

Proposals

to the thematic group on

“Discourses of Identity. Religion, Culture, Nation and Empire”.

1. It is suggested to have as a starting point for the project the clarification of the notion ‘nation’ used by the participants. It is not expected from the members of the thematic groups to share common views on the theme as such. On the contrary, the project will be enriched by the diversity of views. However, the notion ‘nation’ can not been used in the variety of its meanings by the participants of the same thematic group since that will make impossible to present their part of the project in a consistent way, as something whole rather than splited in opposing each other parts.

It is advised then for the members of all the three thematic groups to read carefully and to take into consideration Ronald Grigor Suny’s article “History” in Encyclopedia of Nationalism, Volume 1, Academic Press, 2001, pp. 335-358 due to its substantiality as well as because all of us should be aware of the views of our grand convenor, that is the man who is expected to bring three groups in some way together.

In the context of the first thematic group it is proposed to prefer to the notion of nation given by Ron Suny in his glossary (p. 335) another one, which is given by him in the same article on page 338. In other words, the first notion is that one which is most relevant to the third thematic group since it describes nation as

“A group of people who imagines itself to be a political community distinct from the rest of mankind and deserving of self determination, which is usually entails self-rule, control of its own territory, and perhaps a state of its own.”

In the context of the first theme it is more appropriate to make an accent on a cultural aspect of the notion, rather than on political:

“The discourse of the nation acknowledges that each nation is unique, with its own separate past, present, and destiny, and that all national members share common origins, historical experiences, interests, and **culture, which may include language and religion.**”

2. The Russian project, in particular its part dealing with religion and culture, is expected to be put into a broader context of the world history of culture and politics. It means, for example, that we should keep in mind the experiences of the other nations, empires, multicultural societies in dealing with the problems similar with the problems Russia faces today. (It is one of the reasons why I dear to present to the colleagues a text written and published by me for other purposes and in a different framework : “Islam and Ethnicity: The case of Islam on Indo-Pakistan subcontinent”). The cooperation with the groups in France, Thailand and China is most valuable as it might give us the update information and analysis of the state of the same problem in different parts of contemporary world.

3. A historical approach to the theme presupposes to take into consideration the dialectics of the role that religions played during the course of the time. Thus, the monotheistic religions, in particular, emerged as unifying forces aimed to make universal destiny for the peoples. They promoted the emergence of great empires later on. However, starting from the Renaissance and Reformation the idea of the universal religion, universal church and state was attacked and the “national” idea was introduced. Religion presented by national churches promoted disintegration of the Christian community as such. The collapse of the

Khalifats and finally of the Ottoman Empire, the emergence of many Muslim states demonstrate the same tendency of opposition to political universalism. In present time that tendency has increased and expresses itself in resisting to globalization.

4. It is obvious that in Russia the role of two religions in shaping identities is of the most importance. That is of Islam and Russian Orthodoxy. Yet, I would suggest to look into the approaches of the other religions towards molding national identities. At least, Protestantism and Buddhism should be in our view. The first, due to a secular dimension it has introduced . The second, because it is one of the three world religions (the fact which could not be ignored since the other two world religious creeds are taken into account) and because it might (!?) present the most consistent tolerant approach to dealing with politics. It will be also interesting to make comparison between the way how Muslim and Buddhist communities manage with the problems of national identity within the same borders of the Russian Federation. Thus, comparative approach will be quite valuable.

5. Special attention should be paid in discovering and presenting those notions or prescriptions of the religious creeds which in one or another way impact the relation between religious teachings and formation of national identities. It is however obvious that religious notions get different interpretations in the cause of history, every time adjusting to new political or social situations. Though the religious fundamentalist would protest against the claims about the evolution of the religious teachings and institutions, it is the fact of the reality.

6. The relations between religion and national identity is to be presented in its diversity. Hence, the difference of the views of religious modernists, reformers, revivalists, fundamentalists must be considered seriously.

7. Referring to the above said I am thinking (at this moment !) of the following structure for our part of the project:

i) General observation and reflections on the correlation between religion and national identity. This part must be the most conceptual.

ii) The description of the role of religions (Russian Orthodoxy and Islam) played as factors of national identification in Czarist Russia. The Imperial policy in the matter. The controversy between slavyanofiles and zapadniks.

iii) The Soviet period. The national policy of the ruling party, atheist ideology, imposing of so called "Soviet nationhood" (Sovetsky narod, sovetsky chelovek etc.)

iv) Perestroika as the time of the search of the lost identities, both for individuals and nations. Religious foundations for ethnic conflicts and wars.

v) The place of religion in formation of the National Idea for Russia (past, present, future).

8. All three thematic groups will gain from basing their views on the firm foundation of facts which could be available from carrying on special sociological investigation. It is proposed to the groups to prepare lists of questions which could be worked on by a team lead by Leokadia Drobizheva.

For the first thematic group the answers of the Russian respondents to the following questions might be relevant:

i) What is the main factor for your personal identification (citizenship, ethnicity, religion)?

ii) Have you read the sacred Book (the Bible, the Quran, etc.) of the creed to which you consider yourself belonging (not at all; some parts; the whole book)?

iii) How often do you pray (a number of times daily; once a week; occasionally)?

iv) Do you go to the church (mosque, temple) regularly (once a week; on the occasion of religious festivals; other)?

v) What should be the relation between religion and state (separate; undivided; lead by the religious authorities)?

vi) Could the religious notions be reinterpreted in accordance of the demands of the time (yes; no; do not know)?

The number of questions from each group can not be unlimited, hence it is suggested to have about fifteen for the whole project. In the case of the first thematic group the answers of the respondents might help us to find out: how important is religion for an individual self-identification; how much genuine is attachment to religion (is it a matter of the choice by free consciousness or a tribute to “the mode” of the time, the result of political agitation etc.)

9. It is expected that the proposals prepared by a convenor of a thematic group will be first commented by the members of the Stirring committee (April); then its altered or edited version will be distributed among

the members of the correspondent group so that to be afterwards to be discussed at the meeting of the group (May); the final version of the proposals is to be submitted to the meeting in June.

Thanks,

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