the Ukrainian neoheathen organizations, let us note that among officially registered communities of January 2013 there have been figuring 13 religious neoheathen organizations and 136 communities, of them 63 communities are “RUN believers”. Among all neoheathen organizations of Ukraine the best institutionalized are “The council of the Native Ukrainian Faith” (Run faith), “The Native Orthodox Faith” and “Consolidation of Ukrainian Rodnovers” with

the centers in Kiev the community “The Great Fire” by G. Botsenyuk with the center in the city of Zhitomir. It should be also mentioned the tens of neoheathen organizations that are not registered and not associated with the pointed movements of the Ukrainian neoheathenism. A great number of independent neoheathens have their visions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Christian-neoheathen alliances: Flexibility of the neoheathen ideas and beliefs, first an foremost, became apparent in the interaction of the Christian radicals and neoheathens during “euromaidan”. Despite the leader of the of the dominant in the alliance “The Right Sector” of the radical right-wing organization “Trizub after Stepan Bandera” Dmitry Yarosh and his closest fellow fighters are consistent member of the Uniate Church during the events of “eurirevolution” the neoheathen associations joined the membership of the alliance. Just in that alliance known as “The Right Sector” there have found their expression the interaction of different radical right-wing groups that are the opponents to each other on religious views.

The interaction of the Christian and neoheathen radicals in “The Right Sector” is described by the chief chaplain of “Trizub named after Stepan Bandera”, clergyman of UGKC, Peter Burak. In his interview he appreciated the activity of the detached forces of the neoheathens during “euromaidan” but pointed out to ideological differences.

This phenomenon obtained the further development in the battalion “Azov”. Despite the antichristian discourse and ideological hostility that are characteristic of the neoheathens, for a long time they had got on with the fighting men of D. Korchinsky from “Sotnia of Jesus Christ” (Jesus with a weapon on the chevron) that profess the Christian faith and are in the clerical custody of clergymen from Russian Foreign Orthodox Church (A) (by Agafangel Pashkov). Then D. Korchinsky formed detached unit “Saint Maria”.

The main forms of neoheathenism in Ukraine: Insufficient examination of the neoheathenism in Ukraine, variance in its appraisal among the scientific researches make difficulties for making exhaustive typology. However, according to the existed materials, ritual practices and strata of cultural reproduction the neoheathenism in Ukraine can be divided into three groups.

The first group is represented by organizations that are oriented toward the renaissance of the Slavonic and pre-Christian cultures. Many communities

of this type have their heathen temples with the idols of Slavonic origin. Their integral attribute is the idol made from wood that symbolizes the “god” honored by the community. Here is institutionalized the group of priests and the Magian who can combine the functions of a minister of religion and a leader of the neoheathen organization. The wide-spread quasi religious ideology among is the idea of “Javi”, “Pravi”, “Navi” as of three worlds of the Slavonic mythological world-view.

The second group devotes itself to “renaissance of the Cossacks”, introducing here neoheathen components, developing the characteristics’ heathen world-view (khimorodnics, galdovnics or zamorochnics). Attitude of this group to the Orthodox Church is more loyal. It is conditioned by historical Christian heritage of the Cossacks. Therefore, they focus on the fact that ancient heathen knowledge have not been eliminated but hidden in the orthodox cloisters and similar to Eastern buddhist cloisters secretly passed on to only the selected circle. Such attitude makes for formal acceptance of the Christian heritage of the Cossacks and at the same time allows to legitimate the neoheathen practices that are made up in accordance with ethnographic descriptions and own interpretation (Rogatin, 2012).

The third group is represented by the Nordic neoheathenism, it finds its historical roots in Vikings and worships Odin, respectively. This movement is especially popular among neonazi groups. It also acquired distinction as a result of arsons of the orthodox Ukrainian churches committed by the followers of this movement. The institute of the priests is feebly marked there and therefore, it may acquire the form of a subculture.

It is the Nordic group of the three described above groups of the neoheathen organizations that takes the peak of its popularity. Notwithstanding, the fact that this group relates to the Slavonic heathenism rather indirectly and has its own center not in Ukraine, it could push the two rest types back. It is connected with the fact that it was initially predetermined to militarism, violence, armed conflicts. Also the symbolism and ideology of the battalion “Azov”, the representatives of this movement have settled are kept in the form of Nordic neoheathenism and are depicted and represented as heroism in the Ukrainian mass media.

Among the other neoheathen organizations the leading role is taken by RUN vera, this organization is also headquartered outside Ukraine. This organization having used the acquired administrative resource in the Yushchenko’s, the President of Ukraine, obtained admission to the Ukrainian recruits and soldiers of MSU.

The rest politically reasoned neoheathen organizations were found to be before the world vision dilemma, they are on the one part to emphasize their Ukrainian patriotism and Ukrainian unique identity in order to remain in tendency with prejudice to their religious studies oriented to the other Slavonic countries as well. Thus, we can see rapid reassessment of the beliefs, religious rituals and world view reference points by the leaders of different neoheathen groups.

Neoheathen organizations and interaction with radical movements: The participation of neoheathens in the events of “eurorevolution” have captured on the video about the arrest of extremists taking part in pogroms in Grushevsky street in the city of Kiev, pelting the law-enforcement officers with “Molotov cocktails”. According to the video of “euromaidan” it is seen that some militants have chevrons of the neoheathen symbol “kolovrat” on. During those events the buildings and the advertising billboards in the environs of “maidan” were covered with drawings of the neoheathen symbolism. The presence of the neoheathens in the battalions of area defense was also reflected in the corresponding symbols and ritual customs in them.

The native Ukrainian national faith (RUN vera): “RUN vera” is one of the most numerous neoheathen organizations in Ukraine. In 2013 in Ukraine, it was registered 63 religious communities of “RUN vera” and abroad >30 communities. Its opponents from the representatives of the other Ukrainian neoheathen organizations assert that “RUNE vera” have been created by the American secret services. There is absent strict centralization in connection with continual struggle for power and confrontation owing to it, that is why the leaders who were at head of “RUN vera” at different times have influence on some communities: Vladimir Pilat, Bogdan Ostrovsky, Bogdan Savchenko, Peter Ruban (Svyatoslav), Stepan Pinchuk, Anatoly Lysenko (Kyivslav). The key cult structure of RIN believers “The Cathedral of Saint Mother of Ukraine” is situated in the city of Spring-Glen (the state of New-York) (Kolodny, 2006).

According to the published and other information during “euromaidan” it was the advertisement of “RUN vera” that one could see mostly. So, near the headquarters there every day a middle-aged man with a banner and bright brass trident in sunny circle was standing (the key symbol of “RUN vers”). The representatives of “RUN vera” were inviting the participants of “euromaidan” and strolling idlers there for a common prayer their organization that was held an hour earlier than the time of holding the common evening prayer of the Christians.

According to the specialists' assessment, religious doctrine of "RUNvers" presents an ideology of anti-Christian character that profess the ideal of a superman, supernation and is marked by religious intolerance. The followers of this movement consider S. Bandera and N. Shukhevich to be the Ukrainian national heroes and follow them. Besides the Ukrainian nationalists, the ideas of the terrorist Breivik acquired wide popularity in their environment his appearance had been published in the newspaper "From Shrine of the Sun" several times during revolutionary events (Anonymous, 2013b).

As long before "euromaidan" RUN believers got in close contact with nationalist organization "UNA-UNSO" in the region of Ivano-Frankovsk and in Lvov SNPU used premises put at their disposal by "RUNvera" for drilling their fighters.

The Chumachenkos the parents of Katerina Yushchenko and Katerina Yushchenko herself, the wife of the former president of Ukraine took active part in propagation of "RUNvers". As the followers of "RUNvera" wrote V. Yushchenko had used the principal thesis from the book by Silenko "Mara ВѢра"- "Above all Ukraine" more than once (Anonymous, 2013a).

Mobilization to eastern front of Ukraine is being held with the support of the followers of this organization. They say to the men due for call-up that "death for Ukraine" will give to each soldier "entry into immortality given by Dazhgod" ("Dazhgod" super deity). According to the missionaries, death on the battlefield is "the utmost act of self-sacrifice to the people of Ukraine". The missionaries "runvers" were noticed in Obolonsky military registration and enlistment office of Kiev, Yavorovsky military registration and enlistment office of the region of Lvov and in military registration and enlistment office of the region of Poltava (the regions where the most number of communities of "RUNvers" are concentrated). In all cases they called the young Ukrainians upon for enlisting in MSU.

Great Fire: The head of Zhitomir neoheathen organization "The Great fire", Gennady Botsenyuk (Prince Ogin), positions himself to be "confessor" of the organization of "The White Hammer" which, from now on, has become a separate sotnia of "euromaidan".

"White Hammer" is a radical group even on the scale of the "Right sector", the part of which it has become yet since the end of November 2013. This radical right-wing organization took the popularity owing to the pogroms of game-playing salons in Kiev where the muscle fighters in masks were smashing with heavy hammers of

"one-armed bandits". "The White Hammer" has always postulated that it struggles for "consolidation of the Ukrainian Ukraine on the basis of national socialism". The fighting men of this organization like their leader Vladislav Goranin, took part in the first conflicts with "The Berkut" that would have been passed for beating of the students. Then they participated in strike force of "euromaidan".

The coordinator of "The White Hammer" was also Anton Bondarenko (Mecheslav), known also as the neoheathen literary man Anton Rysich. In one of his interviews he told that "a considerable part" 15 men of that ultrarightist group "at present are in the battalion of the area defense "Aidar". Gennady Botsenyuk wrote in his about rituals performed for the fighting men of the battalion "Aidar" at Ivan Kupalo's night.

For some time "The Great Fire" had cooperated with the Russian "Circle of Heathen Tradition" (CHT), until the year 2009, when they were broke off because of anti Ukrainian opinions of the CHT followers in the Internet-forum "The House of Svarog". In 2009, "The Great Fire" became a participant in "Worldwide Center of Ethnic Religions" (WCER).

RODOVID center: At the beginning of 2000 the representatives to be expected of RODOVID started displaying activity. Then "euromaidan" became bridgehead for realization of neoheathen ideas by Igor Didkovsky who was the initiator of spiritual enlightener dominating idea "The town in the city" in Kiev "Rodovid downtown" which was supposed to be the magnet of the Ukrainian spirit and to involve: evolutionary-civilization parliament "RODOVID center" (Didkovsky, 2010).

In the period of all disorders, he became the head and supporter of sotnia on "euromaidan"- "The Vikings". This sotnia has not been investigated sufficiently in this connection, it is described with respect to "The White Hammer" and sometimes identified with it. "The Vikings" have become known owing to expressive heathen symbols on the shields (runic scripts) and its leader Igor Didkovsky. The given sotnia it had been part of "The Right Sector" until it was excluded because of the extreme radicalism.

The interesting fact is that Igor Didkovsky is not taking part in ATO but is concentrating to set up a "Center of cultural mind "RODOVID Sich" near the city of Kiev as continuation of his dreams about "Rodovid downtown". There he holds 2 weeks cultural programs for the children of different age. The program involves residence, meals, excursions and leisure. The given

program suggests also a series of neoheathen studies and practices. The coaches and teachers of school listed in the site all master various martial arts at high professional level (most of them are the champions of Ukraine).

After the statement of Didkovsky (2010) of the desire to grab gas-transport system and to recommence nuclear status of Ukraine he was excluded from “The Right Sector” and similar social organization “The National Guard” set up by him was controlled by the militia. The National Guard itself was originated in March 12, 2014 by Verhovna Rada of Ukraine. The first oath of the fighting men of Didkovsky was the prototype of the heathen oath “Azov” (Anonymous, 2014a).

The Russian orthodox circle: The fighting men of the area defence battalion “Azov” in Zaporozhiye uniform and with the banners participated in the celebration of Ivan Kupalo on the island Khortitsa. That event was held by the neoheathen organization “The Russian orthodox circle” (Anonymous, 2014b). At the site and account of this heathen organization money have been raised for “support of the fighting-men-rodnovers” in the battalion “Azov”, at that this part is called none other than “Peroun’s array”. The battalion “Azov” was formed in May, 2014 with about 400 fighters. The backbone of the “Azov” consists of the activists of the radical right-wing “Socio-National Assembly” (SNA) and the movement “The Patriots of Ukraine”. The representatives of “The Congress of the Ukrainian Nationalists” (CUN), the parties “Freedom” and “Fraternity” and also the supporters-ultras are the members of the “Azov”. The commander of the battalion is Andrey Bilyetsky who is more known among his companions-in-arms as “The White leader”. He became People’s deputy of Ukraine in 2014. According to the external evidence-abundance of the tattoos of the Nazi Germany’s symbols one can judge about sympathies of many “azovers” for the ideas of national socialism. Approximately half of the fighters candidly flaunt the Nazi tattoos: swastika, runes SS double lightnings, arms of The Third Reich and mottoes like “The God with us!”.

The special interest in the battalion is provoked by the oath of allegiance to Ukraine that is taken by each fighter. It resembles more a heathen spell. As an example let us take the last lines: “The deeds of those let find the sweet death, death in agony for you. And the solution is in thee and I will live forever in You, Aboriginal Ukraine, the mighty and the cathedral!”. Certain traditions of a farewell with the killed fighters of the battalion “Azov” are established for example, the battalion stands in rank in

front of the coffin with a fallen fighter, the fighters beat themselves with fists to chests and touch with the hand of the fallen friend. After all the fighters to have said good-by to the fallen, a funeral volley is fired.

Votanists: On the “euromaidan” there were the “Votanists” as well, who are known more as “Votan Jugend” or “Mizantropicheskaya Division”. The motto of this radical right-wing neoheathen group “To kill for Votan” (Germ. Toten für Wotan). This racial neoheathen organization (the founder is David Laine) is called by the name of the super god in the religious beliefs of the ancient German Votan (Wotan) known as the One the lord of hosts. In recent years votanism as a movement acquires growing popularity in the USA, the European countries and the countries of the CIS. Impelled by the racial and religious intolerance the adherents of this movement organized a series of arsons of religious structures in Ukraine. There is an information that only in Nikolayev they have burnt two orthodox churches and a synagogue. After the arrest of perpetrators of arsons, the followers of this neoheathen movement accounted for their actions by religious beliefs in the Vikings.

Having found a certain ideological support from Social National Assembly (SNA), “votanists” took part in skirmish in Kiev; this group keeps on its activity in the battalion “Azov”. It should be noted that the ideas of the neo heathenism are rather dear to many from the battalion “Azov” for example, of the west-european neo-Nazi. The Slavonic and German-Scandinavian mythology is inextricably intertwined in the interpretation of the neoheathen from the “Azov”. One can take the appearance of Andrey Biletsky before the fighting men of the battalion as an example of “If Somebody is killed in action then our ancestry from Vallhall wait us”. This movement emphasizes the importance of the symbolism of the runes and in so doing, consolidate the ties with the Nordic neoheathenism.

The Russian club “The Cult Ra”: The tent with meals “The Cult Ra” on “euromaidan” with inscriptions “from the Carpathians to Sakhalin” was a street feeding station of the ethnic bar “The Russian club”, situated in Kiev.

The Russian club “The Cult Ra” is a kind of efficient combination of the restaurant, tea and bookshop and is a place of informal communication of the neoheathens in Kiev. Almost every evening the concerts, master-classes, the neoheathen feasts, literary events, celebrations of historical dates take place there. This organization is also a sponsor of the neoheathen concerts in support for the fighters of the battalion “Azov”.

Most of all the Ukrainian voluntary battalions that are connected with the neoheathens, namely the battalion "Azov" and "Aidar", are charged with outrageous treatment, marauding, excess of powers. During "euromaidan" the neoheathen sotnias also displayed an extreme cruelty and irreconcilability. The extreme radicalism of the sotnias "The Vikings" and "The White Hammer" was admitted by "The right sector" as well and it had to be dissociated from them.

Ambiguity of the neoheathenism and inherent in it the ideological and religious pluralism allow many researchers to see occultism, syncretism, mass of ideological contradictions, subculture and even so called diaspora in it. Formation of the neoheathenism in Ukraine, its institutes and religious beliefs set conditions for putting forward hypotheses of every sort and kind, studies and beliefs. Thus, the existing neoheathen studies are characterized by the present estimations and pluralism in understanding of this phenomenon. Considering the groups of the neoheathens who took part in the social and political conflict in Ukraine, we see that the most inclined to conversion to the religious beliefs and world vision are first of all not institutionalized groups of the "Nordic" neoheathenism. Playing an important role as a part of the subculture of the ultrarightists, they are free in creation any conceptions that are claimed in the period of a conflict. It is also demanded for those radical right-wing groups that actively operate the national and corresponding Ukrainian attributes as we see in the example of Rune faith. The rest of the neoheathen formations turned out to be face the complicated world vision option, reappraisal of the religious beliefs and cult rites in favor of Ukrainization and nationalization.

CONCLUSION

Resuming the material above, one may make the following conclusions. Having analyzed the interaction a participation of the neoheathen formations in the events of social and political conflict in Ukraine we see so called need for radical right-wing organizations of the neoheathen ideas. The sympathy the radical right-wings for the neoheathen ideologies is connected with its legitimating and approving any cruelty concerning opponents, proceeding from archaic examples of ancient history. It is also worth emphasizing that the symbolic line and visions of the neoheathens and the radical right-wings are intersected as they are a product of a "constructing" of new social and political community. Thus, the symbols and ideology of the battalion "Azov", stand for the Nordic neoheathenism and are represented in this way and demonstrated as heroism in the Ukrainian mass media. The runes and swastika for this battalion are character symbolic line.

Unsteadiness and flexibility of the neoheathenism of the movements during the Ukrainian socio-political conflict is conditioned by the fact that the neoheathens are to a considerable extent oriented to radical right-wing movements and react practically like a flash to their needs. The smallest manifestation of this phenomenon is the borrowing by many radical right-wing groups and neoheathen formations of the symbolic line, stylized to rune scripts, wolf's rune, types of swastika and whirlpool. The continuation of this display in tendency was in the renunciation of some neoheathen organizations in Ukraine of the ideas of the Slavonic unity (Ukraine, Russia, Belarus') for the sake of nationalist slogans "Ukraine is above all" or pan-European ideas.

Consolidation of the neoheathen ideology and radical right-wing movements is preceded by the formation of ideological support and legitimation of various violence, giving it the status of as sacred and sacral. Presence in such formations of the visions connected with racial superiority and neo-Nazi ideology giving government support of any form to such groups create major danger for society and national security that makes for the necessity of regular studying of this phenomenon.

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