

Passionarity, Passionarnost', *пассионарность* (Russian). A central concept in the historical, ethnological and anthropological studies of Lev N. Gumilev (1912-1992), a polymath Russian thinker and a major historian of the 20th century.

As a historian, who studied the rise and fall of ancient and medieval civilizations, Gumilev was seeking an answer to the question of why various civilizations start rapid, explosive expansion at a certain point in history, as if propelled by some invisible force to cover as much ground as possible. Likewise, the original impulse of an ethnic group to expand visibly weakens over time, and the future complacent generations of this original group resemble but little their forefathers in terms of their creative activity and expansive energy. The notion of “passionarity” was offered by Gumilev as an explanatory concept, which measures the intensity of a given group’s ethnic identity and vitality, as well as the energy in its will to domination. The outburst of passionarity, for example, in the Mongolian steppes in the 12th and 13th centuries had quite extraordinary results: the amorphous, scattered, nomadic Mongolian tribes managed to unite into a single ethos, to form a mighty army, and within the next several decades to conquer the unprecedented territory from Japan and China in the East to the Adriatic sea in the West. Their relentless thrust to expand in all directions, according to Gumilev, could not be explained by any rational or pragmatic motives, but must be attributed to the unconscious drive of inner passionarity. It is important to note, that, according to Gumilev, passionarity (or the lack of it) can be attributed both to ethnic groups, and to individuals, who can thus be classified as passionaries, harmonious individuals, or sub-passionaries (the ones who lack this quality).

Gumilev’s critics were pointing to the somewhat occult qualities of the notion of “passionarity” (the reason why many of his works were banned during the Soviet period), and to his refusal to formulate a single law-like principle which would explain the outburst of passionarity at a certain place and a certain time, as well as its gradual decline within several generations (the reason his theory was often labeled “unscientific”). The latter accusation is only partly true. While resisting exact measurement and accurate predictions, the energy of passionarity is derived, according to Gumilev, at least indirectly from solar and other extraterrestrial sources. But this need not be interpreted in the esoteric sense. For example, the solar activity may determine the abundance or insufficiency of grazing grass, which in turn, influences the stationary or migratory behavior

patterns of the steppe peoples, contributes to the intensity of their identification with ethnic values and traditions, and gives rise to their warlike or peaceful character.

Several aspects of Gumilev's theory of passionarity, his unique and unorthodox interpretation of the world history are adopted by the political movement of Neo-Eurasianism (e.g., Alexander Dugin), as well as by the new wave of the Russian Cosmists (see *Cosmism*).

Andrei Zavaliiy

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