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A Paradoxical Battle for Salvation: Gumilev, Linkola, and Žižek.

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Introduction

We encounter a big dilemma apropos of the urgency to do something about today's threat of ecological catastrophe: we know that there is an ecological crisis, but we don't believe it, so we don't react. Žižek refers to this as an obvious paradox, and lots of scholars launch different theories to resolve such a crisis. I propose to rescue two: Deep Ecology and Ethnogenesis, both enough radical and weird.

The Ecological Paradox

During the last ball celebrated at the Winter Palace, one of the guests noted down from a randomly heard conversation: “One should not be shy while dancing polka”. Of course, none of guests expected the forthcoming events, since any tipping point can be clearly perceived only once it is already too late. As the French philosopher Jean-Pierre Dupuy explains: “We believe in the possibility of a disaster only once this one happened. We react only to our actuality – therefore, too late” (Dupuy 2002: 162-163). As Slavoj Žižek figures out, either we take this threat seriously and decide to do things, which, if the catastrophe will not occur, will appear ridiculous, or we do nothing and lose everything in the case it will happen. Thus, going further with the argument of Žižek, the worst choice which can be made here is the choice on a middle ground, of taking a limited amount of measures: in this case, we will fail whatever will occur.¹

Likewise, once we have to admit the urgency of querying our organisation as a society, the next question to debate should be if it is possible to change the system within the system - what forces us to examine the ground in which the current model is based? To do that, different discourses should be reviewed, to query the nodal assumptions of the contemporary hegemonic discourse and to introduce alternative political discourses. Therefore, notwithstanding the validity of their proposals, I consider that the study of authors like Pentti Linkola and Lev Gumilev (a Finnish bio-empiricist and a Russian ethnographer) could be positive, because of their critical value, their originality and the provocative character of their discourse. Until not so long ago, the acts of nature were helpful or harmful to us, but were certainly not our responsibility. However, this has changed. As Allen Thomson points out in his article “Responsibility for the end of Nature”, we now know that the fundamental conditions of the biosphere are something that, collectively, we are responsible for. Science and technology have enabled us to wrest some control over nature but this has now come at the cost of being responsible for far more than we ever bargained for.

Thus our anxiety is over our loss of innocence. We don't fear the end of the natural world; we fear responsibility for the natural world. What leads Thomson to conclude that “whether we accept it or not, human beings now shoulder the responsibility of planetary management; once the planet was larger than us, but it no longer is”². Or as Žižek puts forward, whether or not *we ourselves* can be proved to be responsible, “the only firm ethical option in the current catastrophe is admitting to the ecologically catastrophic in all

its meaningless contingency, accepting responsibility groundlessly”³. The matter is that, although our acts can have catastrophic consequences, we continue to perceive such consequences as anonymous, as something for which we are not responsible, for which there is no clear agent⁴. “We know it, but we cannot make ourselves believe in what we know” (Dupuy 2006: 147). We know that the main production of the economic system is precisely waste, until the point that it will transform the earth into a vast wasteland, however, “You lose the sense of tragedy, you perceive progress as derisive” (Miller 1999: 19).

It is what Žižek criticizes, pointing out our incapacity to imagine the destruction of the planet given direct experiences of its assumed power. So we cannot truly grasp the subjugation of nature by experiencing it directly: “These encounters foster romanticized conceptions of nature and are in danger of misleading observers to believe that nature remains a powerful and even indestructible source of life, which cannot be entirely dominated or degraded”⁵. That means that environmental issues can not apparently be imminent, because they are distanced from our daily realities and thus easy to ignore. Yet when concerns do breach the wall of apathy and present themselves and their consequences in apparent ways, people can be moved to act⁶. This relates to an interesting notion tagged as NIMBY (Not In My Backyard). “When environmental concerns are directly affecting people, they are much more likely to act in order to address the problem” (Sewell 2010: 13).

Žižek refers to this as an obvious paradox, in that despite the growing awareness of the ecological crisis and the internationally supported scientific data that illustrates the problem, there remains a lack of meaningful action to address the problems. He reflects on this by saying that it is as if, when we consider ecology, we “simply do not believe that this can be destroyed. That is the horror of visiting sites of a catastrophe like Chernobyl, in a way... we are not wired to even imagine something like that, it is in a way unimaginable”⁷. Because of this inability to conceive of ecological consequences, we distance ourselves from the conception of such possibilities and thus fail to respond to them, even when they are understood as conceivable outcomes. Two main reasons appear to be behind this paradox; First: because it doesn’t disturb yet our everyday life; Second: because still we are thrusting the romantic-harmonic idea of nature, understood as a “place” in which to escape of the capitalist use of the resources.

Additionally, consumerist ideological choice also preserves the idea that we still have a choice; “Ambience exhibits a bewildering range of choices. Ambience shows us, as

it were, the different kinds of shampoo in the supermarket, the supermarket shelves, the walls of the supermarket; the sound of the parking lot outside; the noise of birds and airplanes in the sky; the smell of toxic fumes. The bewildering quality of ambience intoxicates and renders inoperative the belief that there is a *thing* called nature that is *out there* beyond us” (Morton 2007: 183). So we need new discourses to ground alternative possibilities, different ideologies to be put into practice, and for that what we have to change is our interpretation of nature.

Deep Ecology

To the given problem of an ecological crisis, different reactions within the green political thought have appeared. In my opinion, the two most noteworthy are the “Deep Ecology” and the “Environmentalism”. While Deep ecology encourages drastic changes to the prevailing system of production and the use of resources, environmentalism seeks fixes that can be accommodated while maintaining the system of production as it is. To develop the argument of this article, I want to focus on the Deep Ecology proposal, the one that questions the whole system of meaning in which we are based and proposes a set of radical solutions. Furthermore, I propose to analyse Pentti Linkola⁸, who basically proposes a return to a smaller ecological niche, to reduce human population and to abandon “the quasi religious” pursuit of economic growth. Linkola takes the idea of environmental balance as a base for the organisation of society (we should turn from anthropocentrism to eco-centrism); what it means, in fact, is that the value of any species is inversely proportional to the number of existing specimens.

Regarding Linkola’s ideological discourse, the core terms that appear in it are: ecologism -understood as a balance of the biosystem; and reduction of human population -since the overpopulation of one species unbalances the ecosystem. Then, what he proposes in order to avoid *the disaster* is to adopt radical measures related to the organisation of society, for example to abolish democracy and the distribution of energy, to license procreation or to implant subsistence economy.

Now the majority of mankind has entered a new historical age, that of market economy, in which the clearance sale of natural resources knows no boundaries. With breeding still unchecked, the human population has risen to a monstrous, murderous size. Mankind has reached a stage of development where it is superseding all other life forms on the planet at a very fast pace, and

is ultimately destined to consume itself... The guardian of life, the deep ecologist, will not accept progress as the end of evolution and will reject the dominating position man has assumed, (Linkola 2009: 169).

In words of Leena Lahti: "Deep Ecology in Finland has been made famous by Pentti Linkola" (2008: 224). Nevertheless, Vesa Oittinen, scholar at the Aleksanteri Institut, suggests that it was Arne Næss who originally designed this philosophical doctrine in Scandinavia, publishing his book "*Ekologi, samhälle och livsstil*" in the early 1970s. Further on, the Deep Ecology current asserts that we need to change our view from anthropocentrism to eco-centrism. Likewise, rather than the environment being something that is valuable to use in terms of resources, Deep Ecology encourages the concept of an integrated nature of life or an intrinsic value of nature; "This distinction between concepts of value has an important role in green political theory, given that how we conceptualize the value of nature pertains to how we set about using, managing, and exploiting its resources for human production, creation and desire" (Sewell 2010: 59).

The intrinsic value of animals, however, and the degree to which they are seen as inviolable beings, depends on their status: their position, that is, in the biosphere and the ecosystem. The whole, the system, the maximum amount of species and diversity is the most sacred thing. The second most important thing is the total number of individuals for every given species across the entire Earth and in every specific area. The greatest, most beautiful and most important value on Earth is the richness of nature, (Linkola 2009: 120).

This illustrates the holism of Deep ecology, which presumes that nature is an essential part of a harmonic whole, a conception that leads to the idea of nurturing and caring for. These conceptions are entrenched in enchanted ideas of nature, as well as in the entire discourse of nature as a refuge of aesthetic beauty⁹.

Nevertheless, the "thing" we call nature is also a construction, a way of healing what modern society has damaged¹⁰. We humans are also separate from nature inasmuch as we are distinctively cultural, historical beings; we have produced this separation ourselves, through our efforts to transcend nature (Adorno and Horkheimer 1944: 13/29). What Adorno and Horkheimer suggest is that "man imagines himself free from fear when there is no longer anything unknown"¹¹. Moreover, Adorno expressed that "wherever nature was not actually mastered, the image of its untamed condition terrified"¹². Unable to escape this enveloping process, nature became subject to demystification; its mystery and

inherent power were subverted by a positivistic obsession to understand and control nature through scientific and instrumental methodology. Enlightenment ideals of freedom and knowledge thus encouraged a positivist conception of reality in which everything is amenable to human understanding and thus to mastery and control. Then “the nonhuman world is considered to be valuable only insofar as it can serve as a means – or insofar as it is instrumental – to human ends”¹³.

This type of approach divorces nature from society and puts humanity in a better position to impose instrumental reason, to contain, control and dominate nature, using it as a mere resource for our modes of production. As Rebecca Sewell refers in her thesis, “Nature, as all other things, is instrumentalized under the process of rationalization and becomes an object, which we can understand, control and master to our will. The particularities and inherent values of objects are subsumed under an illusory universality, which pervades over all dimensions of society. The dominant relationship over nature becomes so well entrenched within the system in the culture industry that it becomes inconceivable of change”¹⁴.

But, in consonance with Hiram Canton's work, the tools of the Enlightenment have not delivered what they promised, but only an illusion of the ideals of freedom: “Enlightenment is the discovery of human freedom, including the wrestle with nature for mastery. From this germ modern enlightenment matured into the scientific and industrial domination of nature for the relief of man's estate; and yet both practically and theoretically enlightened men are enslaved by the instruments of liberation”¹⁵.

By basing our ideal on freedom, we have closed ourselves off to obligations outside of ourselves, which coincidentally are the things that make us feel most alive. We are prisoners of the self, and it is not surprise we act selfishly as a result, (Linkola 2009: 14).

We are given the illusion that nature remains free when we go to a park, and yet the *commodification* of nature has become so pervasive that the appearance of its total domination has been camouflaged within the culture industry. As Bernstein clarifies, based on Adorno's concepts: “Nature as an object valued on its exchange potential is subsumed within the commodity fetishism of culture and this process is entrenched within the system, to the extent at which it appears not only justified, but necessary and progressive. The process of *commodification* is achieved by displacing the intrinsic properties of things for the sake of ends extrinsic to them”¹⁶.

Adorno and Horkheimer agree with deep-ecologist thinkers that the process of disenchanting nature has facilitated its “domination” by humanity. But they add that, because modern society is unprecedentedly effective at dominating nature, it comes to appear that this form of society cannot reasonably be criticized¹⁷. Individuals therefore experience modern society as unchangeable and so as deriving from nature. This, in turn, encourages individuals to see natural phenomena as ‘enchanted’; A consequence that Alison Stone describes in this way: “the mode of thought which lies at the root of modern social relations makes it impossible for people to think critically about these relations, which thereby become an unchallengeable framework akin to myth” (Stone 2006: 237).

Adorno agrees also with those environmentalist thinkers who think that we need a re-enchanting picture of nature to deter us from dominating it. But whereas these thinkers aim to re-conceive nature, positively, as animated and balanced, he warns that such positive re-conceptions always risk feeding into currently typical forms of enchantment, which see nature as already meaningful. Then, for Adorno, the only kind of re-enchantment which can avert this risk is one that finds natural beings to be mysteriously meaningful solely because they refer to their histories of immeasurable suffering¹⁸.

Likewise, Adorno rejects aesthetics’ devaluation of natural beauty, which, he thinks, forms part of modernity’s radicalized disenchantment and domination of nature. But he also argues that direct experience of natural beauty is problematic, since this experience implies that nature can still express and realize itself in modern society, concealing the extent of nature’s domination. Thus, Adorno proposes that natural beauty should be experienced only indirectly via artworks, then managing to re-enchant nature while remaining critical of its domination¹⁹. However, since man himself creates the superiority of his existence within taxonomy, the artifice of this taxonomy will eventually be exposed and will then lead to the annihilation of his existence. “Only man place values in things to preserve himself—he alone created a meaning for things, a human meaning. Whoever must be a creator always annihilates” (Nietzsche 1970: 171).

Once we have articulated a concept of “nature” as distinct from “all things” or “the world as a whole”, it becomes possible to speak of some things as belonging to nature or being natural, and of other things as being unnatural²⁰.

The cityscape is becoming gross and shabby. Beauty is always a central and inalienable value, a value far more important than economy... these ever-present giant-letter signs displaying sums of money are no small concern, no simple subject for a merry causerie, (Linkola 2009: 35).

“The world around us appears for the most part to be rather decided and determined” (Torfing 1999: 65). Texts have environments, and these environments are made of signs, yet the matter-sign distinction breaks down at a certain point, because one of these environments is the environment. Then comes Derrida’s famous formulation ‘Il n’y a pas d’hors-texte,’ (There is nothing outside the text)²¹. Or, as Raymond Williams describes it: Nature is “the most complex word in the language”²². Hence the conclusion that finally Adorno proposes is “to honor nature by confirming that it no longer exists; otherwise, we will delude ourselves that life is still alive”²³.

Thus life-forms are constantly coming and going, mutating and becoming extinct. Biospheres and ecosystems are subject to arising and cessation. Living beings do not form a solid pre-historical, or non-historical ground upon which human history plays. But nature is often wheeled out to adjudicate between what is fleeting and what is substantial and permanent (Morton 2007: 21). The final word of the history of nature is that nature is history. Thus *Nature* is an arbitrary rhetorical construction, empty of independent, genuine existence behind or beyond the texts we create about it. Moreover, it is a social construction, since it is formed within the material activity and interrelationships of the people who constitute the societies occupying specific places at specific times²⁴. Then, coming up with a new world-view means dealing with how humans experience their place in the world.

At the same time, lifeworld is delimited to experience, what in fact curtails the ecological reaction to global warming (“the gratifying illusion of immersion in a lifeworld provides yet another way to hold out against the truth of global warming”²⁵). Human beings experience their world first and only then endow it with self-conscious meaning, whether personal, cultural, ideological, or scholarly (See Seamon and Sowers 2009). Therefore, aesthetics should perform a crucial role, establishing ways of feeling and perceiving this place²⁶. As Robert Boardman asserts, “discourses are important, not merely derivative; and they are seen to grow in specific spatial, cultural and temporal contexts”²⁷. Thus, since “nature” does not exist outside of man, the Green ideological discourse it has to be identified also as a montage, an articulation of various separate moments around a master-signifier.

Prior to this articulation in nodal points, these moments pre-exist as floating signifiers, as proto-ideological elements with no Green connotations. Then, their identity is modified and decontested in a particular way as a result of their articulation around the

Green nodal points; thus they become moments of Green ideological discourse. Moreover, Stavrakakis clears up that the difference of the Green ideology from other discursive forms is the core location of the “Green” component, that is to say the fact that it occupies the place of the nodal point instead of serving as a mere moment in the periphery of the ideological chain²⁸. According to Morton, the further scholarship investigates life forms, the less those forms can be said to have a single, independent and lasting identity. The further scholarship delves into texts (deconstruction), the less they too can be said to have a single, independent and lasting identity. In his opinion, this similarity is not simply an analogy, hence “Life forms cannot be said to differ in a rigorous way from texts. On many levels and for many reasons, deconstruction and ecology should talk to one another” (2010a: 1).

Therefore, the main mistake of Green thought is the transformation of nature into an oppressed “thing”, invoking its conceptualization as a subject in need of representation²⁹. So the error is to understand nature as the “other”, a meaningful “whole” that should be protected from the human hubris. Moreover, our experience of that “Other” as alive, and our faith in his capacity of harmony and self-regulation prompts the inadequacy of contemporary political approaches facing the paradox of inaction.

Natural Distortions of Nationalism.

In agreement with Adorno: “Natural beauty, purportedly ahistorical, is at its core historical”³⁰. Hence nature functions as a symbol of order or disorder, it is romanticized and aestheticized, or villainized and deemed threatening; it is instrumentalized or sacralized; it is an enclosed space of equilibrium, or a wild space of untamed and overlapping flows; it is seen to include humanity, or detached neatly from this realm of culture; it is raced, classed, gendered, and sexualized. These conceptual struggles suggest that whenever the word “nature” is spoken, it is infused with “social” and “cultural” desires that, although often latent, are closely connected with normative visions of political community; particularly “the nation” (Hultgren 2010: 6).

Ecological forms of subjectivity inevitably involve ideas and decisions about group identity and behaviour, but the problem of sovereignty use to become a central aspect of the tension between Green thought and nationalism. On one hand, myriad commentators have advocated that “nature” works to break down national boundaries in favour of more holistic forms of governance (Ruggie 1993, Ward 1998). On the other, however, “nature” is

associated with conservative movements that appeal to biological and ecological science, romantic aesthetics, or traditional connections to the land in order to naturalize a political community while excluding others (Bramwell 1989, Kosek 2006)³¹. In line with Eric Hobsbawm, “there is no way of telling the observer how to distinguish a nation from other entities a priori, as we can tell him or her how to recognize a mouse or a lizard” (Hobsbawm 1990: 5). Moreover, the accepted idea of the environment is a way of considering collective-humans surrounded by nature, or in continuity with other beings such as animals and plants, what sets the base to suggest that the interpretation of nature will play an important role in the legitimisation of the hegemonic power, like, in the modern period, the idea of the nation-state emerged as a way of going beyond the authority of the empire.

Likewise, by placing the idea of *ethnos* in a naturalistic framework, the Russian ethnographer Lev N. Gumilev removes it from the hierarchy of “clan-tribe-people-nation” (Gumilev 2001: 78). Thus, the “behavioural stereotypes” are changeable, and language, race, customs, and ideology cannot be seen as absolute determining factors in the identification of an *ethnos* (Gumilev 2001: 93). Gumilev is significant as a creator of the only genuinely biological theory of civilisations in the USSR, considering the *ethnogenesis* (birth of civilisations) to be “a part of natural and biospheric processes”. According to him, the world of human beings comprises many *ethnoi*; the starting point is when a people, after living together for a long period of time, are of the idea that “their way of life, manners, customs, tastes, outlook and social relationships” (Gumilev 2001: 21).

Moreover, he understands the *ethnos* as a system, thus not a sum of human units, but a complex of interrelationships between humans. “For Gumilev’s understanding of *ethnos*, economic and citizenship rights are not a factor – members of an *ethnos* may enfranchised titular citizens of a nation-state, peasants living on a manor, or steppe nomads. It makes no difference: they still are part of an *ethnos*, which is to say, part of a natural system”³². Then, because of the dynamic nature of the *ethnos*, Gumilev points out that the problem in defining the *ethnos* arises when it is defined as a “state” of human life, what means antagonistic to a “process”. Rather, a living organism is a constant process, from birth through maturity and aging to death. Then, when an organism dies, it reverts to a “state”, a field for an archaeological dig.

The idea of state is useful when speaking of technology, the means of production; one can also talk about social states, such as class. One can

change one's social state through the expenditure of energy. But it is not possible to change one's ethnos in the same way. Therefore, ethnos must be regarded as a process (*Gumilev 2001: 70*).

As a substantiated theory, Gumilev's vision became a concentrated expression of a positivistic effort to grasp and explain everything in terms of the natural sciences. His theory appeared as a generalisation and adaptation of the views of European thinkers and historians such as Oswald Spengler, Karl Yaspers and Arnold Toynbee. For instance, Spengler saw, as the key to understanding world history, "a number of mighty Cultures", each with "its own idea, its own passions, its own life, will and feeling, its own death" (Spengler 1934: 21); Likewise, Jaspers chose as a focus the few "Great Civilizations" that formed about 5.000 BC, underwent, separately but synchronously, a transformation during an "Axial Period" several hundred years BC, resulting eventually in a single human civilization (Jaspers 1965: 24); And, withal, Toynbee identified 21 societies in world history, of which five, the Western, Orthodox Christian, Islamic, Hindu and Far Eastern societies, exist to this day (Toynbee 1939: 51).

Nevertheless, Gumilev differs from these historians while applying a more naturalistic approach, developed by the articulation of a basic unit of human cultural association, the ethnos, and a process, the ethnogenesis, deriving from interaction with the natural environment and carried through a medium of individual human beings organized in such an association³³. Gumilev's ideas about the environment drew heavily on the Russian tradition of landscape science, which developed as an important branch of the earth sciences through scientist as V. Dokuchaev, S. Solovev, V. Kliuchevsky, V. Vernadsky, S. Winogradsky and L. Berg (See Oldfield and Shaw 2005: 247). For example, Gumilev takes inspiration from the work of Vladimir Vernadskii on the biosphere, which is not "just a film of living matter on the surface of the Earth", but a "constantly changing aggregate of organisms, connected to each other by, and subject to, the evolutionary process in the course of geological time" (Gumilev 2001: 326). However, Gumilev himself recognised his difference from the conventional Russian historians in his use of a systematic approach. They studied the elements of the system, whereas he himself studied the links between those elements³⁴.

Lev N. Gumilev, son of the poets Anna Akhmatova and Nikolay Gumilev, was a polemical figure until he died in St. Petersburg in 1992. His theories were considered "non academic" during the Soviet Union and he spent around 16 years in different Gulags. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union the struggle to articulate exclusive ethno-territorial

attachments has become a fundamental feature of identity building across the former USSR, producing some “bastard sons” of Gumilev’s theory. Additionally, his figure has become even more preminent (and polemic) since when he was alive, and in the last years a university with his name has been created in Astaná and his premises have come to be broadly used in discussions about nation and empire, notoriously by neo-Eurasianist scholars as A. Dugin or politicians as Nazarbayev, Ziuganov or Zhirinovskiy³⁵.

Certainly, Gumilev just used nature and geography to discuss ethnic development and his thinking was not that buried in ecological concerns. However, since Gumilev tried to define the whole process of ethno-genesis in terms of the natural sciences, we can use some of his concepts in order to query the current social organisation and create a new political discourse. Likewise, notwithstanding that the core of his work is about the rise and decline of civilisations, we can check if his assumptions could be convenient to resolve the suggested paradox, since his discourse offers new nodal signifiers. According to him, the ethnogenesis process develops in accordance with the second rule of thermodynamics, where the initial impulse of energy is gradually spent and the entropy consistently increases. “The ethnic system, therefore, has to release the growing entropy from itself into the environment and to take the energy back from the environment. How does this happen? The natural answer is: through war, or through the exchange of goods or ideas. Thus an ethnos is a self-regulating system” (Filatov 2003: 26). Then, if an ethnos is a process, ethnogenesis is a change of state, and that means that it requires an injection of energy, similar to the hidden thermal energy in a material change of state from solid to liquid to gas. Thus, drawing from Vernadskii’s principle of biochemical energy, Gumilev concludes that it is this energy that stimulates all ethnogenesis³⁶.

Likewise, the aggregation of living and non-living matter is also explained by the Second Law of Thermodynamics, which states that the entropy of any isolated system increases with time, which is to say that matter moves from an ordered state to a disordered state. This loss of orderliness is uneven, however, and systems that are not isolated (that interact with their surrounding environment), can reverse entropy in themselves while speeding up the process of entropy around them. Thus, when Gumilev speaks of ethnogenesis being governed by natural laws, it is this “reverse entropy” that he is speaking of, the same principle that applies to biological processes³⁷.

But what is ethno-genesis? “It is the consequence of an entropic impulse, i.e. a short living explosion of the energy of a living (animate) substance in the biosphere... As a result of this, *passionarity* appears, i.e. a recessive sign that dissolves only after 15

centuries”³⁸. Or, as it was defined in a terminological glossary prepared by his followers: “*passionarity* is an excess of biochemical energy of the living substance, which appears in the ability of people to produce a super effort”³⁹.

We are not alone in the universe, the near Cosmos plays its part in saving the nature of the earth. Our business is to keep it alive and healthy. Nature is not just our home, it is we ourselves (Gumilev 2001: 577).

Gumilev believed that micro-mutations, which resulted in the appearance of “*passionary*” people in the population, are caused by radiation from the near cosmos, and that radiation “usually occurs during the period of the lowest activity of the Sun”.⁴⁰ This radiation provokes a so called ethno-genetic explosion, i.e. a sudden emergence of people, whose distinction from the rest of the usually inert population is in the possession of an upgraded level of *passionarity* or ability to make a super effort and produce extraordinary work. Those people allegedly form the core of the new ethnic system⁴¹.

In Gumilev’s terms, *passionarity* means that something beyond rational self-control drives people to do extraordinary things. And that “something” is unlike the Freudian libido, it is not connected with human sexuality though may affect it. *Passionarity* belongs rather to the realm of “super ego”, to use Freudian terminology (See Filatov 2003: 27).

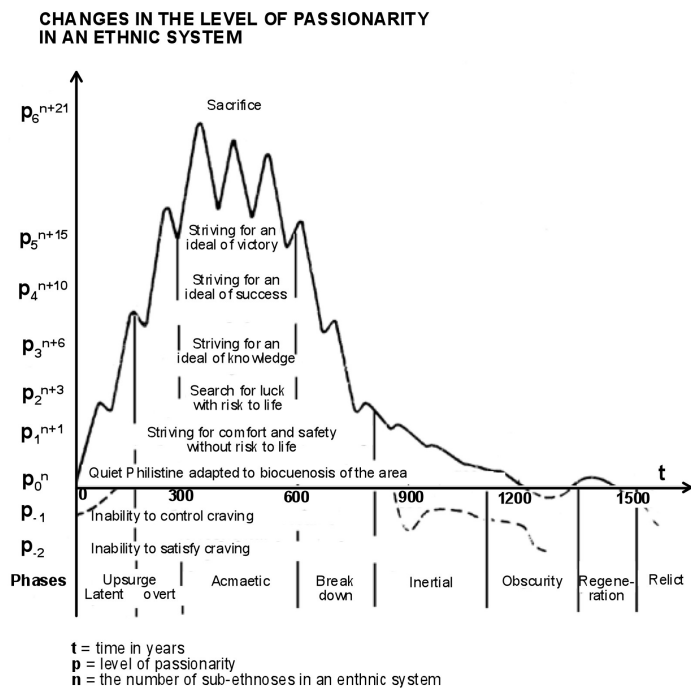
Depending on the level of *passionarity*, Gumilev classified people into three categories.

1. The *passionary* people are individuals whose level of *passionarity* is higher than their instinct of self-preservation. 2. *Harmonious individuals*, are whose level of *passionarity* is equal to their instinct of self-preservation. The 3rd category is formed by *subpassionary* individuals, whose impulse of self-preservation is superior to everything.

Hence, following Gumilev, the advanced or declining state of an ethnos depends upon its percentage of “passionary”, “sub-passionary” or “harmonious” people in the whole ethnic population. Then, to generalise Gumilev’s vision of history, one can say that history is being created through interaction of bordering super ethnic systems while each of them is experiencing a different age. Landscape and climate have a very important role in this interaction. It is landscape that defines the ways of housekeeping, the habits of everyday routine, “The aspects that make people’s bio-field vibrate in a common rhythm and on the same frequency.”⁴².

Since any civilisation is a result of a decrease in the level of *passionarity* and the civilisation at the latest phases is the very cause of the mistreatment of nature, the emergence of a young ethnic system is a means to reintroduce *passionarity* in order to

save nature, so the natural duty of an entity, pretending to be a "young system", is to defend the nature from civilisation (See Filatov 2003: 45). Additionally, Gumilev defined the ages of an ethnos in the whole process of ethno-genesis respectively to the level of *passionarity*. Moreover, he divided the whole process from the birth to death, which takes from 1200 to 1500 years (if not interrupted by a neighbouring ethnos), into 6 stages:



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Gumilev himself stated that the main problem of history is the super urbanisation and the damage of the environment caused by the ageing ethnic systems. So the start of a new ethno-genetic process is, in accordance with Gumilev, "a coordinated action of the biosphere of the earth and the near cosmos in order to prevent people's destruction of nature" (Filatov 2003: 9).

How can a single ethnos be created for the entire planet? This would require, at a minimum, the destruction of natural-climatic zonality, the cyclical movement of the atmosphere, and the differences between forest and steppe and – of course – those between mountains and valleys, (Gumilev 1989: 305; 1994: 293).

Moreover, Gumilev believed that the modern development of communications makes the anti-systems more powerful and seductive: "Since all the ethnoses had been involved in extensive contacts long ago, it seems that the anti-systems should have replaced the ethnoses everywhere and destroyed all form of life in their areas ... but why did this still not happen? Because new ethno-geneses sometimes happen, and there, in the hot flame of

the growing *passionarity* with an original and pure bio-rhythm there is no way to survive for any old anti-system."⁴⁴.

There are no good reasons for advocating a policy of assimilation and fusion. Why should we try to squeeze the behavior of an Abkhazian and a Chukchii, a Lithuanian and a Moldavian into a single model? Why indeed seek to create on planet Earth 'a single ethnos' and a giant *komunalka*? Gumilev 1994: 257; 1995: 49–50).

In fact, if an ethnos is a natural form of human existence, the trend of globalisation clearly looks unnatural, and *passionarity*, as the driving force of history, is generally in opposition to this trend. Thus, Gumilev saw *passionarity* as an instrument to correct the mistreatment of nature by civilisation, even if civilisation itself was built by *passionary* elite; this leads us to conclude that in Gumilev's theory the *passionary* explosion happens in order to prevent destruction of nature by human activities.

Eventually, Gumilev's theory could be worthy in order to influence the political discourse, if we take, for example, his view that humans can't develop their personalities in the circumstances of their choice, since they choose neither the time nor the place of their birth and they are also driven above all by their instincts. However, this belief in a self-regulation of "nature" can not resolve the suggested ecological paradox, since it is supposed that *nature itself* will react in order to prevent its destruction. Nevertheless, Gumilev's theory provides people some "zone of freedom", understood as a highly restricted space within which they can make choices, regarding if they live in balance with their *landschaft*: "The only distinctive thing about freedom is that Man can make the right choice or make a mistake, and in the latter case he is doomed"⁴⁵. Consequently, Gumilev concludes that humankind has two handicaps: the weight of responsibility (its choice can bring about its disappearance), and a total lack of real liberty (since the freedom space is illusory and humanity does not shape events because it can only see appearances).

Therefore, he proposes that: "Without the utmost necessity it is better not to attempt to change history, for any such change will always come at a great cost, and its results cannot be foreseen"⁴⁶. What is still not helping in our purpose of resolving the ecological paradox: Yet people could believe in the ecological crisis, they will not see the need to act because of the extreme futility of the acts. Then, the first question is whether history is capable of teaching us anything at all. The second is about the limit of the violations of nature. This question now is whether the fatal threshold is already passed. And the last

one is concerned with the life of civilisation itself (See Filatov 2003, 51). Even so, Gumilev resolves the deadlock to what we come suggesting a practical usefulness of his theory; as a kind of meteorology: “it cannot prevent rain or hurricanes but at least allows people to be prepared for them”⁴⁷.

We have a meteorological service that predicts the weather and in many ways helps us avoid its pernicious consequences. My theory of ethnogenesis may likewise be used as an applied science... (Gumilev 1992: 11).

What Is To Be Done?

Both, Linkola’s “Deep Ecology” and Gumilev’s “Ethnogenesis” have potential to query the way society is organised, and to offer some original concepts for it. Moreover, they both plead to strength the human coexistence with the surrounded places (local niches), as a *sine qua non* condition to achieve a more ecological balance. Moreover, their assumptions offer original concepts in order to construct new political discourses and approach the current ecological events, as for example:

The only criteria to measure the satisfaction, happiness and future faith of citizens and societies are the following: the number of suicides, the need for psychiatric services and medicine, the need for drugs and alcohol, the endurance of relationships or the number of divorces, the degree of firmness and warmth in gender relations, the degree of harmony and respect between citizens, the quality of the environment, (Linkola 2009: 184).

However, their shared interpretation of nature as a harmonic, meaningful, and balanced “thing”, it appears as an obstacle in the attempt to resolve Žižek’s suggested ecological paradox (we know the ecological crisis, but we don’t believe it). Concretely, their proposal of nature as an organic system in which human beings are embedded does not resolve the problem of how to react to an unbelievable catastrophe, not offering, either, any motivation to people in order to change their behaviour and apply a suitable set of measures to face the changes of the ecologic phenomena.

So why do we put together Linkola and Gumilev (a full environmentalist with an ethnographer) and try to resolve the Ecological Paradox suggested by a psychoanalyst? As I have mentioned above, because of their capacity in querying the nodal signifiers in the hegemonic discourse and their value as a ground for alternative articulations. There is

not a miraculous solution, but a different organisation of the society. So the most important thing is to know the limits of our capacity, the conditioning factors, and, specially, to acknowledge that the system in which we are is not “natural” but a human construction that it could be preserved or changed. Furthermore, whether we accept or not that the economic model and system of meanings should be changed, the assumptions of the discourse in which the model is based have to be constantly scrutinized, particularly because that will bring better argument. So, new ideological discourses should be welcome in order to face the current ecological difficulties. Then, agreeing with Linkola, the first reaction is to question the system, especially, if that way of organisation means a degradation of the life conditions.

According to many specialists, the environmental crisis seem to be approaching a zero-point (the end!), or, as Ed Ayres points out “We are being confronted by something so completely outside our collective experience that we don't really see it, even when the evidence is overwhelming. For us, that 'something' is a blitz of enormous biological and physical alterations in the world that has been sustaining us”⁴⁸. At the geological and biological level, Ayres enumerates four "spikes" (or accelerated developments) asymptotically approaching a zero-point at which the quantitative expansion will reach its point of exhaustion and will bring about a qualitative change. These four spikes are: population growth, consumption of resources, carbon gas emissions, and the mass extinction of species.

However, since we cannot be sure what the ultimate result of our interventions into geo-sphere will be, we know that if humanity were to stop abruptly its immense industrial activity and let nature on Earth take a new course, the result would have been a total breakdown, an unimaginable catastrophe. That assumption leads, in my opinion, to deny the radical measures proposed by Linkola, as not being able to avoid the ecological catastrophe. As Žižek asserts, “*Nature* on Earth is already to such an extent *adapted* to human interventions, the human *pollutions* are already to such an extent included into the shaky and fragile balance of the *natural* reproduction on Earth, that its cessation would cause a catastrophic imbalance”⁴⁹.

Additionally, the measures suggested by Linkola (Democracy and distribution of energy abolished, procreation licensed, subsistence economy implanted...) will be hardly accepted by the popular will, as will be not, either, the measure of the value of the species by the number of specimens, which means setting a romantic idea of environmental balance as the base of the social organisation. Likewise, in the case of Gumilev, his

inferred belief on the self-regulation of the system reproduces the enchanted understanding of nature, what impedes the human reaction to any catastrophe. That's the meaning of the affirmation that humanity has nowhere to retreat, since there is no "big Other", no self-contained symbolic order guaranteeing meaning, no nature qua balanced order of self-reproduction. What remains then is that, forasmuch as it is too late to step down the exploitation of the natural resources and put breaks to the economic system (since the cessation of activity can trigger an even greater catastrophe), "the only alternative that rests is to accept the radical abyss of one's existence", in line with Žižek's view⁵⁰.

So the first thing we can do is to acknowledge that what we can do is limited, but there is still some margin linked with our behaviour and scientific development. In order to "adapt" our way of living to an "adapted nature"; one should thus learn to accept the utter groundlessness of our existence, and in the line of Hans Jonas claim, "to admit ignorance becomes so the other mountainside of the obligation to know"⁵¹. Agreeing with Badiou⁵², politics must revolve around the construction of great new fictions that create real possibilities for constructing different socio-environmental futures. To the extent that the current post-political condition combines apocalyptic environmental visions with a hegemonic neoliberal view of social ordering constitutes one particular fiction, there is an urgent need for different stories and fictions that can be mobilized for realization⁵³. Then, the second action is to change our interpretation of nature, "what we need is ecology without nature: the ultimate obstacle to protecting nature is the very notion of nature we rely on"⁵⁴, in order to articulate new ideological discourses and change the everyday politics, or how the discourse is put it into practice.

However, if we accept that subject and object do not really exist, why should we care about it? "Why bother trying to reconcile them? If, at bottom, there is no problem, and we coexist in an infinite web of mutual interdependence where there is no boundary or center -why then do we need to make all this ecocritical fuss? Surely therefore, the fuss is like scratching an itch that doesn't exist-thereby bringing it into existence" (Morton 2007: 23). We should because the degradation of life conditions challenges our capacity of surviving; because the problem we face has the urgency of being about our physical existence. "When the immersive world is also toxic -when it is not actually just a matter of phenomena appearing on a screen (virtual), but of chemicals penetrating our cells-the stakes get higher" (Morton 2007: 27). Thus, what we talk about is our live conditions in a context of incertitude, full events that could be superficially prevented but not avoided.

Then the only choice we have is to adapt our way of living to the given “adapted” ecology. For that, we have to change our interpretation of what is nature, substituting the harmonic idea of an organic whole for a scientific approach to the chaotic amalgam of phenomena that happen around us, affecting our life conditions and also being affected by us.

Hence, to sum up: Deep Ecology and Ethnogenesis approaches cannot resolve the ecological crisis because of four basic reasons: First, because people will not accept the application of such a radical measures; Second, because the understanding of nature as a holistic and harmonic is false, fostering an erroneous trust on its balance; Third, because we experience natural phenomena by our senses, so we don't ultimately believe that any apocalypse is to come. Fourth, because even if we take the measures Deep Ecology proposes it doesn't make sure that the problem will be resolved, since the ecology is already that much “adapted” to our activity that in the case of stopping the human use of nature, ecology will react in an even more catastrophic way.

Existence is coexistence or, as Darwin wrote: "adaptation". Thus, the conclusion may be one of the aphorisms of Emil Cioran: “The fact that life has no meaning is a reason to live -moreover, the only one”. So, despite that our margin of action is very limited, and despite that there is no such a big Other and no harmonic natural beauty there around us, by our own interest we should do something in order to avoid suffering and not live in a garbage patch. Then, the only way of reaction is to adapt our system (social, economic, political, cultural...) to an “adapted nature” -understanding that *nature* is an amalgam of chaotic phenomena.

1 Endnotes

- See Žižek, Slavoj. "Unbehagen in der Natur. Ecology Against Nature", *Bedeutung*, 2009.
- 2 See Thompson, Allen. "Responsibility for the end of nature". *Ethics & environment*. 14 (1), 2009.
- 3 See Žižek, *Looking Awry*, Verso. pp. 35-39
- 4 See Žižek, "Unbehagen in der Natur. Ecology Against Nature". *Bedeutung*, 2009.
- 5 See "Nature and its Discontents" of Slavoj Žižek, pp. 37-72.
- 6 See Sewell, R. (2010) "Representing nature: an analysis of the virtual representation of nature and its challenge".
- 7 See Examined Life", film by Astra Taylor: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iGCfiv1xtoU>
- 8 To put Linkola in context - he is a Finnish fisherman and ornithologist, who was born in Helsinki in 1932 and lives in Ritvala, in a 30 square meter cabin. He has two daughters and until not so long ago he had no electricity at home. Basically, he lived from what he earned selling on horseback the fish he caught in the lake Vanajavesi. Moreover, his father, Kaarlo Linkola, was Rector of the University of Helsinki, and his grandfather was Chancellor of the same institution. However, he left his zoological and botanical studies after one year at that university. His family lived in the main building of Kaisaniemi's Botanical Garden, which was planned as a castle for the king of Finland in 1918. Nevertheless, most of the family heritage that Linkola received he donated to the Finnish Natural Heritage Foundation, a NGO created by him to preserve forest for Finnish society. He has been writing for Finnish journals with a certain frequency; added to which he has published nine books in Finnish, and a book in English compiling some of his articles (curiously, he doesn't know which of his articles have been translated). Linkola is not totally isolated there in Sääksmäki, since he appears occasionally on TV (particularly during election years), and from time to time he comes to Helsinki to visit his family or to listen to some seminars at the university in which he is particularly interested, (for example about Dostoevsky). He is also known for his legendary expeditions -walking for weeks throughout the forests of Finland or riding a bike in continental Europe (he never went further than the Pyrennees). Besides literature, one of his favourite hobbies is to study the migration routes of water birds.
- 9 See Sewell, op. Cit. 2010 pp. 26.
- 10 See Williams, Raymond "Culture and Society: Coleridge to Orwell" Charto and Windus, 1958.
- 11 Adorno, T. and Horkheimer, M. "Dialectic of Enlightenment", trans. John Cumming, Continuum. 1993. pp. 16
- 12 Adorno, Theodor. *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor. University of Minnesota Press. 1997, pp. 65
- 13 Fox, W. "Toward a Transpersonal Ecology – Developing New Foundations for Environmentalism", 1990. pp.149
- 14 See Sewell, op. Cit. 2010 pp. 53-54
- 15 See: Canton, Hiram. "Review: Dialectic of Enlightenment". *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 68.
- 16 Bernstein, JM. in "The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture by Theodor Adorno". 2001. pp. 5
- 17 See Stone, Alison. *Adorno and the disenchantment of nature*. 2006. pp. 232.
- 18 See Stone, op. Cit. 2006. pp. 32;
- 19 See Stone, op. Cit. 2006. pp. 244
- 20 See Evernden, Neil. "The Social Creation of Nature", The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992, 20-21.
- 21 Derrida, Jacques "Of Grammatology". The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987, pp. 158.
- 22 Wilson, A. "The Culture of Nature: North American Landscape from Disney to Exxon Valdez"; 1991. pp. 12.
- 23 Adorno, Theodor, "Notes to Literature", 2 vols. Columbia University Press, 1991. 1958: vol. 1, pp. 11.
- 24 See Alexandros Dagkas and Kyriaki Tsoukala.
- 25 Morton, "Ecology as Text, Text as Ecology", 2010, pp. 9.
- 26 See Morton, Timothy; "Ecology without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics", 2007.
- 27 Boardman, Robert. "The Political Economy of Nature", Palgrave. 2001. pp. 56
- 28 See Stavrakakis, Y. "Green ideology: A discursive reading", *Journal of Political Ideologies*; 97, Vol. 2 Issue 3,
- 29 See Sewell, op. Cit. 2010. pp. 101.
- 30 Adorno, Theodor "Aesthetic Theory", University of Minnesota Press, 1997. Pag. 65.
- 31 See Hultgren, J.; "Negotiating Exceptions to Neoliberalism: Environmental Restrictionism, Nature and Nation"; 2010
- 32 See Matern, Frederick, 2007.
- 33 See Filatov op. Cit. 2003, pp. 5.
- 34 See Filatov, Valeriy "A vision of history by L. N. Gumilev" Ph.D thesis. University of Adelaide, 2003. pp. 26.
- 35 See Bassin, M., "Nurture is Nature: Lev Gumilev and the Ecology of Ethnicity", *Slavic Review* 68, n. 4, 2009.
- 36 See Gumilev, "Etnogenez I Biosfera Zemli (Ethnogenesis and the Earth's Biosphere)", ACT 2001. pp. 277.
- 37 See Gumilev, "Etnogenez I Biosfera Zemli (Ethnogenesis and the Earth's Biosphere)", ACT 2001.
- 38 Gumilev, L. "Tysyacheletie vokrug Kaspiya (A Millennium Around The Caspian Sea)", ACT, 2008. pp. 6.
- 39 Gumilev, L. "Etnogenez I Biosfera Zemli (Ethnogenesis and the Earth's Biosphere)". ACT, 2001. Pp. 606.
- 40 Gumilev, L. "Etnogenez I Biosfera Zemli (Ethnogenesis and the Earth's Biosphere)". ACT, 2001. pp. 583.
- 41 See Filatov, Valeriy "A vision of history by L. N. Gumilev" Ph.D thesis. University of Adelaide, November 2003.
- 42 See Filatov op. Cit. 2003, pp. 37
- 43 Obtained from L. Gumilev, " Ot Rusi do Rossii (From Rus' to Russia)", ACT 2002b. pp. 17
- 44 L. Gumilev, "Ethno-genesis and the Biosphere of the Earth", pp. 577.
- 45 Gumilev, L. "*Drevniaia Rus' i Velikaia step'*" (Moscow: Mysl', 1989), pp. 599-600.
- 46 Gumilev, L. "Chernaia legend: Druz'ia i nedrugi velikoi stepi"; Airis-Press. Moscow, 2007. Pag. 124
- 47 Gumilev, L. "Tysyacheletie vokrug Kaspiya (A Millennium Around The Caspian Sea)", ACT, 2008. pp. 22-23.

48 Quoted in Žižek 2010, Pp. 327

49 See Žižek, S. "Ecology - a New Opium for the Masses". www.lacan.com 2009.

50 Žižek, S. "Unbehagen in der Natur. Ecology Against Nature", Bedeutung, 2009.

51 Jonas, H. "Das Prinzip Verantwortung: Versuch einer Ethik für die technologische Zivilisation", Insel-Verlag, 1979.

52 See Badiou, A. 'Politics: A Non-expressive Dialectics', paper given at 'Is the Politics of Truth still Thinkable?', 2005.

53 See Brand, U., N. Bullard, E. Lander and T. Mueller (eds). 2009.

54 See Žižek, S. "Ecology - a New Opium for the Masses". www.lacan.com; 2009.

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