EVOLUTION OF THE BELARUSIAN NATIONAL MOVEMENT IN THE PAGES OF PERIODICALS (1914-1917)

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Abstract

Belarusian national movement is usually characterised by its relative weakness delayed emergence and development. Being the weakest movement in the region, before the WWI, the activists of this movement mostly engaged in cultural and educational activities. However at the end of First World War Belarusian national elite actively engaged in political struggles happening in the territories of Western frontier of the Russian empire.

Thus the aim of the thesis is to explain how the events and processes caused by WWI influenced the national movement.

In order to accomplish this goal this thesis provides discourse and content analysis of three editions published by the Belarusian national activists: *Nasha Niva* (Our Field), *Biełarus* (The Belarusian) and *Homan* (The Clamour).

The main findings of this paper suggest that the anticipation of dramatic social and political changes brought by the war urged national elite to foster national mobilisation through development of various organisations and structures directed to improve social cohesion within Belarusian population. Another important effect of the war was that a part of Belarusian national elite formulated certain ideas and narratives influenced by conditions of Ober-Ost which later became an integral part of Belarusian national ideology.

Table of Contents

Introduction

The Belarusian national movement emerged relatively late especially compared to the Polish, Lithuanian and Ukrainian ones. Belarusian activists were falling behind all of the nations of Russia's western frontier and despite steady growth, did not achieve a high level of political mobilisation among the Belarusian population prior to WWI.

Several researchers point out a number of objective preconditions for such a late emergence and problematic growth of the movement. For example, such factors as low urbanisation and industrialisation, low literacy rate, and the general underdevelopment of the region are mentioned as explanations. However, the most noticeable peculiarity of the Belarusian situation was its geographical position on so the called Civilizational borderland which created a bipolar ideological environment, with two strong nation-building centres, the Polish and (Great) Russian ones. Moreover, both of these centres suggested their own national projects for the Belarusian territories, which supposed strong connections of the Belarusian population to either of the centres. Both of these projects influenced, interacted and competed with the Belarusian movement as such. Even when the modern ideology of Belarusian nationalism was formulated in the last decades of the XIX century, Belarusian national activists had to face the ideological struggle of Polish and Russian elites over Belarusian territories and take it into account when creating national ideology. Thus, the first legal Belarusian-language periodical – *Nasha Dolia* (Our Destiny) was published only as late as 1906. From that time on, the Belarusian movement was slowly developing, though most of its activities were directed towards the cultural and educational spheres.

The First World War brought about drastic changes in the environment that the Belarusian nationalists operated in. All of the Belarusian population was affected by wide-scale mobilization, refuge, and the harsh realities of a front-line area and a martial law regime. All

of the Vilnia Belarusian editions were shut down as the front-line approached in 1915. A large number of activists along with millions of common Belarusians from the Western gubernias went or were forced to go into refuge to central Russia. The refuge had considerable influence on the formation of a national consciousness among Belarusian refugees. The Belarusians from the Eastern part of the country faced harsh conditions of martial law and rear administration. During the years of the war, the policies of the imperial centre acquired more and more nationalistic features which were also reflected on the development of the Belarusian movement.

On the other side of the frontline, the remaining national activists found themselves in conditions of German occupation. The cultural politics of the German occupational authorities greatly differed from Russian imperial policies, and strongly affected the Belarusian movement. For instance, military administration of Ober-Ost for the first time allowed Belarusian-language primary education while at the same time prohibiting the use of Russian language.

The current level of research of the history of Belarusian nationalism seems insufficient. Due to the late emergence and general weakness of the Belarusian national movement, its origins, development and character to this day remain a relatively poor examined topic in Western and Russian historiographies. The situation can be illustrated by the fact that most Western and Russian scholars who cover the Belarusian national movement often turn to works of Nicholas Vakar *Belorussia: the making of a nation: a case study*[1] published in 1956 and Jan Zaprudnik *Belarus: At a Crossroads in History*[2] published 1993. Despite these works

1 Nicholas P. Vakar, Belorussia: The Making of a Nation: a Case Study, Russian Research Center Studies 21 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956).

2 Jan Zaprudnik, Belarus: At the Crossroads in History (Westview Press, 1993).

being comprehensive studies of Belarusian history, they do not thoroughly cover the topic of the Belarusian national movement. To this day, no broad study of late XIX – early XX century history of Belarusian nationalism in the English language has been published.

However, it is precisely the weakness of Belarusian national movement that makes it interesting for a researcher. In this regard, particularly interesting is its leap from mere cultural activities in 1914 to the proclamation of independent Belarusian nation-state in 1918. Moreover, the creation of the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic in 1919 indicates that after all the Belarusian national movement was at least partially successful. The logical question is then what happened during the war-years and what transformed the national movement and pushed it towards engagement in political struggles?

Unfortunately, there is little is written in regards to this question. The most notable study connected to the problem is The Great War and the Mobilization of Ethnicity[3] (1998) written by Mark von Hagen. However, he conducts the research of the problem based primarily on the Ukrainian materials. A number of Belarusian authors covered the topic (Sidarevich, Smalianchuk). However, their main interest lies in the political development of the Belarusian national movement and the influence of the war itself is not analysed. Thus there is a distinct gap in the research of the topic and this thesis can be the first step to filling this gap.

Thus the research question of this thesis is how the World War I influenced the development of Belarusian national movement. I will try to investigate what aspects of the war as well as war-caused processes and events affected and shaped the Belarusian national movement and in what way. I will also attempt to explain the rapid transition from cultural to political work which later led to the proclamation of the Belarusian People's Republic and

3 Mark Von Hagen, "The Great War and the Mobilization of Ethnicity," in Post-Soviet Political Order: Conflict and State-Building, ed. Barnett R. Rubin and Jack Snyder (London: Routledge, 1998).

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In order to answer these questions I will conduct content and discourse analysis of three Belarusian periodicals: *Nasha Niva* (Our Field), *Biełarus* (The Belarusian) and *Homan* (The Clamour). I will try to single out certain reactions of the national activists to war-caused events and processes. At the same time, I will try to explain the perception of the war and the logic of national activists hidden behind the text lines.

The time frame of the thesis is July 1914 – March 1917. I decided to end my analysis with the outbreak of February Revolution in Russia, as the Revolution itself changed the situation dramatically and created significantly different environment for national activists to operate in. Therefore, the effects of February Revolution of evolution of Belarusian national movement can be a subject of another study.

The thesis consists of three chapters. In the first one I will make an overview of the development of national movements in the Belarusian territories before the WWI. At first I will take a look at the cultural traditions, elite identities and government policies of the XIX century as these were the elements that shaped the pre-conditions for the emergence of the Belarusian national movement. Then I will outline the societal structure of "Belarusian" gubernias of the Russian empire and its influence on nation-building possibilities. Finally I will describe the development of the Belarusian national movement as such in late XIX - early XIX century.

In the second chapter I will analyse the effects of WWI on the population and national elite. I will overview the general effects of the war such as general mobilisation on the factors that shape national building. In the next part of the chapter I analyse the German-Occupied part of Russian empire – Ober Ost and how its national politics influenced the Belarusian movement. Finally I talk about the refugeedom and its role in developing national

consciousness among common population.

The last chapter is dedicated to the analysis of the three newspapers. I will try to find some general patterns in rhetoric of the Belarusian nationalists that emerged as a result of the war. In addition I will compare the three newspapers and describe how the Belarusian national rhetoric changed throughout the war.

In this thesis I will anachronistically use the term "Belarusians" and "Belarusian population" when talking Belarusian-speakers. However, I do not imply that this group generally shared the Belarusian national identity or even used the word "Belarusian" (*belarus*) as an endonym. Similarly, I use the terms "Belarus", "Belarusian territories", "Belarusian lands" to indicate the territories with predominantly Belarusian-speaking population and which were the object of activity of Belarusian national elite. This territory approximately encompasses Minsk, Grodno, Mogilev, Vitebsk as well as partially Vilna and Smolensk *gubernias*.

Chapter 1. Between krajowość and West-Russianism: The Development of the Belarusian National Movement Prior to WWI

The Belarusian national movement developed in a very complex and peculiar environment. The territory of five "Belarusian" *gubernias* of the North-Western *Krai* was notable for its heterogeneous ethnic and confessional compositions, which included four major ethnic groups (Poles, Belarusians, Russians, Jews) and three dominant religions (Catholicism, Orthodoxy, Judaism). The important factor in the formation of the national movement in the region was its early modern history, namely the formation of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in 1569, the religious union of Brest in 1596, the catastrophic wars of the XVII – XVIII centuries and finally the partitions of the Commonwealth by the

Russian, Prussian and Austrian empires in the end of XVIII century.

The lands of the future Belarusian state were situated in what several scholars and philosophers viewed as a civilizational Borderland. Samuel P. Huntington states that the line which divides Western Christian (Catholic) civilization and Eastern Christian (Orthodox) civilization cuts through the territories of modern day Belarus and Ukraine.[4] About 70 years earlier, Belarusian philosopher Ihnat Abdziralovich made a very similar statement:

> *"Belarus, starting from the 10th century is in fact a battlefield of two direction of European (or rather Aryan) culture – Eastern and Western. The frontier of both influences, dividing Slavic lands into two camps, passes through Belarus, Ukraine and goes further into Balkan states."*[5] *

As contemporary Belarusian historian Siarhei Tokts argues, such a factor is often absent from the studies of the development of the Belarusian nation, though the specificity of the civilizational Borderland greatly influenced the evolution of nationalisms in this region.[7]

This indeed can be seen as one of the most important factors in shaping the path of the evolution of the Belarusian movement. For instance, the characteristic ideological position of the Belarusian national project which was situated between two strong nation-building centres – the Polish and the Russian ones-- can be explained by the influence of the Borderland position.

However, there were several other important factors that determined the specific pattern of the evolution of the Belarusian national idea ranging from ecological to economical ones.

4 Samuel P. Huntington, The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order (Simon and Schuster, 2007), 158.

5 Ihnat Abdziralovich, Advechnym Shliakham: Dasledziny Bielaruskaha Svietahliadu [Along the Eternal Way: Studies of the Belarusian World Outlook] (Mensk: Navuka i tekhnika, 1993), 10.

6 The quotes from Belarusian and Russian here and afterwards are translated by the author

7 Siarhei Tokts, "Belorusy v Epokhu Formirovaniia Modernyh Yevropeiskikh Natsiy [Belarusians in the Era of Formation of Modern European Nations]," in Belorusy: Natsiya Pogranichya [Belarusians: The Nation of Borderland (Vilnius: EHU, 2011), 96–97.

These factors will be analysed further in order to understand the specificity of the Belarusian nation building, namely its particularly late development. Thus, in this chapter I firstly take a look at the activities and attitude of the elites and imperial bureaucracy in regard to Belarusian ethnicity in the XIX century. In the second part of the chapter, I talk about the social structure of the society of the North-Western *Krai*, based primarily on the result of All-Russian population census of 1897. Finally, I will follow the development of the Belarusian national movement as such until the beginning of WWI.

1.1 Elites and bureaucracy: identities, traditions, policies

Every ideology, including nationalism, is shaped and influenced by the cultures and traditions that are present in a given society. In this part of the chapter I will try to sum up the processes and events that affected the emergence of Belarusian nationalism. One of the main processes that contributed to the development of the modern Belarusian nation was described by Belarusian scholar Aliaksandr Smalianchuk. He uses the term "Belarusian cultural accumulation" (*Belaruskaye kulturnaye nakaplenne*) by which he means the set of events of cultural life which promoted the penetration of Belarusian language into elite culture and formed a specific historical identity.[8] This definition is also correlated to "Phase A" of national development introduced by Miroslav Hroch. This author characterises this phase by the emergence of scholarly interest and absence of political demands from the elites.[9]

According to Aliaksandr Smalianchuk, the process of Belarusian cultural accumulation

8 Aliaksandr Smalianchuk, "Litsvinstva, Zakhodnerusizm i Belaruskaya Ideya XIX - Pachatak XX St. [Lithuanianness, West-Russianism and Belarusian Idea XIX-early XX C.]," Kamunikat (n.d.), http://kamunikat.org/7983.html.

9 Miroslav Hroch, Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe: a Comparative Analysis of the Social Composition of Patriotic Groups Among the Smaller European Nations (CUP Archive, 1985), 23.

was happening inside two traditions - "Lithuanian" (*litwinstwo*) and "West-Russian" (*zapadnorussizm*). The Lithuanian cultural tradition was represented by Polish or Polonized Catholic nobility (and partly Uniate clergy) which preserved historical and cultural traditions of the former Grand Duchy of Lithuania and distinguished themselves from ethnic Poles and Russians. At the same time the Lithuanian tradition was part of a bigger "Commonwealth patriotism" which embraced all *szlachta* of the former Res Publica.[10]

The representatives of the "Lithuanian" tradition were among the first to develop literature in the Belarusian vernacular. However, this literature was usually directed not at peasant masses but rather at narrow circle of Polonized elite of the North-Western Krai.[11] Even the most prominent authors writing in Belarusian usually never identified themselves with the Belarusian peasants and preserved their "*Gente Lithuanus (sive Albaruthenus) natione Polonus*" identity. *Polonus* in this formula represented affiliation with the political "noble nation" of the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth rather than a connection to an ethnically Polish nation. Such an identity created preconditions to the emergence of the "*krajowość*" movement, which united the Polish and Polonised nobility of the Belarusian-Lithuanian *Kraj* (region, land). Participants of the "*krajowość*" movement or *krajowcy* adhered to a political rather than an ethnic definition of the nation and argued for the creation of a political unit, which would continue the tradition of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania.[12] However, throughout the time, the "Lithuanian" or "Ruthenian" component of local *szlachta* identity faded away and a Polish national identity in the modern sense spread instead,

10 Smalianchuk, "Lithuanianness, West-Russianism and Belarusian Idea."
11 Pavel Tereshkovich, Etnicheskaya Istoriya Belarusi XIX - Nachala XX Veka: V Kontekste Tsentralno-Vostochnoy Yevropy [Ethnic History of Belarus XIX - Early XX Century in the Context of Central-Eastern Europe] (Minsk: BGU, 2004), 74.
12 Smalianchuk, "Lithuanianness, West-Russianism and Belarusian Idea."

especially in the early XX century.[13] Only a very small portion of the *szlachta* joined either Belarusian or Lithuanian national movements, however, they played important role in both of them.

The other tradition which contributed to the Belarusian cultural accumulation was West-Russianism. Formulated in the milieu of Uniate and later Orthodox clergy, the idea proposed to look at Belarus as a specific but inalienable part of Russia – West Russia.[14] The ideas of West-Russianism were popular among the locals who became civil and military officials in the imperial administration.[15] The most prominent scholar of West-Russianism, Aliaksandr Tsvikevich, defines the social basis of West-Russian as "everyone non-Polish, non-noble, non-*szlliachta* […] Orthodox priests, their sons, service class, middle-class townsmen".[16] Tsvikevich notes that this category of people were economically interested in fighting the Polish dominance in North-Western gubernias.

However, it is important to notice the difference between West-Russianism as a tradition and West-Russianism as an ideology. According to Aliaksandr Smalianchuk, the ideology of West-Russianism aimed at the eradication of all traits that distinguished Belarusians from (Great) Russians. At the same time, the West-Russianist cultural tradition aimed at studying these traits and preserving them at some level.[17] Thus, several representatives of the West-Russianist tradition made significant contribution to Belarusian cultural accumulation: the publication of official documents of GDL written in Old-

13 Aliaksandr Smalianchuk, Pamizh Krajowastsiu i Natsyyanalnay Ideyay: Polski Rukh Na Belaruskih i Litouskih Zemliakh 1864-liuty 1917 H. [Between Krajowość and National Idea: Polish Movement in Belarusian and Lithuanian Lands, 1864- February of 1917] (Hrodna: ГрДУ [Hrodna State University], 2001), 278–283.

14 Aliaksandr Tsvikevich, "Zapadno-Russizm" Narysy z Historyi Hramadzkay Mysli Na Belarusi u XIX i Pachataku XX St. ["West-Russianism" Essays on History of Social Thought in Belarus in XIX - Early XX Century] (Mensk: Navuka i tekhnika, 1993), 7.

15 Smalianchuk, "Lithuanianness, West-Russianism and Belarusian Idea."

16 Tsvikevich, West-Russianism, 14.

17 Smalianchuk, "Lithuanianness, West-Russianism and Belarusian Idea."

Belarusian by Ivan Grigorovich[18], the publication of the first Belarusian dictionary by Ivan Nosovich[19], the fundamental multi-volume study of Belarusian ethnicity by Yefim Karskiy and many other achievements. Similar to the representatives of the "Lithuanian" tradition, part of the West-Russianists drifted towards the Russian nationalist ideology and some of them joined the Belarusian national project once it emerged.[20]

Both "Lithuanian" and "West-Russian" traditions appealed to Belarusian folk culture as well as some historical facts such as the official use of Slavonic language which was close to vernacular Belarusian in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Moreover, both of these traditions partly originated from a circle of Uniate priests, who constituted the social class most connected to the Belarusian peasantry. However, due to the political incompatibility of these traditions, they developed separately which created obstacles to the formation of a proper Belarusian national movement.

Another important factor in the progress of Belarusian cultural accumulation was of course the position of imperial authorities. Nationalising historiographies tend to ascribe inherently assimilationist intentions to the authorities of the Romanov Empire. However, the national and linguistic policies of the Russian state were of course very different throughout the time and depended on the actors who implemented them. Alexei Miller argues that for the imperial authorities, the loyalty in political and cultural forms was more important than assimilation and affirmation of national identity.[21] This, for instance, explains the rather

18 Aliaksandr Smalianchuk, "Belaruski Natsyyanalny Rukh - Ad 'Kulturnaha Nakaplennia' Da Baratsby Za Nezalezhnasts. Pachatak XIX S. - 1918 H. [Belarusian National Movement - From 'Cultural Accumulation' to the Fight for Independence. Early XIX c. - 1918]," accessed May 13, 2013, http://kamunikat.org/7988.html.

19 Tokts, "Belarusians in the Era of Formation of Modern European Nations," 137.

20 Ibid., 143.

21 Alexei Miller, The Romanov Empire and Nationalism: Essays in the Methodology of

lenient approach to Polish culture in North-Western Krai prior to the 1830-1831 uprising. Most researchers agree that such a policy actually contributed further to the Polonization of the East Slavic and Lithuanian peasant population of the territory.[22]

At the same time, the Russian authority expressed a lack of knowledge as well as interest in the ethnic composition of Belarusian-Lithuanian lands until the last quarter of the XIX century. The Belarusian speaking population was called in official documents *litovtsy* or *litviny* (Lithuanians), *poliaki* (Poles) *krivichi* (Krivichs), *russkiye* or *rusiny* (Russians or Ruthenians), *belorussy* (White Ruthenians), *chernorussy* (Black Ruthenians) etc.[23] For the Russian authorities, both central and local, confessional and estate affiliations remained the main identity marker until the last part of the XIX century.[24]

However, Belarusians along with Ukrainians were important for the imperial ideology of the triune Russian people. Linguistic and confessional traits that differentiated these peoples from Great Russians were often explained by the influences of foreign occupation and these traits had to be eradicated.[25]

Though the triune Russian nation idea was dominant among imperial and local officials, various actors came to different conclusions in regards to the national politics in this land. From time to time representatives of local or regional authorities as well as local orthodox intelligentsia put forward suggestions for advancing the Belarusian language to the peasants, often as a tool to confront Polish influences (like the creation of grammar for Belarusian

Historical Research (New York: Central European University Press, 2008), 54.

22 Mikhas Bich, Belaruskaye Adradzhennie u XIX - Pachatku XX St. [Belarusian Revival in XIX - Early XX C] (Minsk: Navuka i tekhnika, 1993), 4.

23 Tokts, "Belarusians in the Era of Formation of Modern European Nations," 104–105.

24 Ibid., 106.

25 Andrew Savchenko, Belarus: a Perpetual Borderland, Russian History and Culture v. 2 (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2009), 39.

language by Shpilevskiy[26] or publishing an official paper in the "Belarusian dialect"[27]). However, it seems that the central authorities usually viewed these suggestions as undesirable and only accepted it under extraordinary circumstances, such as in the case of "Tales in the Belarusian Dialect" (*Rasskazy na belorusskom narechii*) published as a response to Belarusian-language agitation of insurgents in 1863.[28]

However, the very uprising of 1863 significantly changed the attitude to both the "Polish question" and the national politics towards Belarusian. The uprising itself drew interest to the territories, as XIX century Russian scholar Alexander Pypin noted:

> *"In regard to the Belarusian nationality [narodnosti] there was almost a discovery: a large part of Russian society which before the uprising had a very vague idea of Western Krai, due to the turmoil caused by the uprising, suddenly was fascinated by an idea that this land was Russian."*[29]

The triune imperial ideology was adopted and developed by Russian nationalists who became prominent in Russian politics of the late XIX century. For instance, Vilna Governor-General Mikhail Muravyev, the suppressor of 1863 uprising and the implementer of Russification policies of North-Western *Krai* stated that following:

> *"This land is Russian from the time immemorial […] The Polish element […] has to be dealt with and suppressed now, otherwise Russia will irretrievably lose Western Krai and turn into Muscovy, as the Poles and most of the Europe want Russia to become"*.[30]

This statement shows that the Western Gubernias of the Russian Empire were viewed by at least some representatives of Russian imperial authorities and Russian nationalists as

26 Vakar, Belorussia, 78.
27 Smalianchuk, "Belarusian National Movement."
28 Darius Staliūnas, Making Russians: Meaning and Practice of Russification in Lithuania and Belarus After 1863 (Rodopi, 2007), 287–288.
29 Fedor Turuk, Belorusskoye Dvizheniye: Ocherk Istorii Natsionalnogo i Revolutsionnogo Dvizheniya Belorussov [The Belarusian Movement: Outline of the History of National and Revolutionary Movement of Belarusians] (с.н., 1921), 12.
30 Tokts, "Belarusians in the Era of Formation of Modern European Nations," 153.

something that constitutes an essential and irreplaceable part of Russia. This idea of course rejected any possibility of the development of a separate Belarusian nation.

Another factor that formed a cautious attitude towards the Belarusian-oriented activism was its similarity to the Ukrainian case. The authorities were afraid that the development of the Belarusian language would lead to undesirable separatist tendencies. For example, a censor from Kiev Rafalskiy stated: "It [Belarusian national literature] should be suppressed in its first stages, otherwise we will have the same trouble as with Ukrainophilism"[31] This shows that despite the absence of political claims by any Belarusian activists in the XIX century, Russian authorities envisioned that such claims could emerge once the Belarusian language was developed. This fact also shows that imperial politics towards Belarusian cultural and later political activities were often influenced by other actors: the Polish movement, Ukrainian movement, West-Russianist movement etc.

This cautious approach to everything connected with these troubled lands prevented further development of West-Russianism itself. This ideology was incorporated into the All-Russian national idea along with Little Russianism, and served as a tool to combat Polish influences and Belarusian national ideas. The Orthodox locals who adhered to the idea of West-Russianism, though were welcomed to assimilate into Russian culture and society,[32] were usually rejected to the higher administrative positions in the North-Western gubernias, which were mostly occupied by bureaucrats from Central Russia.[33] Of course this created dissatisfaction among a part of the emerging local elite and pushed them to more national oriented positions.

31 Jerzy Turonek, "Vatslau Ivanouski i Adradzhennie Bielarusi [Vaclau Ivanouski and the Revival of Belarus]," in Madernaya Historyia Belarusi [Modern History of Belarus] (Vilnia: Instytut belarusistyki, 2008), 167.
32 Miller, The Romanov Empire and Nationalism, 52.
33 Tokts, "Belarusians in the Era of Formation of Modern European Nations," 157.

Thus it is possible to say that Russian nationality policy in North-Western *Krai* was rather unfruitful: "The creators of borderland politics could not suggest such a vision of Russianness which would be able to develop dynamically, considering the cultural heterogeneity of the region".[34] Indeed, even adherents of West-Russianism loyal to the empire did not give up their sense of ethnic peculiarity. Later, they became a significant part of the Belarusian national movement.

1.2 Societal structure of the Belarusian gubernias

The way of development of any national movement directly correlates to the structure of society that the national activists appeal to. It is generally agreed among scholars that there are a certain set of characteristics that define to what extent a society is ready to support national movement. For instance, one of the early scholars of nationalism, Karl Deutsch, suggests several "yardsticks of measurement" of the level of societal mobilisation for more intensice communication: level of urbanisation, level of industrialisation, level of literacy, level of education etc.[35]

One of the few relatively reliable statistical sources that contain information on Belarusian society of the late XIX and early XX centuries is the first All-Imperial population census of 1897. Despite the critique of the census result, they are recognised by scholars as "sufficiently reliable".[36] It is worth noting that the ethnic affiliation of an individual was based on native language of a respondent. In case of Belarusians, this criteria usually provided

34 Zapadnye Okrainy Rossiiskoi Imperii, Historia Rossica (Moskva: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2006), 252.

35 Steven L. Guthier, "The Belorussians: National Identification and Assimilation, 1897–1970," Soviet Studies 29, no. 1 (1977): 37–61, doi:10.1080/09668137708411105.

36 Rainer Lindner, Historiker Und Herrschaft: Nationsbildung Und Geschichtspolitik in Weissrussland Im 19. Und 20. Jahrhundert (Saint-Petersburg: Nevskiy prostor, 2005), 28.

close approximation to the real size of the ethnic group.[37]

As Belarus did not exist as a separate political unit prior to 1918-1919, Steven Guthier proposed to outline the Belarusian area, which is the set of *uyezdy* (districts) were Belarusian speakers are the largest linguistic group. Most of these districts constituted Vilna, Vitebsk, Grodno, Minsk and Mogilev gubernias with some exceptions.[38] The Belarusian-speaking population of this area constituted 74,6% which is calculated to be around 5.45 million people[39], while 5.89 million people listed their mother tongue as Belarusian throughout the empire.[40]

The social composition of Belarusian speakers differed significantly from the other linguistic groups of the region. More than 97% of all Belarusian speakers lived in the countryside and 92% of them belonged to peasant estates.[41] A mere 1% of Belarusians lived in cities with populations larger than 20 000, which constituted only 10% of the population of the cities. Almost the same percentage of the population – 1,1% was engaged in industry, manufacturing, construction or transport.[42]

The following statement made by XIX Russian scholar Giltebrandt illustrates the low level of mobilisation of the Belarusian population:

> *"In our [Russian] land a peasant is almost always a worldly-wise man […] went to the cities, travelled around Russia. Here [in the Belarusian lands] the industrial movement is so week that it is not uncommon in the provincial backwoods to meet and old man who lived in his village all his life."*[43]

37 Guthier, "The Belorussians," 40.
38 Ibid., 40–41.
39 Ibid., 41.
40 Lindner, Historiker Und Herrschaft [Historians and the Power], 29.
41 Ibid., 29–30.
42 Guthier, "The Belorussians," 45.
43 Volha Shatalava, "'Zamknionyya u Viostsy': Satsyyalnaya i Zhytstsiovaya Prastora Bielaruskih Sialian XIX-XX Stst. ['Locked Out in Rural Areas': The Social and Living Space of Belarusian Peasantry in the 19th and 20th Centuries]," in Acta Albaruthenica,

However, even though there was development of industry in the Belarusian territories, it tended to be situated in rural areas and dealt with the extraction and primary processing of natural resources (mainly timber).[44] Such a peculiar way of industrial development ensured that most of the industrial workers remained in the countryside i.e. far from the Russifying and Polonizing influences of the city.

Another important factor that defines the level of social mobilisation is of course literacy rate. Only 22.4% of Belarusian-speakers from age 10 to 49 were literate, while for the other language groups the percentage was 51.5%.[45] However, literate Belarusian speakers were spread unevenly across the region. The Catholic Belarusians who lived predominantly in Grodno and Vilna gubernias constituted 29.07% of literate Belarusians, while their percentage of the Belarusian population was only 13.55%.[46] This factor was reflected later in the fact that Belarusian national activists were more successful in theWestern part of the region rather than in the Eastern part.

Though the conditions for the development of the foundation for a popular Belarusian national movement seemed unfavourable, Reiner Lindner, in his overview of Belarusian society, notes that on many "yardstick measurements" Belarusians were not that different from neighbouring groups like Ukrainians or Lithuanians, for instance.[47] In addition, Pavel Tereshkovich notes that the notion of direct positive correlation between modernisation, industrialisation and urbanisation on the one hand and the development of national movements on the other is a gross oversimplification. For instance, the more mobilised Slovak population was subjected to stronger assimilationist pressure from the side of

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ed. Mikołaj Timoszuk and Mikołaj Chaustowicz, vol. 12 (Warszawa: Katedra Białorutenistyki Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2012), 199.

44 Savchenko, Belarus, 57.

45 Guthier, "The Belorussians," 47.

46 Tereshkovich, Ethnic History of Belarus, 172.

47 Lindner, Historiker Und Herrschaft [Historians and the Power], 30–35.

Hungarian authorities which possessed more modern instruments of cultural policy than for instance the Russian authorities.[48] Thus, paradoxically enough, the low level of modernization of the Belarusian region and the Russian empire in general worked both against effective Russification (and to a lesser extent Polonization) of Belarusians and at the same time against their active involvement in national projects, whether Belarusian, Russian or Polish.

1.3 Political development of Belarusian national movement

The origins of national projects of any kind is usually an obscure and fiercely debated topic. The birth of the Belarusian national idea is not an exception. The estimates of the time of the emergence of the Belarusian movement, introduced by various scholars, range from 1820s to 1910. For the purposes of this study, I will not go into details in regards to the early articulation of Belarusian ethnicity in political terms. Instead, the most significant stages of the formation of the Belarusian national movement will be analysed.

As was stated earlier, the formation of national project was happening within the context of a civilizational Borderland; i.e. the struggle between Russian and Polish nation-building centres. Representatives of both cultural milieus tried to incorporate the notion of separate Belarusian ethnicity into their own project. However, it is important to note that on both sides, the "Belarusian question" went hand in hand with the ideas of social emancipation, particularly in the last half of XIX century.[49] This connection is in fact logical considering the overwhelmingly peasant nature of Belarusians.

According to Aliaksandr Smalianchuk, it was the radical liberalism which spread among

48 Tereshkovich, Ethnic History of Belarus, 196.

49 Adam Stankevich, "Da Historyi Bielaruskaha Palitychnaha Vyzvalennia [On the History of Belarusian Political Emansipation]," in Z Boham Da Bielarusi, ed. Alies Pashkevich and Andrei Vashkevich (Vilnia: Instytut belarusistyki, 2008), 167.

the Polish-speaking nobility of the *Krai* that first made political appeals to Belarusians as an ethnic group.[50] The most famous representative of this movement was the revolutionary Kastus Kalinouski (Konstanty Kalinowski). Kalinouski was one of the leaders of the 1863 uprising in the territory of Lithuanian-Belarusian land, and had organised the publication of an illegal newspaper in the Belarusian language *Mużyckaja Praŭda* (Peasant Truth). In this paper, he advocated the ideas of social justice which he viewed, and held that the peasants would achieve after separation of the *Krai* from the Russian empire and joining a federation with Poland.[51] Kalinouski is also notable for breaking the mental estate barrier which was a new thing compared to Belarusian-language writers of the "Lithuanian tradition". In his "Letter from Beneath the Gallow" Kalinouski associates himself with peasant writing "my brothers, my dear *mużyki*[*]".[53]

Another important example of an attempt to articulate Belarusian ethnicity in a political sense comes from revolutionary *narodniki* circle.[54] It is known that in 1870s and 1880s a group of students from Belarusian ethnic territories organised a group within "*Narodnaya Volya*"(People's Will/Freedom).[55] The murderer of Alexander II, the son of an impoverished noble from Belarusian land Ihnat Hryniavitski (Ignat Hrynievicki) was also a member of the organization.[56] This circle of Belarusian *narodniki* published only two numbers of newspaper *Gomon* (The Clamour) which however are very important for understanding the evolution of Belarusian political thought. Authors of Gomon envisioned Belarus as an autonomous part of

50 Smalianchuk, "Belarusian National Movement."
51 Stankevich, "On the History of Belarusian Political Emansipation," 163.
52 *Mużyk* can mean both "peasant" and "man"

53 Tereshkovich, Ethnic History of Belarus, 82.
54 Per Anders Rudling, "The Battle Over Belarus: The Rise and Fall of the Belarusian National Movement 1906-1931" (University of Alberta, 2010), 66–67, http://www.academia.edu/382068/_The_Battle_Over_Belarus_The_Rise_and_Fall_of_the_Belarusian_National_Movement_1906-1931_.
55 Smalianchuk, "Belarusian National Movement."
56 Stankevich, "On the History of Belarusian Political Emansipation," 169.

Russia which had specific interests that differed from both Great Russian and Polish ones.[57] From the text of the newspaper it look like that publishers of Gomon were cautious not to provoke accusation of separatism even though the main Russian revolutionary thinkers like Herzen, Bakunin and Ogarev recognized the separate character of the Belarusian people and even its right to self-determination.[58].

Both *Mużyckaja Praŭda* and *Gomon* appealed to the Belarusian ethnicity. However, neither of them viewed the future of Belarusians as something separate from either Polish or Russian center. Moreover, the primary goal of the publishers of both Kalinouski and *Gomon* was the social emancipation of the Belarusian peasantry within the context of social transformation of the whole society. The pure national goals were still marginal in their political claims.

The idea of the modern Belarusian nation was proposed another decade later by a member of the local nobility from Vilna region, Frantsishak Bahushevich. In the foreword to his book *Dudka Belaruskaja* (Belarusian Reed) which was published in Krakow, Bahushevich proclaimed that "Belarus is there, brothers, where our language is spoken and heard".[59] Furthermore, he stressed the importance of the Belarusian language in his proverbial statement "Do not leave, brothers, our Belarusian language, for you not to die away".

Ideas of Bahushevich, who was rather a representative of the "Lithuanian" tradition, supplemented the scientific achievements of the circles of West-Russianists. In addition to the purely academic activities a circle of democratically oriented West-Russianists published "North-Western" calendars which contained among other things Belarusian poems and short

57 Smalianchuk, "Belarusian National Movement."
58 Bich, Belarusian Revival, 11.
59 Vakar, Belorussia, 82.

stories directed at "awakening of Belarusian national spirit".[60] This connection between Bahushevich and certain group of West-Russianists show that in the last decade of XIX c. the two traditions found a point of contact thus facilitating the formulation of a Belarusian political ideology.

This ideology emerged from Belarusian student groups formed at various universities of the empire. The most important student group which contributed greatly to the formation of the Belarusian national movement was one organised in Saint-Petersburg by Vatslau Ivanouski (Waclaw Iwanowski). In 1902, the Belarusian student circle that existed in the imperial capital was transformed into the first Belarusian national political organisation: "Belarusian Revolutionary Party".[61] Though cooperating closely with Polish Socialist Party (PPS) as well as Russian revolutionary circles, the activists of BRP adhered to specific Belarusian national goals such as development of Belarusian literary language, creation and popularisation of Belarusian literature. Besides it was the circle of BRP, where the very idea of Belarusian independence was initially pronounced. [62]

Despite the BRP being a student circle rather than real political party, the leader of the party had different ideas on future development of Belarusian movement. In 1903 the party split into the Belarusian Revolutionary *Hramada* (Union) and the "Circle of Belarusian popular enlightenment and culture".[63] The Belarusian Revolutionary (later Socialist) Hramada, however, is considered to be socialist only partially. As there industrial proletariat was practically absent in the Belarusian society, activists of BRH/BSH worked primarily with

60 Turuk, The Belarusian Movement, 16.
61 Turonek, "Vatslau Ivanouski i Adradzhennie Bielarusi [Vaclau Ivanouski and the Revival of Belarus]," 158.
62 Ibid., 160–163.
63 Aleh Latyshonak, Zhaunery BNR [The Soldiers of BPR] (Vilnia-Bialystok: Belaruskaye Histarychnaye Tavarystva, Instytut belarusistyki, 2009), 24.

the peasantry which resembled *narodniki* ideas.[64] Though most of the founders of the party came from szlachta estate and were connected in many ways with activists of Polish movements, their hopes for a political future now were with the Russian revolutionary movement. The activists of BSH moved from uncertain claims of political independence of Belarus to the development of ideas of Belarusian autonomy with local parliament in Vilna.[65]

The *Hramada* actively participated in the events of First Russian Revolution and managed to mobilize part of the Belarusian peasantry and workers. However, in this period, the national component of their ideology became a form for socialist agitation.[66] Still, the political positions of the party remained weak throughout 1905-1906 which convinced national activists of the importance of the spread of national identity among the wider population.[67] This thesis was supported by the fact that the authorities shut down the first legal newspaper in Belarusian – *Nasha Dolya* (Our Fate) was quickly shut down by authorities due to its radical nature.[68] Instead, the activists of the Belarusian movement turned to a more moderate cultural program which they reflected in the pages of a new edition *Nasha Niva* (Our Field).

From 1906 until 1915, *Nasha Niva* was the centre of the Belarusian national movement. The creators of *Nasha Niva* managed to formulate a coherent national ideology, necessary for popular agitation. New Belarusian literary canon was created in the pages of the newspapers

64 Smalianchuk, "Belarusian National Movement."
65 Anatol Sidarevich, "Anton Lutskevich i Yaho Rolia u Bielaruskim Ruhu [Anton Lutskevich and His Place in the Belarusian Movement]," in Da Historyi Belaruskaha Rukhu [On History of the Belarusian Movement] (Vilnia-Bialystok: Belaruskaye Histarychnaye Tavarystva, Instytut belarusistyki, 2010), 10.
66 Smalianchuk, "Belarusian National Movement."
67 Turonek, "Vatslau Ivanouski i Adradzhennie Bielarusi [Vaclau Ivanouski and the Revival of Belarus]," 177.
68 Turuk, The Belarusian Movement, 22.

and virtually all classics of new Belarusian literature started publishing in the newspaper.[69]

The Belarusian movement in general showed the trend of slow but steady growth. For instance, from 1863 to 1900, only 9 little books of 160 pages altogether in the Belarusian language were printed in the Russian empire.[70] In contrast, from 1906 to 1915 around 80 books were published with gross print run of 220 thousand. In addition, the Belarusian-language publishing actually became profitable around 1910, which is also a significant development.[71]

Besides, the *Nasha Niva* circle, which was mostly socialist oriented, several other groups worked within the national movement. The most significant non-socialist group of Belarusian activists formed around student circles in Catholic seminaries. Being more moderate in their social demands, Catholic Belarusian activists argued for the introduction of the Belarusian language in the church and a further spread of national identity (connected with Christian values) among Belarusians.[72] The Catholic activists gained support from several local nobles who welcomed the Belarusian revival but did not accept the socialist orientation of its leaders. For instance, Duchess Magdalena Radziwiłł sponsored publication of the Belarusian catholic newspaper *Biełarus* (The Belarusian).[73]

It is also important to note that most of the szlachta from the Belarusian-Lithuanian lands adhered to the idea of *krajowość* described in the first part of the chapter. Most of them had rather positive attitudes to the development of the Belarusian national movement, though were also partly worried about the possible way of its development. Moreover, the ideology

69 Savchenko, Belarus, 66.
70 Turonek, "Vatslau Ivanouski i Adradzhennie Bielarusi [Vaclau Ivanouski and the Revival of Belarus]," 167.
71 Ibid., 187, 192.
72 Adam Stankevich, "Bielaruski Khrystsiyanski Rukh (histarychny Narys) [Belarusian Christian Movement (historical Essay)]," in Z Boham Da Bielarusi, ed. Alies Pashkevich and Andrei Vashkevich (Vilnia: Instytut belarusistyki, 2008), 480–483.
73 Ibid., 483.

of *krajowość* spread among the leading activists of the Belarusian movement, though they often viewed it as a tool to reach their own national goals.[74] However, such an approach to *krajowość* was a rule rather than an exception.

There are certain general conclusions that can be made from an analysis of the pre-WWI development of Belarusian society. First of all, it should be noted that the civilizational Borderland factor is visible throughout all the developments of national ideas in Belarusian lands. Situated between Poland and Russia, which each had their own vision of Belarus, the native elite of the region could develop Belarusian-centred ideology only by the end of XIX century.

The socio-economic conditions of the region also created obstacles for national agitation, though these obstacles also worked against the Russian and Polish national aspirations. Locked in the countryside, the Belarusian peasantry was not susceptible to most forms of national agitation. At the same time there was only thin layer of educated elite which was able to formulate the very idea of the Belarusian nation.

Though this idea was formulated and turned into a coherent ideology at the turn of the century, the Belarusian movement still encountered problems caused by the Borderland factor. The divide of the Belarusian population according to religion as well as state and cultural loyalty was a significant impediment to the attempts of introducing unifying Belarusian national idea.

The plans of Belarusian national activists for the political future of the *Krai* were rather blurry. The idea of an independent national state, though was announced at the early stages of nation building, was later was substituted by autonomist plans.

74 Smalianchuk, Between Krajowość and National Idea, 283.

Despite these difficulties, the national activists steadily moved towards their goals and further expanded their activities. Still, their visions were not to be fulfilled as the bullet of young nationalist from another Borderland country reached its goal and set fire to the Powder Keg of Europe.

Chapter 2. Occupation, martial law and refugeedom: experiences of WWI and the national movement

The Great War brought drastic changes in the life of the Russian Empire and particularly to the Belarusian lands. Being the borderland of the empire, the "North-Western Krai" was afflicted by the events of war even more than central gubernias. The World War was indeed a new type of war – a total war, which affected most if not all spheres of life of the whole society. The direct and indirect effects of the war on various aspects of life were usually fast and traumatic and led to even deeper changes in societal structure. All of these changes of course influenced the development of the Belarusian national movement. Finding themselves in ever-changing surroundings, national activists had to adjust their policies and adapt to the new environment. The war, of course, affected the "material" that national activists were working with. Belarusian-speaking population of the North-western provinces of the empire also underwent deep changes in mentality, identity, economic conditions etc. This transformation of Belarusian society also made national activists alter their activities.

In this chapter I analyse the various effects of the war on both the Belarusian national movement and wider Belarusian population. In the first part of the chapter I will examine the wider imperial processes that also involved the Belarusian population, such as mobilization or war-time changes in economics. In the same part I discuss the specific experiences of the

Belarusian population on the Russian side of the front-line which experienced martial-law and military rule. In the second part of the chapter, I talk about the Belarusian lands under German occupation – namely, territories of Ober-Ost and its controversial policies towards nationality problems. Finally in the last section I review involuntary resettlement – one of the most significant effects of the war on national movements and nation building of most of the Western borderland ethnic groups including Belarusians.

2.1 General effects of the war

There are a number of empire-wide processes and events that affected the Belarusian population and particularly its ability to apprehend the national ideas suggested by Belarusian nationalists. Many of these processes and events created rather controversial effect and often it is impossible to find out whether they were positive or negative for the national movement. In fact, the contemporary Belarusian historiography has not reached a conclusion regarding the larger question – whether WWI was in general a positive or a negative event for the development of the Belarusian nation.[75] However, some of these processes should be mentioned here for better understanding of the changes that Belarusian society underwent.

One of the most important events that affected the peoples of the Russian empire was the general mobilisation. Around 18,6 million Russian subjects served in the army throughout the WWI.[76] Hundreds of thousands of these men were Belarusians. The conscription exhausted the empire's agricultural and industrial workforce. In addition approximately half of all primary school teachers were called up.[77] The latter is of particular importance to the

75 V. V. Yanouskaya, ed., Na Shliakhu Stanaulennia Belaruskay Natsyi: Histaryiahrafichnyia Zdabytki i Prablemy [On the Way to Establishing Belarusian Nation: Historiographic Achievements and Problems] (Minsk: NANB, Instytut Historyi, 2010), 285–286.

76 Peter Gatrell, Russia's First World War: a Social and Economic History, 1st ed (Harlow, England: Pearson/Longman, 2005), 22.

77 Ibid., 23.

national movement as primary school teachers made up a large number of Belarusian national activists before the war.[78] Obviously due to the mobilisation the very possibility of national agitation was curtailed. The side effect of mass mobilisation was the rising role of women in the society, who became more and more politically active and thus more amenable to political agitation including the national one.[79]

However, there was even more profound effect of the mobilisation on the Belarusian recruits and reservists. According to Joshua Sanborn the army was viewed by Russian military intellectuals as the tool for creating a modern Russian nation. Though many of them adhered to the idea of a multi-ethnic and civic, to some extent, Russian nation, still one of the army's aims was to assimilate non-Russians. With the beginning of the war the question of assimilation did not only disappear but instead the length of planned assimilation decreased from years to months.[80]

This means that assimilationist pressure on the Belarusian population, which was present well before the war, increased significantly after its outbreak. In addition, most of the Belarusian recruits served their service not in their native region, but in South-Western and Romanian fronts.[81]

At the same time many Belarusian national activists particularly primary school teachers who were mostly commissioned and non-comissioned officers or skilled workers

78 Anton Lutskevich, Da Historyi Belaruskaha Rukhu [On History of the Belarusian Movement], ed. Anatol Sidarevich (Vilnia-Bialystok: Belaruskaye Histarychnaye Tavarystva, Instytut belarusistyki, 2010), 45.

79 Gatrell, Russia's First World War, 73–76.

80 Joshua A. Sanborn, Drafting the Russian Nation: Military Conscription, Total War, and Mass Politics, 1905-1925 (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2003), 72, 77.

81 Mikhaliuk, "Revolutsiia 1917 Goda v Rossii i Belorusskoye Natsionalnoye Dvizheniye [Revolution of 1917 in Russia and Belarusian National Movement]" (presented at the Revolutsionnaya Rossiya 1917 goda i polskij vopros [Revolutionary Russia of 1917 and Polish question], Moskva: Institut slavianovedeniya, 2009), 96.

who served in technical troops were recruited in the Romanov's army as well.[82] After the February revolution, these activists organised soldiers of Belarusian origin in Belarusian clubs and committees, thus further spreading the national identity. For instance Belarusian solder Pilip Karetka recalls:

> *"I of course saw myself as Russian [ruski] Orthodox man. But then, agitators came to our regiment and said that Russian and Belarusian peoples [narod] are different peoples and that Belarus should have a separate state […] When I heard that, I didn't sleep for several nights and thought and though about it... It appeared that it would be rather good"*[83]

Later, the movement of Belarusian servicemen became an important force in the whole national movement due to their activities directed at creation national Belarusian army units.

Another logical result of the outbreak of the war was militarisation of politics. This meant that political power of Russian army commanders was growing stronger more and more. Daniel Graff compares this process in Russia to unofficial military dictatorship, which was formed in Germany during the same period. He notes that besides receiving autonomy of actions, the army commanders now were in charge of the administration of the Western borderlands of the empire including most of the Belarusian territories.[84] On the territory of modern day Belarus two military districts were organised – in Minsk and in Dvinsk. In addition, the Supreme Military Headquarters were located at first in the important railway junction of Baranovichi and later moved to Mogilev – both on Belarusian territory.[85] As a result, the Russian soldiers and officers flooded Belarus, especially after the summer of 1915 – there were approximately 1 500 000 Russian soldiers and officers stationed there. The

82 Latyshonak, Zhaunery BNR [The Soldiers of BPR], 40.
83 Shatalava, "Locked Out in Rural Areas," 205.
84 Daniel William Graf, "The Reign of the Generals: Military Government in Western Russia, 1914-1915" (Ph.D., The University of Nebraska - Lincoln, 1972), 2, http://search.proquest.com/docview/288265373/citation?accountid=15607.
85 Gatrell, Russia's First World War, 27.

population of some of Belarusian towns doubled. Some of the industrial production related to army needs was also moved to cities like Minsk, Mogilev or Gomel, which fostered both urbanisation of Belarusians and movement of Russian proletariat to the territories.[86]

The army exercised their power and demanded from the local population of the military administrated territories to provide services and supplies for the army. Military administration conducted requisitions and sequestering of needed goods or properties. In addition, army officials enjoyed unlimited rights to conduct the "anti-spy campaign" and sent away all suspected individuals who usually belonged to certain targeted ethnic groups.[87]

However, the army objectives went beyond mere fulfilling its needs in supplies and services. Military commanders saw the war as an opportunity to fully integrate the borderlands into the body of the empire in terms of ideology, administration and economy. Though the civil administration had in fact the same objective, the military urged more rapid Russification which in its vision would secure the home front.[88] The military commanders saw the war as a test of loyalty for the ethnic groups in the Empire.[89] At the same time by expressing loyalty and support for the war organised nationalities hoped to win some concessions from the side of the authorities after the war.[90]

All of these factors created rather unfavourable conditions to the development of the national movement. After the outbreak of war and particularly after the Great Retreat of the Russian army in the summer of 1915, all Belarusian national activism in Russian held

86 Latyshonak, Zhaunery BNR [The Soldiers of BPR], 33.
87 Eric Lohr, Nationalizing the Russian Empire: The Campaign Against Enemy Aliens During World War I, Russian Research Center Studies 94 (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2003), 85.
88 Alexander V. Prusin, The Lands Between (Oxford University Press, 2010), 50–51, http://www.oxfordscholarship.com/view/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199297535.001.0001/acprof-9780199297535.
89 Gatrell, Russia's First World War, 177.
90 Prusin, The Lands Between, 42.

territories shrunk to activities of underfunded relief societies.[91] At the same time, the Belarusian population as a whole was in the process of transformation which would give the national activists more opportunities for proselytizing. For instance the military-oriented industrialisation of front-line territories created an influx of Belarusian peasants into the cities, where they were becoming more involved in politics and thus becoming possible targets of nationalist agitation. On the other hand, urbanising Belarusians were subjected to stronger assimilationist pressure in mostly Russian-speaking cities and towns.

Another positive aspect of the war-related transformation in the society is the elevated role of a women in the society. This pan-European process has important implications regarding the national issues. According to Sylvia Walby, women play a specific and very important role in nation-building, particularly being the central link in both biological reproduction of individuals and ideological reproduction of group collectivity.[92]

The general rise of the Russian nationalist right, whether represented by military officials or political parties which hoped to regain their strength using the wave of patriotism caused by the war, according to Mark von Hagen, unintentionally provoked strengthening of the anti-Russian movements within the Romanov empire.[93]

Naturally, along with several positive shifts, there were huge new obstacles in the development of the national movement. Most probably it will be impossible to answer the question whether the war itself had an overall positive or negative effect in terms of national revivals. One thing can be said for sure though. The Belarusian society was in the process of transformation and rapid modernisation, where the traditional, pre-modern realities were

91 Latyshonak, Zhaunery BNR [The Soldiers of BPR], 31.
92 Sylvia Walby, "Women and Nation," in Mapping the Nation, Mapping (London, England) (London: Verso, 1996).
93 Von Hagen, "The Great War and the Mobilization of Ethnicity."

vanishing. Belarusian national activists had to take into account these changes in their target group and to consider implementation of new or altered politics.

2.2 Failed utopia: Ober-Ost and its national politics

After the unexpectedly successful German offensive in spring 1915 a large part of the Belarusian territory from former Grodno, Vilno and partly Minsk gubernias were united under German military rule of Ober-Ost. Before the war the Russian empire was seen by Germans as something monolithic and uniform. That is why it was a shock for the German army to encounter diverse ethnic composition of the occupied land. The land and people of Ober-Ost were relatively unknown to Germans especially compared with other occupied territories – Belgium, Poland and Northern France.[94] Therefore, the German plans for these territories varied significantly through the course of the war. Initially, Germans were not interested in assisting any of the national movements present in Ober-Ost. For example, the Polish-Belarusian scholar, Jury Turonak, explains the initial lack of German interest in the Belarusian problem by the German vision of post-war future. Particularly important in that vision were economic interests in Russia, which was viewed as a future market for the German economy. Therefore the division and weakening of Russia was not in the best interest of German strategists.[95] However, as time passed German authorities started to recognise and use the political potential of local national elites.

When the Germans occupied Ober-Ost they saw a land full of human misery, disorder,

94 Vejas G. Liulevicius, War Land on the Eastern Front: Culture, National Identity and German Occupation in World War I, Studies in the Social and Cultural History of Modern Warfare 9 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 2–5.

95 Jerzy Turonek, "Belarus Pad Niametskay Akupatsiyay [Belarus Under German Occupation]," in Madernaya Historyia Belarusi [Modern History of Belarus] (Vilnia: Instytut belarusistyki, 2008), 516.

disease and confusion. One of the reasons for that was the "scorched-earth" tactics of retreating Russian armies. German military officials wanted to bring order - "*Ordnung*" to this unsettled land. General Ludendorf was the main proponent of creating Ober-Ost as a military state. Ober-Ost was envisioned to be a "military utopia", embodiment of an army with a modern kind of rule – bureaucratic, technocratic, rationalised and ideological.[96] One of the missions of the military state was to bring "Kultur" to this land, which in German view was obviously lacking. Another slogan of Ober-Ost was "German Work", which was believed to be the unique German ability of reshaping, organising and directing space around them. "German Work" was put in contrast with disorganisation and cruelty of Russian rule. [97]

Most of the Russian officials fled the region together with the Russian army. The whole territory was administered by German military officials, no locals were allowed into governance. Although German administration conducted harsh policies of economic exploitation of the land and population, Ober-Ost professed the maxim of absolute neutrality towards ethnic groups. Such a position was supposed to justify the position of German overlordship.[98]

For Belarusians the political situation in Ober-Ost was similar to the one across the front-line: all political activity was prohibited and the only allowed national organisation were relief committees. These committees, organised according to nationality, became the unofficial representative bodies of each ethnic group in Ober-Ost.[99].

Despite being neutral to all nationalities, the German occupation authorities were by no means passive towards them. One of the distinct features of the German "Kultur" program

96 Liulevicius, War Land on the Eastern Front, 7.
97 Ibid., 113, 129.
98 Ibid., 120.
99 Turonek, "Belarus Pad Niametskay Akupatsiyay [Belarus Under German Occupation]," 517.

was not only the mobilization of native manpower for military needs, but also the mobilization of the native ethnic groups as collective units with the objective to find their niche in the broader cultural design of these territories.[100]. The leaders of Ober-Ost pursued this idea in educational, linguistic and cultural policies. An important step in mobilizing Belarusian ethnicity, for example, was the recognition of Belarusian language as one among other languages of Ober-Ost. The step raised the prestige of the language in the eyes of the population who previously thought of it only as a primitive language of peasants.[101] Now the decrees and laws were published also in Belarusian among other languages. In addition, German translators attempted to systematise this linguistic "chaos" of Ober-Ost publishing the 7 language dictionary of official terms used for translation of German orders in the local languages. The authors of the dictionary – the translation post of Ober-Ost, argued that some of the terms were non-existent in some of the languages before Germans arrived.[102]

Another essential issue was that according to decrees regarding the education issued by Hindenburg and his successors, the mother tongue along with German was to become an obligatory subject, while the Russian language was prohibited.[103] However, the most important innovation of Ober-Ost education system was the "national school", as schools were organised on the basis of student's native language. As the region was specific for its mixed ethnicities and fluidity of national identity, the German officials often had to intervene and find out the mother tongue of a student if there was confusion or doubt (for instance in the

100 Liulevicius, War Land on the Eastern Front, 89.

101 Turonek, "Belarus Pad Niametskay Akupatsiyay [Belarus Under German Occupation]," 520.

102 Liulevicius, War Land on the Eastern Front, 117.

103 Uladzimir Liakhouski, Shkolnaya Adukatsyia u Belarusi Padchas Niametskay Akypatsyi (1915-1918) [School Aducation in Belarus During the German Occupation (1915-1918)] (Vilnia-Bialystok: Belaruskaye Histarychnaye Tavarystva, Instytut belarusistyki, 2010), 95.

case of Catholic Belarusian-speakers who would sometimes identify themselves as Poles).[104]

As one can see, the experience of Ober-Ost is also rather ambiguous. Relatively lenient approach to national activism was combined with the cruel and arbitrary actions of local German administration, and draconian *Verkehrspolitik* (movement policy) which essentially turned the whole region into thousands of small ghettoes. However, Liulevicius argues that these very faults of the occupation authorities contributed even more to the formation of national identities among peoples of Ober-Ost. German policies of arbitrary and unfair requisitions and other problematic economic actions pushed natives to view this crisis in terms of nationality and confronting cultural ideals.[105]

2.3 Refugeedom and nationality

Yet another crucially important issue for understanding the Belarusian national movement is the refugeedom. The German advance of the summer of 1915 provoked a massive movement of refugees from Western borderlands of the Russian empire. Poles, Lithuanians, Belarusians, Latvians and Jews and many others fled to Central Russia, Siberia, Central Asia or Ukraine from the lands soon to be occupied by the German army. According to the Polish historian of Belarusian origin, Jaugien Miranowicz, it was the Russian authorities that initiated the movement of refugees. He claims, that the Russian military command wanted to use the tactics of scorched earth – similar to the one which was used against Napoleon's *Grande Armée* in 1812. Such tactics presumed the replacement of the population to non-occupied parts of the country and destruction of all valuable property which could be used by the enemy. To achieve these goals Russian army officers and soldiers, as

104 Liulevicius, War Land on the Eastern Front, 125.
105 Ibid., 180.

well as Orthodox priests intentionally spread rumours about the brutality of German troops. Some people who still did not want to move were forced to. Often the cossacks burned the villages after they had been abandoned.[106]

The amount of displaced refugees reached a tremendous scale. According to Peter Gatrell, a scholar of the refugee, there were as estimated 6 million refugees in the Russian empire by 1917, which constituted approximately 5% of the population.[107]. Among these 6 million refugees, 1,4 million were Belarusians from the Western provinces of the empire (mainly Grodno province).[108] The imperial government together with local authorities and charitable organisations engaged in providing assistance to the refugees to satisfy their basic needs. Peter Gatrell notes that after the initial confusion and disorganisation, their efforts were more-or-less successful after all: the worst fears of government officials of pogroms and urban collapse were not realised.[109]

Peter Gatrell claims that refugeedom actually catalysed the spread of national identity among various displaced peoples. The basis for that, according to the author was the common sense of violation and loss, communal ways of solving individual problems, and encounters with bearers of different cultures. The negative reaction of a host society (for instance in the Latvian case) also brought the refugees of an ethnic group together. The refugeedom also created a discourse of return to the motherland, which members of various elites interpreted in nationalist terms.[110]

106 Jauhien Miranowicz, "Uvodziny [Introduction]," in Bezhanstva 1915 Hoda [The Refuge of 1915], ed. Vital Luba (Belastok [Białystok]: SPHU "Podlaska," 2000), 6.
107 Peter Gatrell, A Whole Empire Walking: Refugees in Russia During World War I, Indiana-Michigan Series in Russian and East European Studies (Bloomington, Ind: Indiana University Press, 2000), 2.
108 Miranowicz, "Uvodziny [Introduction]," 7.
109 Gatrell, A Whole Empire Walking, 72.
110 Ibid., 142–143.

However, the Belarusian case had its own specificity. First of all, the Belarusian Society for Assisting Victims of War which was created in the spring of 1915 was rather poorly-funded compared to other national relief organisations. Echoing the West-Russianism ideology, the authorities argued that Belarusian refugees should turn to all-Russian organisations like the Tatiana committee.[111] As a result of the underdevelopment of Belarusian relief organisations, many if not the majority of the Belarusian refugees had to turn to either Polish or Russian organisations. Therefore, the refugeedom in this case worked against the strengthening of Belarusian national identity among the whole Belarusian population. Nevertheless, the refugee question remained one of the central political questions of Belarusian activists both in Russian held territories and in German occupied territories.[112] Another specificity of the Belarusian refugee situation is that as most of them found themselves in the middle of revolutionary events, many of them adopted more radical political views. In fact, a significant number of Belarusian refugees participated in the creation of Soviet Belarus in 1919.

In this chapter I tried to capture the range of experiences of Belarusian population and Belarusian national activists during the war years. Each of these experiences shaped the politics of Belarusian activists and general political preferences of the Belarusian population. However, it is possible to define several general traits of WWI experience. First of all, the war destroyed many traditional patterns of life and provoked rapid modernisation, be it in form of military-oriented mobilisation or moving of refugees to urban centres, or living in a technocratic modern military utopia. Another trait is that the whole society on both sides of

111 Valentina Utgof, "In Search of National Support: Belarusian Refugees in World War One and the People's Republic of Belarus," in Homelands: War, Population and Statehood in Eastern Europe and Russia, 1918-1924, ed. Nick Baron and Peter Gatrell, Anthem Studies in Population Displacement and Political Space (London: Anthem Press, 2004), 55.

112 Ibid., 60–61.

the front-line was living in increasingly nationalising environment: the rise of the Russian nationalist right, the articulation and acceptance of other nationalities in Russian army and empire in general, relief organisations divided along national lines, German nationality regime and the neighbouring nationalisms of Lithuanians, Poles and Ukrainians etc. In such an environment, the Belarusian population started to acquire nationally framed world-view even without being subjected to agitation of Belarusian activists. Of course many of Belarusian-speakers chose to join other, stronger national movements.

Thus, it is possible to say that WWI indeed fostered development of national thinking. In the following chapter I discuss how the Belarusian national elites reacted to this change as well as other important developments in politics and society of the lands of the Great War.

Chapter 3. Development of Belarusian movement as mirrored in periodicals

One of the ways to trace the changes of the Belarusian national movement during the war is a critical analysis of newspaper publications. Unfortunately to this day there are no comprehensive studies of Belarusian periodicals of the 1900s-1910s. Usually the researchers turn to the main edition of the pre-war period – *Nasha Niva* which became the centre of Belarusian national activism in 1906-1915. However, other editions, namely the newspaper *Biełarus* published by Belarusian Catholic activists usually receives little attention in historiography, although it can be viewed as a predecessor to the rather influential Belarusian Christian-democratic movement in II Polish Republic. Therefore in the first part of the chapter I analyse and compare the war-time publications of *Nasha Niva* and *Biełarus*.

Even less researched is the newspaper *Homan* (The Clamour) which was published in

German-occupied Vilna in 1916-1918 by Belarusian activists who did not evacuate in 1915 with the Russian army. However, *Homan* is particularly important for the history of Belarusian nationalism, as it was the first Belarusian periodical published outside Russia. Unfortunately, there was virtually no Belarusian press in the Russian empire after the German occupation of Western provinces of Russian in the summer of 1915 and before the February Revolution. Therefore it will be impossible to conduct a comparative analysis of the evolution of the Belarusian movement in Ober-Ost and Russian empire between August 1915 and March 1917. Thus I concentrate mostly on the analysis of *Homan* publications and development of Belarusian national activism in Ober-Ost.

Thus, in this chapter I access the influence of various aspects of the war in the rhetoric and politics of Belarusian national activists. I take into account both the general effects of the war, such as economic hardships, recruitment, toughening of censorship as well as various events that happened during the war: from military actions to cultural activities.

3.1 Nasha Niva and Biełarus: between socialism and Catholicism

As I already mentioned in Chapter 1, Nasha Niva became the centre of the Belarusian national movement and remained one until its closure in 1915. According to Andrei Unuchak, the founders and activists of the *Nasha Niva* circle managed to formulate the main theoretical foundations of the Belarusian national idea: moderate land reform in social-democratic spirit, rights of Belarusian language and culture, particularly in schools and churches, and unspecified idea of "self-governance".[113]

Nasha Niva tried to be a universal publication that both peasants and intelligentsia

113 Andrei Unuchak, Nasha Niva i Belaruski Natsyianalny Rukh [Nasha Niva and Belarusian National Movement] (Minsk, 2005), 11.

would find interesting. The first page usually contained editorial articles on various topics: from agriculture to politics. The second and third pages contained the literature section, where works of Belarusian authors were published. The section called "*Z Belarusi i Litvy*" ("From Belarus and Lithuania") contained various news from the region, while the section "*Z usikh staron*" ("From Every Quarter") covered news from around the world. From the beginning of the war, a large part of the newspaper was given over to war news. The last page of the paper contained various advertisement.

From the beginning of the analysis of the paper one can notice several general traits in publications of the Belarusian national activists. The most visible one is the general criticism of the war as a disaster for humanity. For instance the editors of *Nasha Niva* regularly published articles called "How Much Does the War Cost".[114] The enormous cost of the war was supposed to show a reader its catastrophic impact on economy of the warring states. In a similar vein the editorial articles periodically described the horrors of the war and the suffering caused by it: "While the people are fighting, while there, far away, people are dying from cannon shots – everywhere in the world, the war very badly impacted trade and the economic life of lands and peoples […] too many sacrifices be it people or resources, are taken by this horrible war"[115]

Such an attitude of the *Nasha Niva* publishers is natural. Being mostly socialists, they could not welcome what later would be called an "imperialist war". They also realised that "maybe here, on our fields the terrible bloody battle that the world has not seen before will take place".[116] Anton Lutskevich, one of the founders of Nasha Niva, who wrote these words was right in his prediction, in a year, the front-line would indeed cut though Belarus. In

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114 *Nasha Niva* 1914 №29, №31, №37, 1915 №9
115 *Nasha Niva* 1914 №37 Dva mesiacy vayny
116 *Nasha Niva* 1914 №29 Vayna

general, the "War is a threat" idea was rather prominent in publications of the periodical. Several other notions were connected to this idea.

The most important idea that derived from the "War is a threat" thesis was the thought of the need in mutual assistance (including a financial one) and solidarity among the Belarusian population: "Whenever there is a common misfortune, people who were separated before […] instinctively come closer together. […] Unite brothers and relieve our common misfortune."[117] Belarusian activists called upon the Belarusian population to express mutual assistance in several ways: helping the families of mobilised men[118], helping families of poor farm hands,[119] establishing village cooperatives and community banks[120], fighting against drunkenness[121], and donating to Belarusian Association of Relief of War Victims.[122] The establishment of the latter was seen as a particularly important event in building civic solidarity among Belarusians: "The association's aim is to organise **mutual assistance** (*samapomach*) [underlined by the author – A.B.] among Belarusians […] it is truly great national (*usenarodnaye*) cause, it is **the work of Belarusian people** (*narod*) **for its own benefit**".[123] The authors of such articles often used Belarusian proverb "Community is a great man"[*] and repeated constantly that power is in unity.

The aim such rhetoric was rather clear. National activists tried to propagate to Belarusian peasants and intelligentsia the idea of a self-sufficient community that provides mutual assistance, economic security, rich cultural and spiritual life. Virtually, they described

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117 *Nasha Niva* 1914 №33 p. 1
118 *Nasha Niva* 1914 №33 p. 1
119 *Nasha Niva* 1914 №41 Semjam parabkau
120 *Nasha Niva* 1914 №38 Vayna i samapomach, №46 Khaurusnaya praca
121 *Nasha Niva* 1914 №43 Vyzvalenne ad p'yanstva
122 *Nasha Niva* 1915 №21 Da hramadzian Belarusi, №22 Da pratsy
123 *Nasha Niva* 1915 №22 Da pracy
124 *Hramada – vialiki chalavek. "Hramada*" originally meant village community.

a nation. Moreover, *Nasha Niva* activists argued that the mere survival of the people depended on a creation of such a community.[125] The War was viewed and was presented to the readers as something that required mobilisation and bringing together all forces of the people (economic, political, creative): "There is hope that this terrible war […] will awaken the village community (*hramada*), village people. War is a school for them".[126] In another case, the activists warned their readers, that the people will be either wiped out the face of the Earth or be forever an oppressed and subjugated group.

However, the "War is a threat" was not the only interpretation of the WWI that can be found in the pages of *Nasha Niva.* One of the ideas that emerged immediately at the beginning of the war and remained valid well through 1914-1916, was the idea, that this war would change many things if not everything: "Now we live in a time, when the whole world has shifted from its foundation, when every day the borders of states are shifting, when some countries die and others emerge".[127] Such a reasonable assumption was a ground for cautious optimism. Quite often, the editors of *Nasha Niva* compared the war to a storm which was followed by good weather. The Belarusian activists hoped the War would awaken the people, change the attitude of the Tsarist authorities towards the Belarusian cause and reform the Russian Empire in general: "With the war the hope for a better future was awakened among the peoples (*narody*) of Russia. Everyone stirred […] hoping for changes in their life".[128] This attitude can be described as "War is hope" or "War is change" ideas. These ideas were used as an argument to strengthen national activism in order to prepare for a brighter but unknown future.

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125 *Nasha Niva* 1915 №25 Zhytstsio duzhey za smerts
126 *Nasha Niva* 1914 №48 Staraya prauda
127 *Nasha Niva* 1915 №1 Klich da pratsy
128 *Nasha Niva* 1915 №8 Napradvesni

Another important perception can be seen from the following quote:

> *"The day of great judgement of peoples (narody) is coming. On this judgement, every nation (natsyia) will try to prove their right to life. We will prove this right only when we come to this judgement not empty-handed […] but show that our peoples (narod) is worth something"*[129]

Belarusian activists envisioned that during the changes they expected in the future, they will have to fight for the recognition of the Belarusian nation, thus they further argued for the development of national activism.

Yet one more argument of *Nasha Niva* activists for enhancing national work came from the army itself. In several issues, the editors placed the photos of well-known Belarusian national activists, writers, poets, painters who were drafted in the Russian army.[130] There were several obituaries for killed national activists as well.[131] This was done in order to show that the young Belarusian intelligentsia along with thousands of Belarusians were also fighting in the war and sacrificing their health and life to the victory. In addition, the image of Belarusians fighting together, in a group, side by side was again used as an example of the merits of common action.[132] The participation of Belarusians in the war also allowed national activists to argue that they deserved something better:

> *"Every soldier fights for his Fatherland. Were there few Belarusians, who shed their blood?! Let our blood not be shed for nothing. Let our native land, everyone, like one man say that we fought for our Fatherland and we need something better, and a lot of it […]"* [133]

This particular quote also brings another peculiar characteristic of *Nasha Niva* war time

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129 *Nasha Niva* 1915 №1 Z novym hodam
130 *Nasha Niva* 1914 №37 p.1
131 *Nasha Niva* 1914 №40 p. 2, 1915 №7 p. 1
132 *Nasha Niva* 1914 №47 Dzelia buduchyny
133 *Nasha Niva* 1915 №1 Z novym hodam

publications. In this and many other cases, at first glance it would appear, that the article was written from the general Russian patriotic position: the authors talk about fighting for the Fatherland, helping victims of the war, working together and expressing solidarity. However, all of these calls were actually directed at the strengthening of the Belarusian cause rather than Russian patriotism. For instance in the article "Spring" the author says at first "Faster, brothers, to work! There is enough work for everybody, let everyone bring use to the honeycomb of our Fatherland"[134]. From the sentence it is impossible to understand what "Fatherland" the author means and who his "brothers" are. Only later in the text he says: "Every reader of Nasha Niva, every conscious Belarusian, spread enlightenment to the darkest corners of our village, call upon them to love everything native, Belarusian, our own language, our own song, our own traditions."[135] General appeal to unspecified Fatherland and brothers which could mean both Russia and Belarus is only then followed by specific definition of desired receiver of the message - "conscious Belarusian".

In this way, the national activists tried to avoid censorship, accusations of separatism and attacks of the Russian Right for "unpatriotic" stands and to propagate national ideas at the same time. Even the prohibition of vodka in July 1914 was seen as a positive development primarily for the Belarusian nation.[136] The publishers of *Nasha Niva* saw it as one of the biggest obstacles in the growth of Belarusian national movement: "The prohibition of vodka opens door for us – to the world and wealth, to the general revival of the people (*narod*), to a better future."[137] Thus, the national activists found yet one more way of conveying national ideas to their readers, hiding behind the generally patriotic headlines.

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134 *Nasha Niva* 1915 №12-13 Z viasnoy
135 *Nasha Niva* 1915 №12-13 Z viasnoy
136 *Nasha Niva* 1914 №33 U dobry chas
137 *Nasha Niva* 1914 №43 Vyzvalenne ad p'yanstva

Several other general traits noticeable in the issues of *Nasha Niva* were present already before the war. One of them is a periodical confrontation with Polish and Russian (West-Russian) "chauvinists". *Nasha Niva* authors used this term to label those politicians or public figures who denied the existence of separate Belarusian culture, language and people and/or argued for assimilation of Belarusians into either Russian or Polish culture. However, the editors of *Nasha Niva* carefully singled out certain groups in Russian and Polish societies who were hostile towards the Belarusian movement and never blamed the whole nation for the negative attitude towards Belarusians. Instead they praise those Russians and Poles, who expressed support for the Belarusian movement:

> *"Thank God […] beside the "serfdom devotees" (pryhonshchyki) in our land there are people, who when defending Polish culture, do not forget that they are local (tuteishyia) citizens, that their duty is to help the hungry, bring light to ignorant people despite their faith and nation (natsyia) […] We believe that forces of Polish democrats will rise."* [138]

Another example is in the article directed against "local" Poles and Russians who did not recognise the Belarusian nation. There, Nasha Niva authors used the words of Maxim Gorky who complimented Belarusian cultural development.[139] In general, the activists themselves often underlined the peaceful and non-aggressive character of the Belarusian movement: "Nasha Niva does not preach blind chauvinistic nationalism, but has only one rule - «Do not disavow your own and learn from the others»".[140] Compared to the image of Russian and Polish nationalists as chauvinists and assimilators, such a self-presentation created of a positive image of the Belarusian cause.

The other general trait that was present before the war was the regular publication of

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138 *Nasha Niva* 1915 №12-13 Ikh adkaz
139 *Nasha Niva* 1915 №14 Zbliska i zdalioka
140 *Nasha Niva* 1914 №45 Zhyla, zhyvets i budze zhyts!

news concerning other "small nations" of the Russian empire. The *Nasha Niva* authors welcomed various news about the development of national projects of Lithuanians, Ukrainians, Latvians, Estonians, Finns etc. At the same time, they covered repressive measures of the Russian government towards these ethnic groups. For instance the newspaper covered Russian politics in occupied Galicia directed against Ukrainian national movement and particularly the activity of metropolitan Yevlogii who was famous for his aggressive campaign against Uniate church. "According to their request Yevlogiyreunited six Greek-Catholic priests to Orthodoxy […] Galician authorities prohibited printing posters on blue-yellow paper […] and the use of these colours in general."[141] Although the editors of *Nasha Niva* did not criticize Russian politics openly, the very fact of publication of such news, showed that Belarusian activists showed solidarity with other national groups of the empire who were developing their own national cultures.

Often, the Belarusian activists of *Nasha Niva* would use achievements of other national movements as an example for the Belarusian one. Particularly they were impressed by the advances of the Ukrainian movement in Galicia.[142] In the article confronting Russian nationalist claims of impossibility of creation Belarusian high culture, the author states the following: "Look at Ukrainians in Galicia who established their gymnasiums, their universities where they teach in Ukrainian – and was it long ago when *khakhly* thought that they could wear only *armyak* (Russian national dress) or *czamara* (Polish national dress)".[143] Belarusian activists also suggested the ways of developing a national movement based on successful examples of other nations:

"Latvians, oppressed by wealthy barons of foreign nation, Czechs who lost

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141 *Nasha Niva* 1914 №40 p. 4
142 *Nasha Niva* 1914 №46 Khaurusnaya pratsa
143 *Nasha Niva* 1915 №9 p. 2-3 Dziakuy za shchyrasts

their civilization and former glory, Irish who were kept in disgrace by English landlords […] all these peasant (muzhytskiya) peoples got to their success by united, common, all-national (usenarodnaya) work"[144]

This shows that Belarusian nationalists were making use of the experiences of other nations which is visible from their support of cooperative activities in Belarusian villages: "National (*usenarodny*) call reached the remote villages […] There are people who are ready to work for […] Belarusian revival. […] A loan partnership was established in the village Mukhayedy".[145] *Nasha Niva* authors were particularly attentive to development of the national movements of similar peoples, first of all – Ukrainians. The particular interest in the Ukrainian experience shows that Belarusian activists themselves desired to follow the way of development of the Ukrainian national movement. This feature of Belarusian national thought became particularly important later, during the German occupation of Ober-Ost and the Russian revolutions.

When talking about the achievements of other national movements, *Nasha Niva* editors regularly reminded their readers that the Belarusian movement was lagging behind the aforementioned nations.[146] The notion of falling behind was used other people was also used to urge people to follow the successful experiences of other nations.

Although *Nasha Niva* was indeed a centre of Belarusian national activism, it is very useful to compare its publications to another Belarusian newspaper – *Biełarus.*

This edition was founded by a circle of nationally-conscious Belarusian catholic priests

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144 *Nasha Niva* 1914 №46 p. 1 Haurusnaya praca
145 *Nasha Niva* 1915 №8 Khaurusny banchok
146 *Nasha Niva* 1915 №21 Da hramadzian Belarusi, *Nasha Niva* 1915 №7 Da kulturnay pratsy

in 1913. Adam Stankevich, a prominent figure of the Belarusian Christian-Democratic party in interwar Poland, stated, that the creation of a truly Belarusian Catholic newspaper was on the agenda of Belarusian Catholic priest circle, but this idea was implemented only after *Nasha Niva* switched to Cyrillic script in 1912 (previously it was published both in Cyrillic and Latin scripts). *Biełarus* was supported by several representatives of the *krajowcy* movement namely princess Magdalena Radziwiłł.[147] The edition united a wide range of Belarusian religious activists and the elite of the Belarusian Christian movement, many of whom had high-level positions and graduate degrees.

The newspaper itself was a fairly specialized publication. The use of the Polish Latin script as the main font was a logical choice – in fact, this type was more familiar and understandable to the Belarusian Catholics. Much of the space was taken up by the Catholic calendar, stories of faith: hagiographies, sermons, parables. Poetry and short stories were published as well. Regular sections of the newspaper were "*Piszuć da nas*" ("We Receive") which contained the reports of correspondents, as well as letters to the editorial office; "*Kaściolnyja wedamaści*"("Church News"), which reported the latest news of Mogilev Archdiocese and the Roman Catholic Church in general. Following sections of the newspaper were "*Szto czuvać*?" ("What's the News?") in the form of news feeds (mainly from the Russian Empire), "*Usiaczyna*" ("Odds and Ends") which published a variety of interesting facts, proverbs, jokes and riddles, "*Swaja Poszta*" ("Our Mail") which published the answers to readers and correspondents. Starting from the August of 1914, the newspaper placed a special section titled "*Wajna*" ("The War"), which published the latest news from the front. The last page of the newspaper was left for advertisements.

In addition to publishing the newspaper itself, the editorial office made it a goal to

147 Stankevich, "Belarusian Christian Movement," 483.

create a small library of the Belarusian Catholic books. During the existence of *Biełarus* several books in Belarusian language were published: "*Niekalki sloŭ ab spakuse*" ("Several words about temptation"), "*Karotkaje wyjasnennie abradau R. Katalickaha Kasciola*"(Short review of Roman-Catholic rites), "*Z rodnaha zahonu*" ("From native place"),"*Boh z nami. Biełaruski madliteunik*" ("God with us. Belarusian prayer book").[148]

One of the main features that differentiate *Biełarus* and *Nasha Niva* is that the former published considerably less articles dedicated to economic, political and cultural issues but often concentrated more on general Christian topics. Still it presented a rather interesting variation of the Belarusian national idea that differed from the ethno-linguistic and partially socialist tradition of *Nasha Niva*. For instance, that is how authors of *Biełarus* linked nationalism to religion:

> *"Nationality (narodnasts) is a sacred thing, given to us by God and nobody has the right to harm it. […] the natural character of people comes from the will of God […] One who tries to erase this deed of God […] becomes opponent of God's will"* [149]

The agitation for the support and development of the Belarusian language was conducted in similar vein. For example the following stanza from a poem of Andrei Ziaziulia was used as an epigraph in one of the articles: "The God who once / set the peoples apart,/ wanted folk forever / to speak their native tongue". Moreover, the example of support of a simple language Catholic Belarusian activists found in Jesus life story, for he spoke not "lordly" (*panskaya*) Latin or sacred Hebrew, but simple (*prostaya*) tongue of common folk –

148 Aliaksandr Nadsan, Kniahinia Radzivil i sprava adradzhennia Unii u Belarusi [Princess Radziwill and the revival of the Uniate church in Belarus] (Belaruski Histarychny Ahliad, 2006), 22.

149 *Biełarus* 1914 №50 Narodnaść i wojny

Aramaic.[150] Thus the Catholic activists were closer to the conservative ideas of Frantsishak Bahushevich – one of the founders of the Belarusian national idea, rather than to their contemporaries – *Nasha Niva* activists. Still, both of the groups agreed on the rejection of chauvinism as a form of national agitation. For instance *Biełarus* writes: "This fire (our native Belarusian culture), will not be harmful to our neighbours, because it flares up not to burn what is near it, but to give light to benighted till now Belarusian people"[151] Very similar ideas can be found in *Nasha Niva* pages: "*Nasha Niva* does not preach blind chauvinistic nationalism, but has only one rule - «Do not disavow you own and learn from the others»".[152] The authors of *Biełarus* even claimed that forced assimilation and chauvinism were the sins that provoked the War. *Nasha Niva* and *Biełarus* activists also agreed upon the primary goals of the Belarusian movement: introduction of Belarusian language into schools, churches, economic emancipation of the peasantry, the fight against drunkenness and several others. There were however several significant differences in their world-views.

First of all, the publishers of *Biełarus* showed more support for All-Russian war patriotism than activists of *Nasha Niva*. Unlike the latter, Belarusian Catholic activists openly blamed Germany and the *Kaiser* himself for starting the war and supported the Russian cause.[153] The editors of *Biełarus* in general showed more acceptance of Russian authorities. For instance, their article about Tsar's visit to Vilna was written in a rather loyalist spirit.[154] At the same time *Nasha Niva* did not cover the visit at all. Sometimes, the activists used the Panslavist rhetoric typical for imperial authorities. In a eulogy to prince Radziwiłł who was killed at the front in winter of 1914, one of the activist of *Biełarus* Father Astramovich

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150 *Biełarus* 1915 №8 Hutarka ab naszaj prostaj mowie
151 *Biełarus* 1914 №52 Rodnaja iskra
152 *Nasha Niva* 1914 №45 Zhyla, zhyvets i budze zhyts!
153 *Biełarus* 1914 №30 Wajna
154 *Biełarus* 1914 №40 Car u Wilni

mentioned that the prince "fought in Bulgaria, like a true Slav, for freedom of Slavs […] laid down his life as a hero, as a martyr in defence of all Slavdom".[155] Such a position can be explained by a different perception of the war by the Catholic Belarusian activists who represented a specific part of the Belarusian population. Catholic Belarusians, though considered as belonging to the Russian family by Tsarist authorities were still restricted in some rights, mainly the right to purchase of land. Thus by expressing loyalty to the Tsarist authorities the *Biełarus* activists tried to improve position of their flock. It is specifically stated in one of the articles:

> *"Not only those sons of Belarus, who considered themselves close to the natives (karennyia) of the state [natives of the state here means Great Russians – A.B.] but also the Catholics who are not loved by those in power went to the war, stand together and carry the burden just as everyone else. […] We can hope that they [Belarusian Catholics – A.B.] can achieve the same attention, care, respect as the other citizens of the state".*[156]

It is notable that the Belarusian Catholic activists tried to use the fact of their participation in the war as a proof of loyalty and an argument for achieving legal equality with the rest of the empire's subjects. This approach is similar to the one used in *Nasha Niva*, only different in its scale.

In addition to the patriotic and loyalist direction of *Biełarus* publications, they also contain the "War is hope" idea similar to *Nasha Niva*. For example: "God grant, the war will open the Government's and people's eyes on our native cause and we will study and pray in our native tongue, remaining the sons of Mother-Russia".[157] A more loyal attitude of Belarusian Catholic priests towards Russia can be also explained by their conservative

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155 *Biełarus* 1914 №56a Mova
156 *Biełarus* 1915 №3 Pawinno
157 *Biełarus* 1914 №34 Skutki wajny

orientation. They criticise the uprising of 1863 and the First Russian Revolution of 1905[158], the socialists in general[159], and express negative attitude towards migration of peasants to the cities and towns.[160]

In general the rhetoric of *Biełarus* tends to be less nation-oriented compared to rhetoric of *Nasha Niva*. Often, the Christian values and ideas are put forward, rather than the national one. For instance, the prohibition of vodka was not interpreted as an advance for nation building but rather a generally good thing which makes people sin less. [161] Also, there are far fewer articles which call to common and united work and neither do they have the strong nation-oriented emphasis of *Nasha Niva*. However, the publishers of *Biełarus* were more active in the introduction of the Belarusian language in the Catholic Church. They covered the topic extensively in the pages of the paper through the war and managed to publish the first Belarusian prayer book (*Boh z nami. Biełaruski madliteunik*) in the spring of 1915.[162] A lot of attention was paid to the issue of education and self-education in the Belarusian language.

From the analysis of the two periodicals several conclusions can be made. First of all, both groups of Belarusian activists realised the numerous difficulties that the war created for the national movement. However, the activists tried to make use of the opportunities that the war gave them. *Nasha Niva* creators used several aspects of the war as arguments for national mobilisation of the population and creation of social structures, that could preserve the national movement. Moreover, they realised that it was indeed necessary, as the war was

158 *Biełarus* 1915 №4 Wajujmo da kanca
159 *Biełarus* 1915 №15-16 Zalaty most
160 *Biełarus* 1915 №2 p. 6
161 *Biełarus* 1914 №47 Wialikaje pastanaŭlennie
162 *Biełarus* 1915 №23-24 U rodnaj mowie

bringing unexpected changes to political, economic and social life. In turn, *Biełarus* authors tried to improve the position of the social group they represented by expressing loyalty to the state. The different levels of loyalty of the two periodical to the central authorities can be also proved by the level of censorship that was applied to both of them. While editorial articles of *Nasha Niva* were censored partially or quite often completely, especially in 1915, *Biełarus* had mostly war sections censored, particularly when the Russian armies suffered defeats in the Spring-Summer of 1915.

3.2 Homan: new developments under occupation

Already in midsummer of 1915, Belarusian activists envisioned the future reality of Belarus as being divided by the German-Russian front-line. The very last edition of *Nasha Niva* contained the article named "*Kryvavaya miazha*" ("The Bloody Border"). Among other things the article states the following:

> *"There, where the bullets are swishing and the bombs are exploding, any cultural work stops. […] But as the red line moves into the depth of the land, frozen life start again on the both sides of the bloody line. […] Let the Belarusian clear voice not get quiet here and there. Let the primordial master (advechny haspadar) of this land not leave it to new lords."*[163]

This article was written by Anton Lutskevich – one of the founders of the Belarusian national movement in general and *Nasha Niva* in particular. He happened to be the very person who contributed to the raising of the "Belarusian clear voice" in German-occupied Ober-Ost, as he was among the few national activists who did not evacuate together with the Russian army.

Despite the initial confusion, the remaining Belarusian activists managed to get a permission to publish a newspaper from the German authorities. The editor of the newspaper

163 *Nasha Niva* 1914 №31 Kryvaya miazha

was Vatslau Lastouski, a first generation "alumni" of the *Nasha Niva* circle famous for publishing the first "Short history of Belarus" in 1910.[164] However, most of editorial articles were written by Anton Lutskevich.

The circumstances of the publication of *Homan* were reflected on its appearance. The first page contained official news from the German authorities. The editorial articles were usually placed on the second page. The literature section occupied the bottom of the second and third pages. On the third page one could find the news sections: "*U Wilni i wakolicach*" ("In Vilnia and in the neighbourhood"), "*Z Usiaho kraju*" ("From around the land"). On the fourth page there was news section dedicated to Russia: "*Wiestki z Rasei*". The last page traditionally contained various announcement and advertisements.

As *Homan* was published by the same people who participated in publishing *Nasha Niva* one can notice continuity between the two editions. Both of them pursued the same national goals:

> *"At the first place we have a need to bring up new generations […] using native tongue. […] Belarusian book […], Belarusian newspaper, Belarusian theatre, Belarusian club – all of it every Belarusian must have. […] There are religious needs – here is the cause of Belarusian word of God in the Church, Belarusian prayer, Belarusian sermon […] Belarusians must think about economic emancipation. […] Belarusians should organised and establish various economic associations, cooperatives, professional worker unions."* [165]

Homan also shared the "War is hope" attitude characteristic for *Nasha Niva*: "Belarusian land (*Kraj*) now experiences a historic moment: we are given wide scope for work*"*.[166] The notion of "War is a threat" was also present in the pages of the paper.[167] As

164 Yanyshkevich Ya. *Vatslau Lastouski// Belaruskaya entsyclapedyia T. 9 (Minsk 1999)*
165 *Homan* 1916 №5 Naszy patreby
166 *Homan* 1916 №1 Da czytaczoŭ
167 *Homan* 1916 №25 Peralom

traits are rather similar to the one found in Nasha Niva, they are not analysed here. Instead the attention would be given to new and significantly altered traits in rhetoric of *Homan*.

The main factor shaping the new directions of the *Homan* publications as well as the whole Belarusian movement in Ober-Ost was of course the very nature of the German occupation and its politics. However, it would be a mistake to consider Belarusian national activists mere transmitters of German propaganda. Just like in the previous year, the Vilna Belarusian circle tried to make the most out of the situation.

The most noticeable novelty in Belarusian national discourse was the openly hostile attitude towards the Russian Empire. Although the view of Tsarist rule as something evil was present in such early Belarusian publication as *Gomon* of 1884, it could never appear on the pages of legal periodical published within Russian borders and thus could never be transmitted to the reader audience. Now, the Russian rule was criticised and attacked in a large number of issues. This of course went in line with German propaganda aims. However, it was also important for developing a particular worldview of Belarusian nationalism. The Russian Empire was pictured as an oppressor of the Belarusian people, who suffered under its yoke for more than hundred years: "Tsar's bureaucrats were sole masters of all our affairs, and the people which they "cared" about did not have a right to decide anything"[168]; "[Russian government] ruled the country as it wished, oppressing everyone together and each one separately and not being afraid of any repulse, any protest"[169] The result of this oppression was the poor state of the Belarusian national movement: "Muscovite (*maskouskaya*) politics did not want to allow cultural development of Belarusians at any cost, and persuaded our people with violence that it was "Russian from the time immemorial" (*iskoni ruskiy*) and it

168 *Homan* 1916 №6 Lichaja spadczyna
169 *Homan* 1916 №7 Dziali i panuj

should get Russified (*abmaskovitstsa*)".[170] Though some of the claims, like impeding the development of Belarusian literary language may have factual justification, the whole image of Russian tsarism as an enemy of Belarusian nation was clearly an ideological construct.

In regard to Russia as a whole, the *Homan* publishers did not have defined position. On the one hand, they argued that Russia just needs revolution to become a free and democratic state: "The peoples (*narody*) of Russia had a great and difficult goal to accomplish: they need first to destroy the old regime, built for hundreds of years, and only then start creative work of establishing new life"[171] On the other hand editors of *Homan* claimed that even Russian liberals are now enemies of Belarusian nation: "Nationalistic rage reached the liberal Muscovite (*maskouskaye*) society, which united with Tsar's government in their desire to destroy the individuality (*samabytnasts*) of the Belarusian Land"[172]

The image of Russian autocratic rule as an enemy was a useful tool in shaping Belarusian identity. Now, there was some distinct body not some vague "renegades" or "apostates" that could be blamed for misfortunes of the Belarusian movement. The new perception of the Tsarist authorities was reflected even in language use. Instead of the term "Russian" (*raseyets* for a person, *raseyski* for the adjective) publishers of *Homan* used more often the term "Muscovite" (*maskovets* or *maskal*' for a person, *maskouski* for the adjective). The term was used more widely among the common Belarusian population usually meant (Great) Russian bureaucrat, official and soldier – not the most likeable figures in popular imagination.

As the Russian tsarist rule was ascribed the role of enemy, a new historical narrative was formed in the pages of *Homan*. The main creator of this narrative was Vatslau Lastouski.

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170 *Homan* 1916 №6 Pryczyny zaniapadu Belaruskaha Adradzennia XIX st.
171 *Homan* 1916 №8 Zapaviedz bury
172 *Homan* 1916 №13 Z-za miazy

He was the first one to introduce into the national pantheon the figure of Konstanty (Kastuś) Kalinowski already in the first issue of Homan.[173] Naturally, this figure who in the Russian Empire was considered a rebel and a criminal could be not praised there. Another historical personality was suggested by former editor of *Biełarus* Baliaslaŭ Paczobka. That was Josaphat Kuncevich – a Belarusian (Ruthenian) Uniate martyr who was killed in Vitsebsk as a result of his conflict with the Orthodox population. This figure could not be a hero in the Russian Empire as the Uniate Church was actually persecuted there. Pachobka dedicated to Kuncevich three extensive articles in *Homan*[174] and later published a book which was advertised in the pages of *Homan* as well. This activity of Paczobka also indicated emerging idea of revival of Uniate Church in Belarus which he will try to put into reality later in interwar Poland.

In general *Homan* often published articles dedicated to history, particularly the history of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania which also played an important role in the Belarusian national myth, as a Golden age of the Belarusian nation. That is how Belarusians presented this part of their history at Lausanne conferences of the League of Non-Russian peoples (*inorodtsy*) of Russia:

> *"From XIII and to late XVI century Belarusians and Lithuanian, united together, created strong state structure, known in history as the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Belarusian language was but into basis of state administration of GDL. All administrative and legal documents, state acts and laws of the Duchy as well as state chronicles were written in Belarusian language"*[175]

Thus it is possible to say, that Ober-Ost regime provided suitable conditions for development of specific Belarusian historical narrative. Moreover, the very territorial

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173 *Homan* 1916 №1 Pamiaci Spraviadliwaha
174 *Homan* 1916 №19-21
175 *Homan* 1916 №52 Reljacyja ab zjezdzi u Lozanne

arrangement of Ober-Ost made that particular option of historical narrative appealing to Belarusians. If Belarusian territories were united with the Ukrainian ones, perhaps, the national activists would produce different version of historical narrative.

However, for the Belarusian activists the most important action of the Ober-Ost administration was the recognition of the Belarusian language as one of the official languages of this territorial unit. The notice "Rights of the Belarusian Language" was first published in issue №6 and then was published several times in row in the next issues.[176] The notice quoted Hindenburg's words "The Belarusian language as distinct from the Russian one is allowed for usage without any obstacles".

Generally lenient attitude of German authorities towards national movement of Ober-Ost (including the Belarusian one) made national activists see this territory as a cultural Piedmont, liberated from Russian oppression:

> *"[…] the present moment, when the part of Belarus happened to be beyond Russian borders, has a particular importance for our people (narod): here we can and should lay a foundation for building our culture, we should establish a think tank for free Belarusian idea".*[177]

This was not an empty demagogy, as the Belarusian national activists did see the real opportunity in cultural work which was not present in Russian Empire.

In addition to the opportunities inside Ober-Ost the national activists got probably the first chance to present their cause on the international arena through the participation of Belarusian activists in Stockholm and Lausanne conferences of the League of Non-Russian peoples (*inorodtsy*) of Russia. The chance to speak about the Belarusian cause at the

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176 *Homan* 1916 №6, №7, №12, №14, №30

177 *Homan* 1916 №11 Rasejskaja palityka u Belarusi

international tribune made the activists formulate the national ideas and claims more precisely.[178] In addition, the very chance to speak along with Ukrainians, Finns, Latvians Lithuanians, Poles etc., meant that all of these peoples were equal in their rights. Participation in these conferences once again proved that Belarusians were recognised as a separate nation by at least one Great Power. This of course was underlined several times in *Homan* articles dedicated to the conferences. Moreover, Belarusian activists claimed that since Germany occupied the Western provinces of the Russian Empire, the fate of the Belarusian-Lithuanian land (*Kraj*) ceased to be internal Russian affair.[179] It is evident that Belarusian activists actually did not want the German occupied territories to be handed back to Russia. That was a particularly important change in the Belarusian national discourse, as prior to the German occupation and on the Russian side of the frontline prior to Bolshevik revolution, the idea of Belarus completely separated from Russia was non-existent.

In general the idea of a political future of Belarus was rather vague, but there were several notable traits. First of all, *Homan* was a strong proponent of the idea of *krajowość,* which is particularly evident compared to rare *krajowość* oriented articles in *Nasha Niva*. In *Homan*, the territory of Ober-Ost was regularly referred to as former Grand Duchy of Lithuania, Belarusian-Lithuanian land (*Kraj*) or simply Kraj:

> *"Vilna – the ancient capital of independent Grand Duchy of Lithuania should become and will become the heart of liberated Belarusian-Lithuanian land (Kraj), equally dear to a Belarusian and a Lithuanian and to those who speak Polish or Yiddish"*

The issue of *krajowość* popularity among Ober-Ost Belarusians was discussed by Aliaksandr Smalianchuk and Anatol Sidarevich. Both of the authors argue that adherence to

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178 *Homan* 1916 №37, №46 Perszyia wystuplenni
179 *Homan* 1916 №35 Unutrannaja sprawa

this idea can be explained by the objective weakness of the Belarusian national movement and the lack of its organisational and political resources. In a confederation with Lithuania (possibly also Latvia and even Ukraine) the authors claim, the Belarusian national movement would have better chance for development. They also claimed that *krajowość* could have been a tactical move, to win more time for the preparation to real independence.[180] However, there might be other reasons for the support of the seemingly romantic idea of new Grand Duchy. In the article "To the Sea" Anton Lutskevich actually argues against the nation state and claims that certain nations cannot exist on their own mainly for economic reasons, but only in cooperation with other ones. He brings the examples of Switzerland and Austria-Hungary as multinational states in which nations are better off together.[181] There is another article by Lutskevich, which proves that the independence of a Belarusian national state was not a goal for Vilnia activists. In the articles "Martyrs for freedom" the author compares Irish insurgent and nationalist Roger Casement who was sentenced to death by the British authorities to heroes of 1863 uprising in Belarus-Lithuania Kalinowski and Sierakowski. Then Lutskevich writes the following:

> *"The blood of the fighters for freedom was not shed for nothing. […] the recent uprising was aimed at fulfilling the last wish of the people: gain political freedom (volia). This wish […] will be fulfilled: the blood of Casement and his comrades provided Ireland with autonomy"*[182]

In this quote one can see that Lutskevich imagined the "last wish of the people" to be not full independence, but autonomy and self-governance.

Finally the growing Polish political power was another reason for the support of

180 Smalianchuk, "Belarusian National Movement."

181 *Homan* 1917 №10 Da mora

182 *Homan* 1916 №52 Muczeniki za voliu

krajowość. Although *Homan* welcomed the proclamation of an autonomous Kingdom of Poland by German authorities in November of 1916 and at the same time expressed hope for the territories of Ober-Ost getting autonomous status as well.[183] However, in January 1917, the Crown Marshall of newly established Kingdom of Poland Waclaw Niemojewski stated the following: "We understand our historic mission which demands expansion of our border to the direction of liberated from Russia territories which are drawn to Poland".[184] This statement provoked a harsh reaction of the Belarusian circle, and several articles were published that opposed this statement. In one of the articles, Lutskevich argues that the united state of Belarusians, Lithuanians and Latvians, despite the economic benefits would provide security against Polish threat.[185] Partially he was right in his warning, as even though Lithuania managed to get independence after WWI, it lost the capital city of Vilnia/Wilno/Vilnius to Poland.

Thus, in the pages of *Homan* one can trace several patterns of development of the national movement that was influenced by the War and the occupation regime. First of all it is the idea of Russia (at least in its autocratic form) as an enemy of Belarusian nation. From this notion derives the will to be separated from Russia by all means. The Ober-Ost occupation policies also provided opportunity for development of national work: be it in schools or churches or theatres. Finally the Ober-Ost existence on Belarusian, Lithuanian and Latvian ethnic territories fostered the development of the *krajowość* idea, and with that the idea of an autonomous Belarus. The idea however seemed to be most popular among the Belarusian activists, while the local Poles gravitated towards the ideas of Polish national-democrats. The final word in Grand Duchy idea would be said by the German authorities in 1917.

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183 *Homan* 1916 №78-79
184 *Homan* 1917 №5 Skandal na adkrycci dziarzaunaj rady
185 *Homan* 1917 №10 Da mora

To find some general patterns of reactions of various groups in the Belarusian movement the comparison between the three periodicals should be made. All of them recognised the grief and suffering caused by the war and agreed that it impeded the national movement. On the other hand there was a shared belief, that whatever way the war ended, the situation would be very different from pre-war situation, and that the national movement should be ready to meet the challenges. Thus, both *Nasha Niva* and *Homan* and to a lesser extent *Biełarus* used possibilities that they had for advancing national activism, establishing civic structures, spreading national consciousness, debating with opponents of the movement, finding possible allies and gathering international support. Most of the activists realised that the end of the war would indeed be followed by the "judgement of nations" and only the strong and well organised national movements would earn the right to express their own political will. Therefore, Belarusian nationalists tried to follow the path of most successful national movements and learn from their experiences.

The war itself contributed significantly to the development of Belarusian national idea. This was particularly visible in Ober-Ost area, as it was the first time in the history of Belarusian nationalism when large of the Belarusian ethnic territory was not under Russian rule. The ideas developed under the influence of either German nationality politics or the very nature of Ober-Ost – its geography, economy, population became significant part of the national idea.

However, at the beginning of the war there were only hints of a desired political future of Belarus. This idea was shaped by war events as the activists reacted to the ever-changing situation. However, it is most probable that the idea of an independent unitary nation state was not popular among the activists at least until the February Revolution in Russia or even later.

Conclusion

Belarusian national idea developed in peculiar and even unique way. The formation and development of the Belarusian national idea was particularly influenced by the Civilizational Borderland factor, which manifested in Russian-Polish ideological struggle over territories of Belarus as well as Ukraine and partially Lithuania.

Another important factor that shaped history of Belarusian lands in early XX century was the socio-economical structure of the territory. The relative economic backwardness and low level of mobility of the Belarusian population created problems for all three national centres that struggled for the dominance in this land: Russian, Polish and Belarusian. That is why the struggle over control of few institutions that could spread the national consciousness among the common population: mainly church and schools, was so fierce.

Though Belarusian nationalists were the outsiders in this power struggle, they managed to create an ideology that was coherent and attractive enough for some part of the Belarusian population. That is why, despite having rather limited resources, the national movement showed steady growth in the period of 1906-1914.

The war brought dramatic changes to the life of common Belarusians and foiled the plans of national activists. Mass mobilisation, the conditions of martial law and general upheaval created whole new different environment for the advance of the Belarusian national movement. Some opportunities disappeared, while other emerged. The drafting of many national activists to the army weakened the centres of national movement, at the same time provided new platforms for national agitation – now at the frontline. The general rise in significance of the nationality question in all the warring states, made common Belarusian-

speakers decide, who they were, and to what nation they belonged.

Belarusian nationalist groups centred on few existing periodicals had to adjust their rhetoric and their politics. The War itself was seen by the activists as both a threat and an opportunity. National activists felt the *Zeitgeist* and knew that the War will change everything. Though nobody envisioned what the change would be precisely, Belarusian nationalists felt that they must use every opportunity to strengthen the national movements. Thus they used motives of common misfortune and grief to unite Belarusian population via various structures like relief organisations or economic cooperation institutions. Part of the movement (religious-patriotic direction) decided to achieve improvements of the group they represented through expressing loyalty to tsarist authorities. *Nasha Niva* group also regularly reminded that Belarusians are suffering in this war as bad as all other nations and thus require equal rights (particularly cultural ones) as well.

Yet even more groundbreaking event of the war, was the occupation of Western part of the Belarusian territory by German army and establishment or military-ruled Ober-Ost. There, the general trait for rapid national mobilisation continued, but the national idea underwent significant changes. Conditions of Ober-Ost defined several novelties in the national ideologies. One of them was the idea of separation from Russia, another one – the idea of federative union with Lithuania (and possibly other states) as a preferable political future. While the later idea would fail, the former one survived and was brought to the other side of the frontline and played a significant role in formation of new state ideal – independent nation-state.

Thus, in this thesis I showed that WWI served as a catalysed for national development and indeed caused mobilisation of ethnicity in various ways. The study of the topic is of course limited by time period and methodology. For more comprehensive picture the study of

development of Belarusian national movement in Russian held territories should be made. The future research should also expand the time framework to include the period of proclamation of Belarusian People's Republic and Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic.

In order to get a full picture, the research on the subject should also turn to Polish, Russian, German, Ukrainian and Lithuanian periodicals, archival documents, and memoirs as well as other primary sources.

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