

Ideas and practices of the skinhead youth counterculture in Belarus

Abstract

The current study is an investigation of the basic ideas and practices of skinheads in Belarus as a local variety of worldwide youth counterculture. There are several themes that are on parade within the frame of the given paper: the origin and development of skinheads' style, neo-Nazi ideas' orientation of the skinhead style proponents and the genesis of skinheads' gangs in Belarus. Special attention has been focused on interrelation of youth counterculture with right-wing radicalism. The authors also touched upon the basic ideas which determine skinheads' Weltanschauung and practices to support the specific collective identity

Key words: skinheads, youth counterculture, style, collective identity, political radicalism

Since the time of mass youth rebels of the late 1960s and the heyday of the hippie movement, a lot of youth subcultures and countercultures have appeared and died away. However, skinheads have become one of the brightest, attractive and ambiguous youth styles. The image of a tough bald-headed guy came from the Great Britain and spread worldwide. Oodles of scandalous publications in mass media: a provocative image of this movement's adherents, political extremism and constant problems with law have generated many, frequently inadequate stereotypes which only have mostly indirect relation to the social reality.

Within the framework of the sociological subcultural approach, skinheads can be related to one of youth countercultures. This is the handling, stress-

ing the analysis of values and practices, which allows us to provide more or less impartial assessment of this phenomenon of youth culture, which does not have much to do with sensational and moralizing statements. Special attention will be paid to complex and antilogous interrelations of the skinhead youth counterculture and political radicalism.

I. Counterculture

For one thing, it is necessary to justify the introduction of the term "youth counterculture". The concept came into prominence in the 1960s on the tide of a wide protest movement of youth. For counterculture ideologists, this term meant a new cultural constellation which was aimed to replace

technocratic values of the Western civilizations for a humanistic-mystical prospect. Subsequently, one of the most common meanings of the concept “counterculture” became localization of youth protest in time (the late 1960s – 1970s) and space (Western Europe and the USA). In cultural studies and philosophy, another line triumphed – to use the concept “counterculture” for any alternative cultural projects which existed during various historical epochs in various forms. Handled in this way, counterculture is a universal phenomenon of human culture. Here, we apply a sociological approach to counterculture, i.e. this phenomenon is defined as a set of world visions, behavioral norms and values, which treat negatively the standard cultural system. The list of criteria of counterculture, enabling us to carry out classification procedures with relation to certain social and cultural phenomena are as follows:

1. Counterculture is a hierarchically organized cultural form with its own symbolical system expressed in unique stylistics which is constituted by an active symbolical opposition to the dominating cultural system. The style determines a specific type of *Weltanschauung*, cultural visualization (exterior, argot and behavior pattern), behavioral stereotypes, etc.

2. Counterculture is characterized by an active, aggressive position against the world it repudiates. It means not only repudiation but also the existence of a different, alternative project of society’s reorganization, even though formulated in rather indistinct and muddy categories.

3. In case of counterculture, society’s basic values are challenged; its political, economic, religious, moral, and aesthetic bases are questioned. Accordingly, counterculture cannot be restrained by the sphere of leisure only; it should cover a person’s cultural activity entirely.

4. Counterculture simultaneously denies and re-interprets culture, and also creates a new culture which leaves the conventional systems of communication and ways of expression.

If applying these criteria to the socio-cultural situation in present-day Belarus, countercultural movements may include skinheads, punks, and Satanists. Being originated in the West, the above-mentioned movements are international in the nature. Despite their external provocative character and extremality, the behavioral practices cultivated by countercultures, basically concentrate on joint leisure activities and a close interpersonal communication. A specific feature of youth countercultures is a huge value of corresponding musical styles which are basic in shaping the identity of these collective groups. The sources for this article include our experience of “inner” supervision (including in-person meetings and correspondence) and the analysis of cultural artifacts (printed editions, leaflets and posters, musical production, photo and video recordings). To re-construct the picture’s completeness, we have used the so-called “official” sources, too. Thus, to analyze skinheads’ representations in mass media, we have carried out a qualitative analysis of newspaper publications. The description of the youth counterculture created by mass

media, exists not only for prevailing culture's informational needs, but also creates the initial basis of knowledge for those young people who join countercultural groups. Since this description is already set by certain ideological positions of "big" society, it differs greatly from the self-description created inside the counterculture.

Counterculture has to overcome and destroy ideologemas created by the media. Thus, analyzing publications in Belarusian printed media, it is possible to determine a steady representative scheme, with the help of which skinheads are described in our country. This interpretive scheme has a stable set of descriptions, metaphors, comparisons, plots, and estimations. The precise logic line – swilled themselves with beer, aggressive shallow teenagers slug foreigners – defines what and how it is possible to write about skinheads in Belarusian newspapers. The real situation on the streets is far from being so unequivocal.

II. Skinheads: the origin of the style

The skinheads' homeland (as well as many other youth subcultures') is Great Britain – it was there, in the 1960s in labor district of East London, that the first skinheads appeared. The radical hairdo style, and there is no disputing its logic, became the marker identifying this counterculture: "any thoroughgoing approach to coiffure, from hair's complete annihilation to full non-interference with the process of a natural growth, symbolizes a person's socially extreme condition – from a total subordination to absolute freedom... With

the help of hairstyles, a person emphasizes not only his/her status, acceptance of traditions and norms, but also his/her distance from society, and moreover – constitutes his/her own subculture" (Bannikov, 2004: 166).

Stylistically, skinheads originated from the "hard mods" subculture by forming local gangs around local leaders. Skinheads at once began to be associated with working-class culture; even their external style emphasized their origin: close-cropped hair (as interpreted later, such hairdo would not allow hair to get in a machine tool) and a youth version of workwear – heavy boots, working shirts and rough jeans. Researchers of post-war Britain's youth subcultures accented skinheads' belonging to the working class. According to John Clarke, the skinhead style is an attempt to restore the working class' traditional communion, being a reaction to this communion's real decline. The basis of this style's social dynamics is a relative deterioration of the situation in the working class and especially an even more appreciable deterioration of the position in the lowest layers of the working class (Clarke 5: 99). Skinheads did not try to revive the workers' real communion as the postwar decline of the working class in Great Britain deprived them of the valid source of solidarity. They tried to lean on the tradition torn off the real social basis. In British researchers' terminology, it was a "magic" attempt of reviving the traditional working communion. During this period, the first behavioral practices of the skinhead counterculture started to form – they included beer drinking sessions, football hooliganism,

and fights with “cultural opponents”, i.e. hippies, homosexuals, and immigrants. Violence at once became an integral attribute of the skinhead counterculture and had an extremely important value for their concept – it emphasized their special manliness which was frequently identified with their physical coolness. “Shaven-heads-ness” receives one more semantic filling – shingled hair is an advantage in a fight. Violence becomes a basis for collective solidarity and mutual support. Fights with immigrants meant a ritual and aggressive protection of society’s social and cultural homogeneity. “Puritans in boots” (according to Michael Brake) actively tried to resist liberalism, subjectivism, and a disinclination to work, which were attributed to the hippie subculture, and “battled” against erosion of traditionally approved stereotypes of manliness.

By 1972, the first wave of skinheads had decreased, but at the late 1970s, there was a revival of this counterculture. At the same time, a corresponding musical stage, the style which was called Oi! Music, was formed. Skinheads’ association with violence, their distaste for political establishments, and their accusations against immigrants, whom they blamed for the working class’ real decline, drew various far right organizations’ attention to this counterculture. In the late 1970s, the National Front and the British Movement managed to politicize a big segment of skinheads by popularizing ideas of the Great Britain’s economic and political decline, and isolation of immigrants, and by accusing Jews in the working class’ troubles. It is possible to name the following basic positions of the far right ideology:

1) axiological domination of the national unity idea based on cleaned-up national culture;

2) idealistic clearance of class differentiation, aspiration for “new society” which would have a uniformed set of values;

3) aspiration for society’s full synchronization which would liquidate potential sources of disagreement or a conflict inside the revived nation; political debates’ elimination;

4) requirement of rigid hierarchical submission and full devotion of the movement’s adherents and, in the long term, – of all nation;

5) glorification of war (and political violence in general) as a healthy clearing means.

Music was the key instrument in distributing the radical right-wing ideology among the young followers. Perhaps, the greatest role in establishing a strong connection between the neo-Nazi ideas and the skinhead counterculture was played by the British musician Ian Stuart and his band Skrewdriver. This group was extremely popular among skinheads in due time and now has a cult status. For a long time, Ian Stuart cooperated with the National Front, within which framework he created the organization Rock Against Communism (RAC – later, it became one of the names of the musical style preferred by skinheads).

After leaving the National Front because of fractional disputes, Ian Stuart founded an independent organization called Blood and Honour which distributed White Power music and had to become a basis to unite skinheads all over the world. The organization was fi-

nanced due to sale of music records and ideological attributes. Until his death in a car accident in 1993, Ian Stuart was the key figure in the skinhead counterculture, promoting a further penetration and mastering of the radical right-wing ideas among them. It was neo-Nazi skinheads and their violence acts that became heroes of mob hysteria inflated by mass media. However, the skinhead subculture is not a homogeneous formation – it has several trends with completely different political colorations. The skinhead counterculture's association with the radical right-wing views provoked an oppositional movement, too. In 1986 in the USA, there was a skinhead movement which task was to struggle against neo-fascist and neo-Nazi tendencies in this youth environment. It was called SHARP – Skinheads Against Racial Prejudices. In 1993 in New York skinheads with communistic and anarchist views created in an organization called RASH – Red and Anarchist Skinheads. The proponents of the above-mentioned movements are obviously less numerous compared to those who follow neo-Nazi ideas, but they are still rather active. Among skinheads, it is also possible to name the direction of “trads” (from the word “traditional”) who revive practices and values of the 1960s skinheads, thus trying to avoid any political marks. All these trends in the skinhead subculture exist in Belarus; “red” skinheads are especially active in Hrodna.

It will be observed that we are going to consider the neo-Nazi and radical right-wing direction among skinheads. This trend is still the most numerous and active (therefore, it is no wonder

that mass media pay steadfast attention to them). Besides, their ideas and values try to get the biggest autonomy from the cultural standards. Thus, the SHARP and RASH skinheads' main task is to struggle against neo-Nazi skinheads, which provides their ideas and practices with a significant share of secondariness. Only in the case of neo-Nazi skinheads is it possible to speak about counterculture as it is in their axiomatics that the opposition to the prevailing norms and values achieves a high voltage.

III. The skinhead counterculture's genesis in Belarus

In the 1980s, the skinhead counterculture which before was specific to British youth culture, began its victorious procession across the countries of Europe and America. It is very hard to calculate the exact number of its proponents (some sources say the figure is 70,000), but it is possible to assert with confidence that the representatives of this counterculture's can be found in all European and North American countries. In the majority of the European countries, there are also regional branches of Blood and Honour. At once, it is necessary to stress that the skinhead counterculture is an international phenomenon in youth culture with the same symbolics and basic values in all countries, even though there are also some local features.

It is rather difficult to estimate the scale of the skinhead counterculture's prevalence in Belarus. The leader of the Minsk gang Wolves88, Sergei, said in

his interview to the Stigmata magazine that the number of skinheads in Minsk in 2004 was about 300 persons. However, he also marked that only about 20 out of them can be called “true” skinheads (Interview...).

In our country, it is very difficult to establish the exact amount of skinheads. There are a number of reasons for that. First, there is a territorial differentiation; there are skinhead gangs not only in the capital and Regions’ centers, but also in such towns as Lida or Slonim where it is practically impossible to trace the situation. Second, skinheads have no formal membership – they are formed contextually during daily communication; they appear sporadically and disappear spontaneously. Third, there are no unequivocal criteria of who should be considered to be representatives of this youth counterculture. It is conditionally possible to name three hierarchical levels which correspond to degrees of involvement into this countercultural activity and an intragroup status:

1) adoption of the style’s external aspects (acceptance of a behavioral code and clothes symbolics, development of linguistic competence, mastering of spaces where they present the chosen cultural form);

2) adoption of the counterculture’s values and norms; inclusion in common knowledge and common memory;

3) behavior according to the counterculture’s axiology, which frequently leads to an antisocial way of life, including conflicts with legislation.

The majority of skinheads (well, the same situation is observed in other youth countercultures, too) only adopt

the appearance presentation, while their rebel against the adult world is limited by their aggressive appearance and revolutionary rhetoric. Therefore, from Sergei’s position, there are not so many “true” skinheads (who correspond to the third level’s requirements).

Nonetheless, the skinhead counterculture in our country has its history, even though it is not so long. The first skinheads appeared in Belarus in 1996. Those were young people aged 17-20 who basically came from the punk movement. They were divided into groups based on the territorial principle, and were called blocs. All these blocs were united by the common practices – street hooliganism, and fights against foreign students and representatives of other youth subcultures. By the middle of 1997, the lack of a precise structure, as well as abstruse and inconcrete purposes, had split all blocs into small groups of three-five persons.

At that time, skinheads’ ideas were of a syncretical character. Like any youth subculture which is a local version of the international movement, the style’s bases were borrowed without any problems from the western colleagues. The style’s external aspects were incorporated most successfully – provocative and aggressive fashion, symbolics (slogans like “White Power” and “88!” – “Heil Hitler!”, Celtic cross, and swastika), and the slang’s basic elements. Anti-immigrant rhetoric and badly digested neo-Nazism were acquired with much more difficulties. For a long time, Belarusian skinheads communicated closely with their Russian “colleagues” and borrowed the Russian Pan-Slavic ideas. Thus, Belarusian skin-

heads' aggressive nationalism was of an extremely Pan-Slavic and pro-Russian character for a long time.

At that time, the Belarusian branch of the Russian National Unity (Русское Национальное Единство, RNE) headed by Hleb Samoïlau (Gleb Samoïlov), gathers momentum; a significant part of skinheads join it (for a long time, mass media identified the RNE members and "shaven heads"). A significant role in it was played by affinity of skinheads' blurred ideological positions and the RNE populist ideology.

Incidentally, at that moment in Belarus, it was not the only radical political organization which showed its serious interest to skinheads, expecting to find in this youth counterculture its supporters. There were certain attempts to propagandize its ideas among this movement by the Belarusian Party of Freedom (Беларуская партыя свабоды, BPS). Other Belarusian nationalist organizations, "Kraj" (Our Land) and "Biely Lehijon" (White Legion) paid attention to them, too. Thus, the BPS magazine "Nacyja" (Nation) published Victoria Vanyushkina's article Skinheads (Vanyushkina) translated into Belarusian (with no indication of the primary source) and an article about football fans. Still, contacts between the BPS supporters and skinheads were more often in the form of fights and collisions; it was quite new for the peaceful Belarusian capital – therefore, they were rather loudly and noisily described by the media. Here, it is possible to mention the Blood and Honour Belarus web site created in the Internet, where the classical western radical right-wing recipes were mixed

with radical Belarusian nationalism. However, this site had only a symbolic relation to the real international organization of skinheads, and a year later it stopped its existence.

Still, a closer and full-fledged cooperation of skinheads and the RNE was nondurable as well. G.Samoïlov was killed in 2000; it led to a crisis inside the Minsk branch of this organization which resulted in a complete disintegration of this movement. Subsequently, there were separate attempts to reanimate the RNE Belarusian branch, but everything remained at the level of small marginal gangs.

By the end of 1998, the boom of the skinhead movement had passed from Russia to our country. All across Belarus, there are numerous gangs; one of primary factors of skinheads' growing quantity is football fanaticism. It is football fans' environment that gave birth to many Belarusian "shaven heads".

Thus, the magazine "Pravy Voin" (Right-Wing Warrior) admits merits of the Dynamo Minsk-based football club's fans in distributing the skinhead counterculture, "If to speak objectively, it is the club that spurred the origin and development of the Belarusian national-socialist movement. Visiting Belarusian cities and villages, Dynamo football fans' attributes and uniform propagandized sometimes even more than any orator with ideological literature. The youth of peripheral towns, who sometimes are hostile to Minsk fans, adopted fashion, manners of behavior, and attributes." The Minsk Dynamo fan club has close connections with skinhead gangs; the far right symbols are actively used by football fans at stadiums (e.g. the

blue banner “White Power” became an integral attribute of all Minsk Dynamo’s matches). This cooperation is not limited by mutual membership and common symbolics – it reaches the level of action. While dispersing concerts of sworn opponents, i.e. anarchists and left radicals (so-called antifa), skinheads are frequently helped by football fans; concerts organized by skinhead gangs are attended with pleasure by football fans and vice versa. For the picture’s completeness, we shall note that the oppositional side of skinheads during street fights, i.e. antifa, is supported by of the MTZ Minsk football club’s fans. Since then, “Street War” between skinheads and the oppositional youth subculture antifa (antifascists) began. During 2001–2005, the majority of antifascist concerts organized in Minsk, were ended by fights against skinheads and football hooligans. Counterculture’s quantitative growth resulted not only in the origin of street “opposition”, but also to an increasing differentiation inside the youth movement. It is possible to name several basic forms of skinhead gangs’ organization.

As before, from a quantitative point of view, the majority belongs to skinhead gangs (blocs) organized on a territorial principle or around leaders. These blocs are not highly politicized; only external aspects of the style are cultivated; the basic practices are joint communication (frequently, inordinate drinking) and sporadic fights.

The RNE’s missionary goal, i.e. to attract skinheads with the ideas of Russian nationalism, is continued by local branches of Russian far right organizations. The Slavic Patriotic Bloc (SPB)

and the Belarusian branch of the Russian Pagan Community “Skhoron Yezh Sloven” (Save All Slavs) are the most appreciable in these attempts. In spite of the fact that these organizations are not skinhead gangs, they actively work among this youth counterculture, trying to find their new supporters there. In 2004 near Minsk, the SPB organized an RAC concert; skinheads are constantly invited to pagan holidays (Kupala, Kalada, spring and autumn solstices) carried out by this community. The Belarusian branch of the National Socialist Society (NSS) and the Slavic Union – Belarus (SU-B) try to carry out similar activities. These organizations adhere to the Pan-Slavic views, propagandizing Russian nationalism mixed with anti-Semitism and racism. For instance, an SU-B leaflet has the following statements, “It’s up to you to decide who’ll rule your country – you, Slavs, or sheenies, pongs, negroes, and other shit... The “universal values” and internationalism are gonna kill completely the rest of our once Great Nation. But not all is lost yet. Slavs must wake up their National Consciousness. Slavs! Regain consciousness! Only National Socialism will save us! Observe cleanliness of blood, cleanliness of the Nation! No interracial marriages! Make invaders flee away!”

Well, local politicized skinhead organizations also exist. Thus, in 2001, a new gang of the most ideologically grounded young skinheads was organized, – “Volki88” (Wolves88; youth came to this organization basically from the Dynamo club’s fans). The Wolves’ leader formulates this movement’s ideological essence, “A skinhead is a

patriot. The true Patriot who uses his/her spirit of idealism against commercialism and materialism. The critic of social problems from national positions because it is the basis with the help of which nations return to the spiritual beginning primacy. As a matter of fact, this concept of idealism is the core of shaven heads' ideology. One of the factors which directly influences the Slavic skinhead, is youth (even though this concept is relative), this is where brutality in actions comes from" (Stigmata Magazine). Once again, this organization was strongly influenced by Russian nationalism (symbolically, the Wolves' web site had the Russian imperial flag which covered the territory of Belarus as well). This organization's close cooperation with football fans allowed it to reach a new level of activity – to print leaflets and stickers, to organize concerts (including Russian and Ukrainian bands), to publish the Pravy Voin Magazine, and to open their own web site.

Subsequently, the Support88 block, a sui generis youth branch of the Wolves, became quite active. Due to the fact that the older generation of skinheads began gradually to leave the movement, it started step by step to apply for dominating positions on the streets of Minsk. The bloc created its own web site to propagandize its ideas. It is necessary to say that there was an essential ideological shift – the interest to the national culture amplified considerably, which had never happened before. Thus, the Support88 web site used the Belarusian language in its materials and the traditional Belarusian symbolics (the Pahonia coat of arms and the White-Red-White flag). The block's initiative was

to disperse concerts organized by skinheads' enemies, i.e. antifa, and it later led to the bloc's disintegration. On 15 March 2005, there was an attack against the Leo Club in Minsk; three participants of the concert were hospitalized; the attackers were arrested; as a result, the block stopped its activity.

In 2006, a new organization, Belaja Volia (White Will), was established; it can be conditionally classified as a "post-skinhead" movement. On the one hand, this organization is based on the traditional skinhead ideas (hostility to immigrants, radical nationalism, underlined manliness and bellicosity), hiring actively its supporters among such people. On the other, this organization's leaders are characterized by serious ideological preparation; therefore Belaja Volia tries to go from street collisions to the level of political actions. Forms of activity were considerably changed as well – instead of attacks against foreigners and dispersals of antifa concerts, this organization prefers to organize pickets against destruction of the cultural-historical heritage and to participate in political rallies under social slogans. Besides, Belaja Volia has applied the position of Belarusian nationalism. To prove it, there is a quotation from its leaflet, "Belaja Volia is a non-formal movement of Belarusian youth, created to protect the interests of the Belarusian nation, state and nature. Our basic principles are Nationalism, Patriotism, and Environmentalism". The Belaja Volia's participation in the Social March on 4 November 2007 and the followed collisions with anarchists attracted the attention of mass media and analysts to it. However, this burst of public interest

may also result in reprisals on the part of the authorities; therefore the future of this organization is not clear.

We shall not regard the skinhead counterculture's development outside the Belarusian capital; this direction still waits for its researchers.

IV. Skinheads: values and practices

We have emphasized the basic features of skinheads' neo-Nazi ideology. At a pragmatic level, it is possible to name some basic ideas which form the symbolical world of this youth counterculture.

The common feature of all skinheads' counterculture both in the West and in our country is hostility against foreigners blamed for various crimes (drug traffic, organized crime, violence against women, etc.) Their desire to clean the nation (first of all, youth culture) from foreign cultural influences is also characteristic. It proves hostility to youth movements generated by an "alien" influence (rappers, Rastas, etc.). However in reality, the main enemy is one more youth culture – antifa which appeared as a negative reaction to the neo-Nazi ideas' distribution in youth culture. Belarusian skinheads' feature is a powerful influence of the Slavic myth and Russian nationalist ideas on the common ideological views. We have already mentioned a close interrelation of the RNE and the skinhead counterculture in the mid 1990s.

Nowadays, skinheads are the basic source of members for marginal political organizations exaggerating the Slavophil topic (the Slavic Patriotic

Block, NSO, Rossa, etc.) Also, there is a serious evolution among politicized skinhead gangs where the Russian nationalistic phantoms are gradually substituted by the Belarusian nationalistic ideas.

It is also possible to name a few main practices which express and support the skinhead counterculture's symbolical union. The collective identity's core of this youth subculture is violent actions and aggressive behavior (both in real and symbolical forms). Violence is of a sacral value for skinheads; it is proved by the supreme interests of the Race and the Nation. They consider themselves the last bastion on the way of apocalyptic forces. However, high rhetoric and practices themselves differ considerably. It is possible to say with confidence that attacks against foreigners, for which skinheads are so infamous, are actually quite seldom.

"Street War" in Minsk occurs basically between skinheads and antifa.

It is known that violence in youth culture is frequently just a symbol of a group unity. Thus, it is not necessarily to be carried out in practice – in order to show it, aggressive appearance and corresponding manners are enough. Besides, "if violent practices have a sign sense (serve as signs of belonging to a certain community, or even wider – to a cultural layer), then it is unimportant whether they really exist or they are just a verbal image (myth). Their sign role is preserved in stories as well" (Shchepanskaya, 2004: 82). There is also a subject symbolization of violence – the neo-Nazi symbolic used by skinheads, as well as militaristic elements of clothes, which can be considered a special form

of a symbolical replacement of violent practices.

Their constant readiness for violent acts, emphasized in the skinhead counterculture, demands them to be in a correspondent physical form. Therefore, the majority of more or less organized blocs try to carry out special classes of combat training (hand-to-hand fight, boxing, karate).

If violence is a stressed dominant of counterculture's habitus, then in a pragmatic measurement, absolutely different practices prevail. Like in the overwhelming majority of youth subcultures and countercultures, skinheads' basic time is devoted to interpersonal communication.

"Squeezes", zones of close interpersonal dialog, are formed. There are specific loci (space localizations of places of dialog), i.e. places where they get together (stable loci can have their own names like "alley", "pipe", etc.) The style of dialog tries to be free internally, avoiding regulations and precise structures.

The Internet communication is of an increasing value. Until recently, marginal groups and subcultures had a limited access to representational means due to which they could influence the collective memory. Their efforts to create a collective identity were based on the "real" union as against the "imagined" one. Now, there is communication not only from some people to many (newspapers, radio, TV), but also from many to many and even from all to all (the Internet users). Erosion and de-legitimation of traditional informational hierarchies, which could be controlled easily by the power structures before, give a

chance to speak out for those who were previously closed in marginal spaces of the public sphere, including the skinhead counterculture.

Still, there are new configurations of the borders dividing collectives. Information technologies create new formats of communication – new ground rules of selection, organization and presentation of information. In their turn, these new formats determine social activity; they provide new opportunities for collective connections and mobilization.

Ritual actions are rare enough, but very important for the skinhead counterculture's functioning – concerts and holidays. We have already mentioned that the skinhead counterculture's formation was closely connected to the development of a parallel musical style, RAC – Rock Against Communism (sometimes, the alternative name is used – White Power). It was White Power music that promoted a revival of the second wave of skinheads in Great Britain, filling this youth counterculture with radical-nationalistic views and later spreading this movement worldwide.

The local music stage was formed by the skinhead counterculture in Belarus, too. At the late 1990s, "shaven heads" built a close cooperation with Vorsha(Orsha)-based pagan metal group APRAXIA. In 2003, this band changed its name to MOLOT (Hammer) and started playing music close to the classical White Power style. The band has released several CDs, carried out an active concert policy, performing not only in Belarus, but also in Russia, Ukraine, and Poland. However, recently it has stopped to exist. Lately, several new young White Power bands

(OSKAL (Grin), NORD WOLF, BRIGADE 15) have appeared, but meanwhile they are still at the underground level. In this case, music has a role of a uniting link for skinheads, providing some meaning to group belonging and collectiveness. Thanks to music, youth culture can objectify itself and its history, making itself visible for others, creating and establishing the meaning of its union.

Carrying out of concerts is of a big value in preserving the collective identity in the youth counterculture of skinheads – they play the major function of ritual actions, promoting intergroup communication and generating solidarity and symbols of group membership. Live concert performances are the core of an emotional attachment and formation of the collective identity. As R. Eyerman says, it is not concerts in their usual sense, – they are frequently illegal, which adds them an emotional value. All the present as if participate in the common plot, creating a stronger connection with the experience of music. This emotionally charged experience will be discussed, recalled, and pictured, – thus connecting an individual with the collective (Eyerman, 2002: 450). Concerts have both cognitive and ritual elements. Songs performed together, become texts as their words are always strongly related to ideology. Before songs' performances during skinhead concerts, there are usually short, but ideologically filled introductions accompanied by collective gestures such as raising hands and calling out slogans. This ritualized performance / the text unites an individual and the symbolical past because the emotional experience

unites an individual with the movement with its own history, heroes, and a set of practices.

V. Conclusion

Despite its full political apathy during the epoch of its development, the skinhead counterculture became a fertile field for radical political ideas' spreading, which in many respects was promoted by the conservative ethos of the warrior and fighter formed among skinheads in the 1960s. Therefore in the 1970s, nationalistic organizations' neo-Nazi propaganda was extremely effective, and the most influential direction in this counterculture is still formed by this ideology. Neo-Nazi skinheads are united by their hostility against immigrants and all foreigners, radical nationalism, and glorification of violent actions. However, even though skinheads cooperate actively with various radical political forces, they are non-political movement – it is simply a youth counterculture even though strongly politicized. The attempts of political radical forces' to use skinheads as "assault groups" have practically always failed because the countercultural style and political activism are completely different. Among the skinhead counterculture, unstable and situational gangs which appear quickly and also disappear quickly, prevail. There are only some groups of skinheads who try to achieve organizational stability by developing their own ideology. It is necessary to note a significant shift in the political ideas shared by Belarusian skinheads – from Russian chauvinism and Pan-Slavism to adaptation

of the Belarusian nationalistic views. In any case, skinheads' priority is their own subcultural pragmatics (symbolical violence, intensive communication, music) – therefore, this marginal movement has practically no essential poten-

tial for a political struggle. So far, their bright and shocking image draws attention of the public to them – therefore, they frequently become heroes of media sensations which essentially deform the image of this counterculture.

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