

Research Proposal
of the thematic group on
“Discourses of Identity: Religion, Ethnicity, Nation, and Empire”
Coordinators: Marietta Stepaniants and Juliet Johnson

I. Papers and Participants

- 1) Observations and Reflections on the Correlation between Religion and National or Ethnic Identities (Marietta Stepaniants, Moscow).
- 2) Russian Orthodoxy and National Identification: Imperial Policy, Past and Present (Tatyana Filippova, Moscow).
- 3) Russian Identity in Confrontation with “Others”: Germans, Poles and Jews in Russia (Ludmila Gatagova, Moscow).
- 4) Ethno-confessional Processes in Contemporary North Caucasia: The Case of Dagestan (Zagir Aruhov, Mahachkala).
- 5) Islam as the Determining Factor in Molding Conceptions of Tartar Ethnicity and Nationality, Past and Present (Aidar Uziiev, Kazan).
- 6) Traditional Cultures and Buddhism in Buryat Self-Identification (Tatyana Skrynnikova, Ulan-Ude).
- 7) Russians as an Ethnic Minority: The Case of the Baltic States (Dmitry Furman, Moscow).
- 8) In Search of the “Russian Idea”: A View from Inside the Russian Orthodox Church (Father Georgy Chistyakov).

II. Conceptual Framework

This thematic group will focus on the role of religion in constituting, challenging, and changing national and ethnic identities in Russia. We understand the term nation to mean the formation of a distinct group as a *political* community that sees itself “deserving of self determination, which usually entails self-rule, control of its own territory, and perhaps a state of its own,” (Suny). We understand the term ethnicity to emphasize the more *cultural* aspects of group formation (including, for example, traditions, language, and religious beliefs and practices). In carrying out our research, the group will concentrate both on historical and comparative approaches to the theme.

A *historical* approach considers the dialectical role that religions have played in identity formation over time. When the monotheistic religions emerged, for example, they served as unifying forces promoting a universal destiny for all peoples, and promoted the emergence of great empires. With the Renaissance and Reformation, however, ideas of nationalism began to challenge the predominant conception of universal religions supported by a universal church and state. The religious teachings of national churches promoted the disintegration of the Christian community, while the emergence of many Muslim states after the collapse of the Khalifats and the Ottoman Empire demonstrated a similar opposition to political-religious universalism. This centrifugal tendency has strengthened in recent years, and currently expresses itself in resistance to globalization. We will pay special attention to understanding how religious philosophies have changed over time to adjust to new political or social situations, and how this evolutionary process has affected the relationship between religious teachings and formation of national or ethnic identities.

A *comparative* approach considers the roles played by a variety of religions and religious actors in shaping national and ethnic identity in Russia, and then looks at these roles in a broader historical and geographical context. This thematic group will not only consider the roles of Russian Orthodoxy and Islam in molding national and ethnic identities, but will also incorporate Protestantism and Buddhism. Moreover, we will consider a wide range of religious viewpoints in our study, such as those of religious modernists, atheists, secularists, reformers, revivalists, and fundamentalists. Finally, we will put our project into a broader context of world history and politics, keeping in mind the experiences of other nations, empires, and multicultural societies in dealing with problems similar to those Russia has faced. We anticipate that our cooperation with the groups in France, Thailand, and China will be especially valuable in this regard.

In carrying out its research, this group will consciously focus on the key themes of the “Identifications” project, and in particular on the connections and contradictions between official and vernacular identifications in Russia over time and across regions. For example, what role has official state support for Russian Orthodoxy in the imperial and post-Soviet periods played in (re)creating a Russian identity? Or, on the contrary, how has state ignorance or repression of religions such as Islam and Buddhism affected the self-identification of Tatars, Buryats, etc. within the Russian/Soviet state? These kinds of questions fully embrace the themes of membership, geographies of identification, and placement and displacement outlined by Sahlins and Scott in “Official and Vernacular Identifications in the Making of the Modern World.”

III. Sociological Research Support

All three thematic groups will benefit from basing their work on a firm foundation of facts obtained through a special sociological investigation. We suggest that each group prepare a short list of survey questions (totalling approximately 15 for the entire project) to be refined and administered by Leokadia Drobizheva and her associates. We realize that we do not have the funding to do a large-scale survey, but we may be able to conduct a small pilot survey or focus group research, or gain access to existing survey databases with pertinent information. This preliminary research could then form the basis for a preparing a larger grant proposal in the future. We are tentatively interested in investigating the following kinds of questions:

- 1) What is your primary social attachment? (citizenship, ethnicity, religion)
- 2) Have you read the sacred Book (the Bible, the Quran, etc.) of your own religious group? (not at all; some parts; the whole book)
- 3) How often do you pray? (daily; weekly; occasionally; never)
- 4) How often do you attend church (mosque, temple)? (daily; weekly; on religious holidays; never)
- 5) How should religion and the state be related? (separate; affiliated; undivided; lead by religious authorities)
- 6) Should religious teachings change with the demands of the times? (yes; no; do not know)

The answers to these questions may help us to discover how important religion now is for an individual’s self-identification, how much genuine attachment people have to their religions, and how these identifications and attachments vary among groups.

IV. Integrating U.S. Graduate Students into the Project

J. Johnson will be responsible for identifying approximately three or four advanced U.S. graduate students in the social sciences who are interested in conducting research that complements the work of group participants. These students should have previous research experience in Russia (or should currently be in Russia conducting research) and have high-level Russian language skills. We are especially interested in attracting students who would like to extend their current research by working in Kazan, Mahachkala, or Ulan-Ude for a few weeks.

While the exact nature of collaboration will be up to the participants and students, we expect that, at a minimum, participants will provide these graduate students with guidance and contacts as the students carry out their research. However, the graduate students (with the help of J. Johnson) will be responsible for making their own travel and housing arrangements. We also plan to bring one or two of these graduate students to the final group meeting in June 2002 (the precise number of graduate student participants will depend upon interest, funds, and availability).

Identification of students will begin immediately, and they will be brought into the project on a rolling basis pending the approval of J. Johnson, M. Stepaniants, and the participant with whom the graduate student will work.

V. Work Plan

September 2001	Participants submit paper prospectuses to coordinators
October 2001	Informal group meeting to discuss the prospectuses
January 2002	Participants submit paper drafts
Late January	Meeting at the editorial board of <i>Rodina</i> to discuss the drafts with an invited group of political scientists and journalists (T. Filippova, organizer)
February 2002	Meeting at the State University of Humanities to discuss the drafts with an invited group of scholars in the history of Russia and the CIS (L. Gatagova, organizer).
March 2002	Meeting at the Institute of the History of Tatarstan in Kazan to discuss the drafts with local scholars (A. Uzиеev, organizer).
May 2002	Participants submit their revised papers, and coordinators begin to edit the papers as a thematic bloc
June 2002	One-day conference in Moscow for all group participants, attended by at least one senior scholar from the U.S. or Europe.
October 2002	“Identifications Project” network meeting in Moscow

VI. Draft Budget

Draft budget details are attached on the following page. Prior to the start of the project, the ACLS will sign an agreement with each participant detailing both the responsibilities of each participant, and the honorarium to be paid for the fulfillment of these responsibilities. The full honorarium of \$1,000 each will be paid in stages (as detailed in the budget), and requires writing a proposal, draft, and final paper; participating in at least two of the three meetings in winter 2002; and participation in the final group conference in June 2002. Honoraria of \$200 for interim conferences are granted for organization of the conference, and for the preparation of a short final report on the conference to be distributed among the participants of all thematic groups. Each participant who serves as the designated “resource person” for a U.S. graduate student will also receive an additional \$200 honorarium.