

# I. LITHUANIA UNDER NOWADAYS TRANSFORMATION: THE SELF, THE STATE, THE CHURCH

## NEW CRITERIA FOR SELF-IDENTIFICATION

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At a very close examination, traditional self-identification by the nationality or the religious confession appears deprived from the common sense and even seems to be a kind of *mauvais ton*. Here a question arises: are the nationality and the religion the essential properties of a man or a woman? The most serious charges are following: national and religious conflicts are the reason of the greatest sufferings of mankind. If it is really necessary to rank a person with any class or category (but only if it is), historical memory can prompt more essential criteria.

Keywords: historical memory, nationality, religious confession, self-identification.

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### Introduction

Raising a question about *new* criteria of self-identification, we mean first of all two main things, particularly common any way: belonging to any nation or religious confession. We recognize, that both these principles of human identification have been considered as most natural for ages and even have gained a particular glory of the solemn inviolability during the history. Nevertheless (possibly namely because of the mentioned reasons), we suppose, that the existing situation deserves the most elementary astonishment, after which, according to good ancient philosophical tradition, the most basic doubt must follow and a set of the absolutely legitimate questions, if not rhetorical, although hardly presupposing the unambiguous and final answers' is: whether nationality and religious confession are indeed the most essential characteristics of human personality and the most serious motives of self-identification? Did not historical experience create or did not historical memory preserve other human landmarks more attractive, more worthy?

### Self-identification: case analysis

It would be possible to bring very serious charges together with such sufficiently easy doubts against the nationality and religiosity as the most common forms of the human self-identification. Is it necessary expressly to prove, that namely these two methods

of people's differentiation delivered to humanity the greatest sufferings? In the first lines of *The Myth of Sisyphus* Albert Camus noticed wittily: "I never saw that someone would die for the ontological argument" (Camus 2006: 17). In fact, he dealt with the suicide; however, it would be not difficult and even very appropriate to extrapolate this observation to the situation, connected with the violence towards others. Indeed, during entire history of humanity we cannot remember any war, which would be unleashed "for the ontological argument"; meanwhile the wars on the national or religious ground are quite often: from the most ancient uncivilized times, when it was completely natural to kill, to enslave and to take away the land from any "barbarians", in other words, from the neighbour nations, to the highly civilized 20th century with its immense attempt to realize the principle of *Deutschland über alles*; from the middle ages' crusades, which sadly glorified Christianity, to the Muslim terrorism in the present 21st Century. If we appreciate the interesting circumstance, that the nationality, as a rule, is tightly connected with the certain religious confession (the Russians are usually Orthodox, the Poles and the Lithuanians – Catholics, the Israelites – Jews, the Arabs – Muslims), it is possible with the good reason to state, that the danger of such kind of "identification" tragedies double at least.

However, let us leave the more detailed analysis of the national and religious reasons of the armed clashes for the scientific competence of the ethnologists, religion researchers and other specialists, and let us pay attention to another, not so dangerous, of course, but not less miserable phenomenon, very characteristic for the democratic society of our days: the so-called "unarmed conflicts" between the national (and religious) minorities and majorities. It will be sufficient perhaps to analyse the several examples making no honour to contemporary Lithuania.

There is one more Russian school closed in Vilnius. The Russian community is annoyed, since treats this solution of authorities as discrimination, at least the disrespect of the national minority. The Lithuanian majority reacts "reasonably": "If you do not like here, in our Lithuania – go back to your Russia". Both conflicting camps perfectly knows, that the Russian schoolboys are not thrown to the street, they are not deprived of the possibility to obtain education in their native language; just the need for the Russian schools noticeably has reduced, as a result, two schools filled halfway united into one. However, the national passions usually achieve superiority over the common sense.

The Poles want to open their University again (one University, based exclusively on the legal right of the national minority, was opened a decade ago, ignoring the lack of the intellectual resources). If we dealt with exclusively scientific enterprise (for instance, a new institute of exotic botany or cosmic sexology), instead of the national one, the idea would not cause any objections and, probably, it would be accepted with the special enthusiasm. However, the Lithuanians express "the historically grounded" fears towards the old neighbour, that is much more numerous and is inclined to domination traditionally: now they demand their own University and autonomy with the second official language, then – with their army and possibly with their government.

Jewish community requires the realty belonged to them before the war. Now all independent on nationality are concerned about the retrieval of realty lost in the years of the socialist nationalization; and the Lithuanian majority, perhaps, is even more interested in that than any minority. However, the requirements, introduced by one national community in the way of solidity, cause “solidary” dissatisfaction of the representatives of other nationalities: the Jews are remembered by their historical-aneccdotic past, that refers to usury, self-interest, stinginess over and over. The charges in all human trouble up to the world Communist plot follow from here.

Leaving the problems of the national and religious minorities to the politicians and lawyers, let us examine now the several amusing curiosities at basis, of which the identification (and herewith differentiation) of people, according to the national or religious principle lies and which usually are neglected by the attention of different functionaries; however, they cannot be ignored by philosophical research. We hear often such special – let us say so – the states of soul as *national pride* and *deep religious convictions*. What does it mean? Besides the unconditional adoption of religious dogmatic and content of the sacred books, firm faith in the post-humous reward and the eternal life, the deep religious convictions include, undoubtedly, also the unquestionable truth of following thesis: my (our) religion is the most (even only one) correct, consequently, from here follow the relation to the representatives of other beliefs as the dissenters, defectors and so on. Actually, the rotations (the transition from one confession to another one) observed frequently do not change anything: new religion becomes again “the best” just because that it is *mine*. Elementary immodesty (Christians would call this pride) is absolutely obvious in this case and it is very difficult to see the love proclaimed emphatically for the relative.

National pride is in no way any satisfaction with the good deeds, performed for the good or into the glory of our nation. There is no need to perform anything, it is sufficiently simple to imagine ourselves in one row with the most outstanding citizens: here is the source of the unspeakable bliss. Any kind of the stars goes: the dukes and the colonels, the scientists and the artists, the sportsmen and the pop stars. The representatives of the large or “historical”, according to Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, nations are in much more advantageous situation. Lithuania experiences in this respect the essential difficulties. That is why there is a need to pretend to Adam Mickiewicz – in prejudice of the Poles, to Oscar Miłosz – in prejudice of the Frenchmen (or of the same Poles), to Lev Karsavin – in prejudice of the Russians. It seems, that the Poles do not pay attention to the Lithuanian pretensions to Mickiewicz, while Bronisława Ostrowska, for instance, does not agree to give Miłosz to France no way (Miłosz 1919: 3) never mind to Lithuania; the Russians are ready to fight for Karsavin (Шаронов 1990), and their Orthodox self-consciousness makes incredible efforts in order to deprive any value of thinker’s confession given to the Catholic priest (Капрашев 1994: 476–477). After the recent visit of English Queen in Lithuania it became known, that in the veins of Her Majesty there is a drop of the Lithuanian blood, too: this substantially increases the authority of Lithuania, at least, in the European community. National pride inspires completely original view on some historical events: in Lithuania,

for example, the people speak about the Soviet occupation of Baltic countries (1940), about the Polish occupation of Vilnius region (1920) with the tears in their eyes and with the noble resentment in their hearts and simultaneously take extremely pride on the marches of Vytautas the Great “from the sea to the sea” (in early 15th century).

The very interesting phenomena of different kind have been formed in the contemporary political stage, i.e. in *the national political parties*. They are today at least two in Lithuania: the Union of the Russians in Lithuania and the Electoral action of Poles in Lithuania (actually, not party but the “action”, which promotes the election of Poles into the organs of authority). There is no need in special studies of the programmes or pre-election promises of such groups; it is completely obvious, that the main intension here is the prosperity for the representatives of their nation. The natural experience of a citizen reminds that, indeed, the traditional political parties are concerned first of all not about realization of social-democratic or liberal ideas; however, only so-called national feelings are able to inspire such open differentiation and confrontation.

The mass media try especially to operate with the national factor and makes it, as a rule, completely unwisely and irresponsibly. We read the messages like this over and over again: “citizen N., whose *nationality is gypsy*, took out the wallet from the pocket of gaping buyer in the market” or “one more *English* tourist proceeded his natural need on the wall of president palace”. Impression about the most essential features of one or other nation has been formed in this way. We do not remember the messages of such kind, for instance, “the businessman X falsified the documents and impoverished the successful bank” or “drunk driver Y initiated the accident, in which five people perished”, would stress the Lithuanian nationality of these criminals.

### Nationality: substance or accident?

This empirical material or, to put it simply, the materials of daily observations, far from the scientific ones, direct to the interesting and serious reflections; however, we should solve, at least formulate a question of theoretical kind. Actually, what is nationality? Is it possible to consider it as essential, inherent, immanent characteristic of a man or a woman, or rather it is his or her external, unessential, accidental feature? In other words, using the terms of philosophical scholastics, is it the substance or the accident?

The old good tradition to choose and to change nationality could render certain assistance in resolution of this question. In fact, usually there are no problems with nationality of a child, having the parents of one nationality; in the case of parents' different nationality the child can choose his or her nationality: as a rule, one of parents' nationalities has been chosen, however, other variants are possible, suppose, in the honour of an uncle or great-grandmother. The cases of nationality change are known: an ethnic Pole Miłosz, for instance, categorically declared himself “Lithuanian poet” (properly speaking, “of French language” – in French: *Je suis poète lithuanien de la langue française*) and some his compositions signed simply *Lithuanian* or *Lietuvis*. Such human characteristics as a race or a gender being indeed also important are

completely different. They are not chosen: independent on his or her will a human inherits the race of his or her parents or certain combination of their different races; gender is also the result of parents' chromosomes' combination independent on the will. Contemporary science is already able, indeed, to satisfy the human caprices and change the gender or race while they do not satisfy somehow. However, the procedure of gender or race change differs principally from the procedure of nationality change. In this way, gender and race seem to be more fundamental human characteristics and can be defined as the substance in this sense, while nationality has rather a status of accident. Using the terminology of Karl Marx, nationality is to be numbered to the "superstructure", i.e. to the cultural phenomena, while race and gender would compose the "basis", the nature.

After determining certain accidentality of nationality, though in a conditional way, we should solve the problem of the features and the criteria, which allow judging about one or other national belonging of an individual. This, in turn, would help to specify the particular, but very important aspect: an individual can determine his or her nationality on his or her own, or this can be done by the others, including the relatives, the officials, the experts of different kind? Without any available scientific methodology in the solution of this problem, we should turn again to empirical material in order to analyse the work of the experts, who ignore, of course, the opinion of the subjects of their judgement just because of objective absence of such possibility. We deal with different encyclopaedias and biographical dictionaries, where the nationality has been usually indicated next to the hero's name and profession.

Honoré de Balzac is a French writer; Stéphane Mallarmé is a French poet. It seems, that everything is alright here, since it is well known, that they had written in French, first of all. Claude Debussy is a French composer; Edgar Degas is a French painter. What does it mean? Indeed, they had lived in France, they had spoken in French (between themselves or with the same Mallarmé), but is it sufficient? Beside this, they (or the composers and the painters) could live also not in their native country, as well to speak in the different languages. What about something specifically French in their works? What does in that case the expression "Henri Poincaré is a French mathematician" mean? We do not speak about any French mathematicians consequently the only one criterion in this case is the country lived in. It happens that a man or woman lives first of all in one country then emigrates to another one. Well, of course, we have such results according to our expectations: "Erich Fromm is a German-American psychologist and sociologist". "American" here is not likely the nationality; by the way, "German" is neither nationality as widely known, that Fromm origins, as the saying is, "from the Jewish family". The same we can say about Sigmund Freud, Henri Bergson, Franz Kafka, Baruch Spinoza, who usually are identified by the country of their origin or living: Austrian psychologist, French philosopher, Austrian writer, Netherlands philosopher. One more curious variant is referring to the country: Dmitri Shostakovich is a Soviet composer. Is "Soviet" probably a nationality? Indeed, there was in some time an amusing idea: to assimilate all the nations as a relict of the bourgeois past and to create the completely new society of "Soviet people".

Despite the mentioned (and not mentioned even more) conceptual, historical, and simply curious misunderstandings, the nationality remains one of the main, any way, the most common principle of people's identification and self-identification (in the second place, perhaps, is belonging to any religious confession and the all other known or only presupposed criterions could be decisively attributed to the exotic rarities). Here we can go back to the question, formulated at the beginning of these considerations: why the situation is namely this one and whether it could be other? An attempt to give a straight answer to this question would be, of course, annoying inadvertence; as result, we will dare to propose only several considerations very subjective, of course. First of all, I must confess, that we cannot understand where is the necessity to number the humans to any class, kind, and species. The expressions, completely natural regarding the plants or animals (the mammal of the class of artiodactyls or the agricultural plant of the bean family) seem the nonsense regarding the humans. M. is Lithuanian, N. is Muslim. We heard from the colleagues-opponents, that being in community of similar people (by nationality or faith) provides human with necessary feeling of safety and comfort. Without experiencing similar feelings we will risk to suppose that this (we wish we were forgotten by my actual and potential opponents for my unwilling roughness), is rather an effect of the "herd instinct" and does no honour to the spiritually matured personality. On the other hand, if the numbering himself to national or religious group defines intellectual, creative, cultural development of personality or his or her practical activity, then historical memory is able, probably, to propose much more solid and more sure landmarks. Why do we not try to become "similar" to Socrates, Ludwig van Beethoven, Albert Einstein, Leonardo da Vinci? We mean not the attribution to the "species of the Socrates", on the contrary, it is sufficient one Socrates in order to direct development and activity of the innumerable descendants along the worthy way. Having "next" constantly Homer, Plato, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Vincent van Gogh we can really feel unusual comfort, similar to that one, which felt Dante after visiting the antechamber of the hell.

However, let us assume that a man or woman needs indeed to proceed with a procedure of identification towards himself or other people. (I tend to such compromise only appealing to the apt observation of Paul Valéry: "Understanding is, indeed, nothing else as comparing. What is not similar to anything is incomprehensible" (Valéry 1957–1961: VI, 83). There can be a man or woman just incomprehensible being not similar to the representatives of any more or less defined class, it is simply unapproachable). But also in this case first of all we should avoid the classification of people, according to the national or religious attributes. Indeed, precisely these two identification principles, as no others, suppose categorical differentiation between *our* and *strange*, what leads to the confrontation, generates hostility and all possible conflicts, fortunately if not armed. Did we hear sometimes so that the violinists would arrange fight against the poets or, much more, so that the basketball players would pick indignity upon the cyclists? So why not to legalize or, at least, not to initiate the identification on the profession, the kind of occupations or hobby? Let us imagine that

humanity is divided not into the Germans, the Chinese, the Russians, the Poles and so on, but to the poets, the builders, the doctors, the cooks, the gardeners. It is possible to imagine also others, more or less dichotomous principles of self-identification. Whether it is not sufficient to number ourselves to one of the known psychological types – extroverts or introverts; or, suppose, to define ourselves as a creator or consumer? Finally, it would be possible and necessary to think seriously: am I a man or a woman? The gender, indeed, has been determined not by the style of clothing and even not by specific details of body: decisive role does play here, probably, the complicated complex of psychical attributes, social attitudes, emotional inclinations; all this must be recognized and then a decision made.

### Conclusions

We do not dare to forecast, when and what namely type of self-identification people of future will prefer. We would like to think, however, that after some time a man or woman will tend rather to be oriented to the great models worthy of imitation. We really hope that sometimes people will lose the mania to unite into all more numerous nations and confessions, what is more, to take pride in their belonging to them, if there is a sense to speak about the intellectual at least progress of humanity. The bases for such a hope lie in the penetrating idea of Valéry: according to him, “the fools are inclined to unite incomparably more than not-fools”.

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## NAUJI SAVĖS IDENTIFIKAVIMO KRITERIJAI

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## Santrauka

Glaustame tyrime tradicinis savęs identifikavimas pagal tautybę ar konfesiją traktuojamas kaip nepriklausantis nuo sveiko proto ir net atrodo esąs kaip *mauvais ton* (blogas tonas). Kyla klausimas – ar tautybė ir religija yra esminės vyro ar moters savybės? Svarbiausia problema – nacionaliniai ir religiniai konfliktai yra didžiausių žmonijos kančių priežastis. Jei tikrai būtina paskirti tam tikros klasės ar kategorijos asmenį (bet tik to reikia), tai istorinė atmintis gali iškelti kur kas svarbesnius kriterijus.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: istorinė atmintis, tautybė, konfesija, savęs identifikavimas.

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