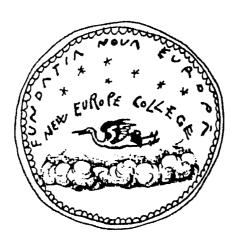
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"NATIONNESS" IN THE RUSSIAN EMPIRE: APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF THE PHENOMENON

Abstract

During the last two decades, we can observe a large and growing body of writing on different aspects of Russian nationalism and national identity. Now we find ourselves in a need to systematize different approaches in historiography to the problem of Russian nationhood, and this is the main concern of this article. It will proceed along two tracks. Firstly, it will try to depict the entire range of views presented in a historiography on Russian nationalism and national identity in the imperial period. We admit that this is a quite ambitious task, not to say utopian, that is why it will dwell specifically on those works, which most distinctly represent the main paradigms that have largely shaped historical discussions on our question over the last decades. Secondly, it will offer a general examination of the critical factors, which influenced theoretical and methodological development of these paradigms.

Keywords: nationalism theory, Russian national identity, Russian nationalism.

Introduction

It is obvious that in recent years, few subjects have produced a greater amount of scholarship than the study of nationalism and national identity. Until recently, however, Russia was "often left out of Western European stories of 'nationalism' and 'nationhood'", as the editors of one of the publications on Russian national identity noted. Although, as a result of the resurgent interest in Russian history, which followed the breakup of the USSR, was an emergence of a considerable amount of general works and specialized monographs on the "national question" in the Russian empire, USSR and conemporary Russia, the scholars have been more

concerned with the nationality policy and the notion of "Russification", or nationalist movements of the non-Russian peoples in it and problems of their national development,² while hardly any of them focused on Russian nationalism and national identity. This situation has changed in late 1990s, when Geoffrey Hosking appealed "to redress the balance in favor of the Russians, whose nationhood has probably been even more blighted by the empire which bore their name".³ During the last two decades, we can observe a large and growing body of writing on different aspects of Russian nationalism and national identity. A variety of views and approaches presented in these studies ranges between two extremes: from statments about Russian national identity as overdeveloped and domineering, and Russian nationalism as the main factor of tsarist nationality policy, on one pole, to vision of the Russians as "the victims of the empire", with its extreme expression in statements that Russian nationalism and national identity did not exist altogether.

Now we find ourselves in a need to systematize different approaches in historiography to the problem of Russian nationhood, and this is the main concern of this article. It will proceed along two tracks. Firstly, it will try to depict the entire range of views presented in a historiography on Russian nationalism and national identity in the imperial period. We admit that this is a quite ambitious task, not to say utopian, that is why it will dwell specifically on those works, which most distinctly represent the main paradigms that have largely shaped historical discussions on our question over the last decades. Secondly, it will offer a general examination of the critical factors, which influenced theoretical and methodological development of these paradigms.

Pre-1990s historiography of the Russian empire

The first approach, which dominated historical writing on the question almost until early 1990s, asserted that Russian nationalism was closely connected with imperialism and thus the process of Russian nation-building was bound to the process of empire-building. We must note, however, that in these studies issues of Russian national identity and nationality in general were rarely addressed straightly, as the historians concentrated much of their attention primarily on Russian state-building. As Geoffrey Hosking noted, "few western historians have taken the notion

seriously, preferring to dismiss the Russian obsession with the national problem as an excuse for imperial domination or reactionary politics".⁴

This paradigm generally saw Russian nationalism as identical (or at least very close) to the doctrine of "Official nationality" of the ruling elites and, usually in a radically negative perspective, as the main reason for the Russian empire for becoming a "prison of peoples". We can distinguish at least two reasons that caused such a perception. First of all, until 1990s, the study of imperial Russia and the Soviet Union was often treated as if these ethnically and religiously heterogeneous states were homogeneously Russian. Nor was the category of Russianness considered worthy of analysis. The second reason stems from what Hugh Seton-Watson called a "Kadet view on the Russian history":

Because it was left that triumphed in 1917, and because almost all historians of Russia, whether Russian or foreign, have disliked nationalism, the view that Russian nationalism and russification were confined to the ruling clique has prevailed. In particular, the Russian working class, "the most revolutionary in history", was presumed immune to this odious infection.⁵

While in a Western literature we can find some notable exceptions from this paradigm, this approach is intrinsic especially to the Soviet historiography. This approach is also akin to the new national or 'official' histories that blossomed on the ruins of the former Soviet Union.⁶

"Discovery" of the Russian *Empire* and the "Official Nationalism"

However, two significant changes in historiography have called this paradigm into question. The first one was the shift in the theoretical literature on nationalism and nations that commenced in the 1980s and 1990s with the works of Ernest Gellner, Eric Hobsbawm, Miroslav Hroch and many others, and since then had become the prevalent view among specialists. The thesis of two authors had a particular resonance for the historiography on Russia: it concerns the "discovery" of the "official nationalism" by Hugh Seton-Watson and Benedict Anderson, who remain, perhaps, the only well-known authors of a classical theoretical work on nationalism who used examples from the Russian history.

Hugh Seton-Watson in his book "Nations and States" developed the thesis about the difference between the nationalism of the so-called "dominant" nations and the "official nationalism" of the ruling dynasties. According to him, Pan-Slavism and Russian nationalism were the ideologies of unofficial though influential groups, and did not necessarily coincide with the official line. Benedict Anderson, in his turn, further developed and popularized this thesis. The most important for us is his statement that this "official nationalism" was reactive in the sense that in many cases it served as a response to the development of nationalistic sentiments among the subjects of the old dynastic realms and served as "a means of combining of naturalization with retention of dynastic power, in particular over huge polyglot domains accumulated since the Middle Ages, or, to put it another way, for stretching the short, tight, skin of the nation over the gigantic body of the empire". 11

It is worth noting that already in 1962 Hans Rogger proposed the similar thesis that the Russian nationalism "was not merely different from official nationality, it was its antithesis." But only after the breakup of the USSR, when the general and domineering paradigm of the Russian empire as a Russian nation-state was shattered and the multinational character of the Russian states was finally "discovered", a came the general acknowledgment of the fact that though Russian nationalism as a public sentiment and the 'official nationalism' of the autocracy were closely connected, nevertheless these were "independent phenomena, sometimes going side by side, but no less often entering into conflict with each other." 14

This discrediting of the conceptual constructs of older or Soviet historiography had one important effect: the new historical approaches on the Russian history have called into question the traditional black and white perception of the Russian Empire as 'the prison of peoples', which in its turn has led to the emergence of a more attractive image of the Russian empire's nationality policy, as well as of Russian nationalism. In the following decades, historians turned their attention to studies of the development and dynamics of Russian nationhood in the imperial context.

Russians as the "Victims of Empire"

Historians and their colleagues from other fields of humanities have started to consider the relevance of the imperial context for the development of the Russian national identity. As a result, another major paradigm developed, which insists that Russian nationhood had to be generated mainly in opposition to the empire and that the national identity of Russians was underdeveloped and suppressed because of the predominance of the imperial mode in the formation of the Russian state.

Geoffrey Hosking, one of the creators of this paradigm, was one of the first to argue against the vision of Russian nationalism as overdeveloped and domineering, which he called "an understandable optical illusion". 15 With his study "Russia: People and Empire" (1997), he, from the point of view of many reaserchers, has broken new ground in the scholarship of the Russian empire by focusing primarily on Russians. Hosking based his argument on the peculiar character of relationships between Russians and empire: "Russians have identified with their empire to a greater extent than any other European people... The empire is not just an aspect of Russian history, it is Russian history."¹⁶ He offered a provocative idea that in Russia empire-building obstructed nation-building, and thus the "imperial" and "ethnic" nations in the Russian empire seriously weakened each other. That is why the Russian nation has never been able to develop to the full its own political, economic or cultural institutions, since these have been distorted or emasculated for the needs of the empire. Moreover, Hosking concludes that the sort of "national imagining", necessary for the development of the national identity, did not occur in Russia, for the dynasty did not promote a sense of belonging to the Russian nation and the lack of literacy obstructed the majority of the population from creating an alternative national vision.¹⁷

Hosking's work had a huge impact on the scholarly debate over Russian national identity, where until recently the dominant assumption was that at least before 1917 Russians were not a nation and had a weak, underdeveloped or "inarticulate" sense of national identity, and that in the era of modern nationalism Russians continued to think in pre-national terms. For example, Hubertus Jahn in his book, devoted to the examination of the Russian patriotic culture during the World War I, comes to a conclusion that

patriotic imagery reveals that Russians had a pretty clear idea against whom they are fighting in the war, but not for whom and for what. If a nation is a community imagined by its members, as Benedict Anderson convincingly argues, then Russia was not a nation during World War I. 18

Scholarly literature within this paradigm offers different explanations of this phenomenon, most of them concentrated around the absence of the necessary preconditions and particularities, which would favor its development in Russia.

Some scholars, for example, suggest that part of this problem lies in the "wrong-timing" (or "the misfortune of timing", in R. Suny's words) of the creation of the Russian empire, i.e., that no Russian nation existed before the creation of the empire; in other words, the early imperial expansion meant that Russia had acquired an imperial identity before it developed a national individuality. Ronald Suny, for instance, concluded that by the time of the First World War, when elsewhere in Europe a nation was imagined as independent from the state, Russian elites could not imagine the nation separately from the religious community and from the state.¹⁹

However, most of the scholars follow Hosking in stressing that the most important reason for the failure of Russian nation-building was the dilemma between nation and empire. According to them, the Tsarist government did not succeed in establishing a strong link with the Russian nation, because the process of "naturalization" of the Russian empire was retarded and incomplete: "The state itself didn't 'nationalize' on a massive scale; unlike its Western European counterparts, which used nation-building and nationalism to unify and strengthen the state, the tsarist monarchy failed to cultivate 'an imagined community' of Russians". David Brandenberger also concluded that the "amorphous nature of national identity" in late imperial Russia meant that this sense of nationhood was weak, and this weakness was a result of the tsarist government's lack of interest for fostering nationalism. Thus, according to this approach, the main problem was that the Russian rulers hesitated to apply nationalism for consolidation of their rule and unification of the state.

In general, the problem of Russian identity in this literature is commonly framed as the elemental tension between imperial (or dynastic) and national identities within an often repeated argument that the Russians did not differentiate between "nation" and "empire". This thesis was developed, for example, by Vera Tolz in her "Russia: Inventing the Nation" (2001) and her other studies. As she argues, it was not only the policies of the autocratic regime, which hampered the creation of the Russian nation. "Russians' failure to form a full-fledged nation" also stemmed, as Tolz claims, from the overwhelming tendency of the majority of intellectuals to blur the line between Russia proper and the empire as a whole: "It seems that a crucial difference of the Russians was that, in their case, a state which

could have offered a framework for nation-building was also absent, but this absence was not realized by the majority of nation-builders, including those opposed to the existing autocratic regime." Thus, she concludes, "the goals of Russian nation-building were not clearly defined".²²

As we can see, most of the adherents of this approach conclude that the key issue lies in the issue of "problematic" Russian identity, or, to be more precise, its ambiguous self-definition:

One of the enduring paradoxes of the Russian historic experience is that while the Russian people have a strong belief in a Russian civilization and a clear association of the concept of that civilization with the concept of empire, when it comes to a distinct Russian national identity, the notion of 'Russianness' becomes vague and uncertain.²³

They stress that there was no clear agreement even among "Russian nationalists" on the question of who was to be considered a "Russian", though the discussions over this notion constituted an important element in the Russian public discourse, especially since the end of the 19th century. The big variety of criteria, such as religion, language, administration, customs, political loyalty, race, and history, has been employed to define the category of "Russian". Different versions combined those elements in various ways. The only point of agreement was that religion played a far more central role in defining nationality than language or "ethnicity" and in practice the defining criterion for being Russian was the membership of the Russian Orthodox Church.²⁴

While some of historians admit that Russian national identity was relatively well developed among the upper or educated strata of society, the major trend of this dominant paradigm insists on the lack of a sense of national identity among the greater part of Russian population, and that the traditional "pre-national" or regional mentality of the peasant masses predominated.²⁵

Despite the diversity of views presented above, a number of key themes dominate. Framing the entire approach is the idea that the supranational (or pre-national) policies of the russian empire hindered the formation of a Russian nation. The regime treated and surpressed Russians just like all other subject nationalities. However, for Russians, unlike other ethnic groups within the empire, it proved difficult to distinguish themselves from the empire, even symbolically. Another characteristic feature of this approach is the continuous attempt of the scholars to find out the ways

and possibilities for Russia to become a fully European-type nation-state.²⁶ Undeniably, Hosking's thesis has shaped recent debates on the issue of Russian nationhood. As a result, the image of Russians has cardinally changed – from authoritarian oppressors and aggressive imperialists to the "victims of empire". In general, this approach sees Russian nationhood in a very pessimistic way: "After a thousand years of history, Russia finds itself a country without a national identity, whose future is uncertain and whose past full of suffering and tragedy."²⁷

While devoting much attention to the issues of national identity and its development, less attention within this approach was devoted to the Russian nationalism as a political movement. We can list here some of the largely accepted views and assumptions in this literature: Russian nationalism was either "artificial, confined to the politicians of the extreme right but not genuinely acceptable to the Russian people", 28 or it was a "manipulated state ideology" 29, it was simply "dysfunctional" either because of its foreign origin, inapplicable to the realities of the Russian empire³⁰ or because of it did not represent a "monolithic movement", and "there was no lasting agreement (among Russian nationalists – E.P.) about the tasks of the national community, their order of priorities or the manner of their solution". 31 And finally, the most radical assumption is that "Russian 'nationalists' were really Russian imperialists, who still saw the mission of the Russian people as being not the creation of a nation-state, but continued hegemony in a multi-ethnic state with a worldwide mission."32

The most illustrative example of the latter approach is David Rowley's article "Imperial versus National Discourse: The Case of Russia", where he states that "it is inaccurate and misleading to use the terms 'nationalist' and 'nationalism', in their generally accepted meanings, to refer to individuals and movements in Russian history before the present day." Just like Hosking, he argues that "the term 'Russian nationalism' has been carelessly used to apply to a style of thought that is in fact 'imperialism'." He offers his own explanation to this "absence of Russian nationalism". According to Rowley, the main reason why Russians were unable to develop a nationalist movement is that they in principle "failed to grasp the arguments of nationalism", as their "discursive universe" did not include the concepts that are inherent to nationalist thought. That is why their political elites were not able to conceptualize nationalist demands, as "the particularism and secularism of nationalism were incomprehensible to the

Russian elite."33 Rowley considers the Russian nationalist project utopian and argues that "since an empire is a state that administers a number of different nations, the Russian empire could not follow a programme of nationalism (even of Russian nationalism) without undermining its own existence."34 Rowley was so ambitious as to suggest that the failure of Russian nationalist project casts new light on our understanding of the origins and preconditions of nationalism in general. The basic point of the article is that Russia possessed all the characteristics (social, political and cultural) that have been adduced as "causes" of nationalism, yet Russia failed to develop a nationalist movement. Therefore, he concludes, all the "causes" that classical theories of nationalism use to explain the appearance of nationalism are not, in themselves, sufficient to produce national movements. He concludes that the major factor that produces nationalism is "Europe's modern discursive domain", that is, the discourse of particularism and secularism, while these generally accepted "causes" are nothing more than preconditions.³⁵

"Modernization Paradigm" in the Studies of Nationalism and the Russian Case

As we can see, this argument generally coincides with the thesis that Russians did not differentiate between "nation" and "empire", repeated endlessly by historians who study the nature of nation-building in the Russian empire basing their research within the assumptions of the so-called "modernist" theories of nationalism. In sum, these theories define nationalism as a modern phenomenon, a result/or cause (depending on the particular theory) of modernisation/industrialization, and perceive it as an instrument used for nation-building or for acquiring independence. In other words, according to most these theories, ideally, nationalist movements envision the construction of ethnically homogeneous nation-state, that is, the state where "the political and the national unit are congruent", using the classical definition by Ernest Gellner.³⁶

While these historians were busy solving the "empire/nation" puzzle, among some part of the scholarly society, influenced by post-structuralism and discourse analysis, appeared doubts concerning validity of the modernization paradigm in studies of nationalism in general and its applicability to the Russian case (or any non-Western European) in particular, providing an argument against their unconditional application

when studying Russian nationhood and national identity. This doubts stemmed from what Rogers Brubaker called "an emergent post-modernist theoretical sensibility", which "emphasizes the fragmentary, the ephemeral, and the erosion of fixed forms and clear boundaries".³⁷ In the Russian case, this reconsideration was also stimulated by a considerably widened source base after the collapse of the Soviet regime.

One of the first voices of the criticism of the modernist paradigm was that of John Hall, who stressed that "no single, universal theory of nationalism is possible. As the historical record is diverse, so too must be our concepts." According to him, "any specification of the different types of nationalism needs to be fairly close to historical reality if it is to fulfill its purpose, that of helping general thought and the understanding of particular cases."³⁸ This article is not the place for a detailed overview of this criticism, that is why we will concentrate here only on those conclusions, which had an impact on the further studies of Russian nationhood.

As the first came the criticism of a classical Hans Kohn's dichotomy between "good" civic Western and "bad" ethnic Eastern nationalism³⁹ from those, who argued that this rather strict division between these two types is problematic because both of them have occurred in Western and Eastern Europe.⁴⁰ Besides, as some authors argued, it is a mistake to regard Russian nationalism as exclusively "ethnic", as is often done, as it could combine cultural (ethnic) and political (civic) elements. ⁴¹

As the second object of reconsideration came those theories, according to which nationalism was perceived exclusively as a political demand for creation of a nation-state, and as we have noted above, provide the theoretical justification for much recent theorization of the "nation". Many authors criticized the universal application of the widely accepted this approach to nationalism, most clearly expressed in Ernest Gellner's theory, from many angles. For the Russian case, perhaps, the most important was the criticism of Rogers Brubaker, who provides an argument against the vision of nationalism as primarily "nation-based, state-seeking activity", which causes most of the difficulties in conceptualizing Russian nationalism.

If this understanding of nationalism were correct, then one might indeed expect the reorganization of political space along national lines to resolve national conflicts by fulfilling nationalist demands. The imagery here is that nationalism has a self-limiting political career ... When nationalist

demands for statehood are fulfilled, the nationalist programme is satisfied; it exhausts itself in the attainment of its ends.

That is why he argues, that nationalism should not be conceived as essentially or even as primarily state-seeking. According to Brubaker,

to focus narrowly on state-seeking nationalist movements is to ignore the infinitely protean nature of nationalist politics; it is to ignore the manner in which the interests of a putative 'nation' can be seen as requiring many kinds of actions other than, or in addition to, formal independence; it is to be unprepared for the kinds of nationalist politics that can flourish after the reorganization of political space along national lines, after the breakup of multinational states into would-be nation-states. ⁴²

Lastly, it is stressed that most of the "modernist" theories rarely include an imperial dimension into the analyses of national development. Only recently they have started to regard empire as a framework for nation-building. Nowadays, with the rise of interest to the imperial problematic in general formed within so-called "Empire studies", a new perspective arose, which has challenged some broadly accepted perspectives on relations between empires and nationalism. As a result of these researches, came the awareness that empires played much more complex roles in the process of shaping of national identity and vice versa, how nationalism influenced the functioning of empire. 43 Previously, as we saw it on the previous pages, especially in the Russian case, the basic assumption for the Hosking-like theories was the perception of an empire as a "burden": as Dominic Lieven stressed, "the burdens of sustaining imperial power contributed to weakening the solidarity of the Russian community and its loyalty to the tsarist state."⁴⁴ Now, in a scholarship we can see that the largely pejorative perception of the empire lessened, it stopped being viewed necessarily as a "burden". In this light, the situation casts doubts on previous theorizing on Russian national identity and the relationship between "national" and "imperial" in it.⁴⁵

With this "imperial turn", especially comparative studies within it, also came the awareness of the fact that the nation/state nexus in the Russian empire might have differed from relations existing in other European states. Theorists have become increasingly uncomfortable with the modernist paradigm while studying Russian nationhood, mainly because of the fact that they do not always reflect in their analysis some important features

of the Russian history, as most of these theories have been shaped by Western European historical experience and thus implicitly apply Western style criteria to a non-Western political system. In this regard, the first obvious problem is connected with the *notion of "modernity"*, which is the basic point of the "modernist" theories. Many scholars point that though modernizing tendencies could be observed in Russia since the end of the nineteenth century, the situation there can hardly be described as an industrialized and modernized mass society with universal education. Therefore, the conditions that were required for a successful development of nationalism according to the "modernist" theories, in Russian case were at least relatively different from those in the Western or Central European societies.

The next issue concerns Russia's specific position as a *continental* (or "contiguous") empire. The problem here is caused by the very fact that the Russian empire, in contrast to the European "maritime" empires, was a single land mass without clear constitutional or territorial borders between peoples, and thus it made it very difficult to define (or "imagine") the core of the ethnic (Great-)Russian population.⁴⁶

Thus, while many authors recognize that "modernist" theories of nationalism can help us in understanding the connection between Russian nation-building and modernization, they nevertheless insist that neither of them can be accepted without qualification in relation to the Russian realities, and that in the case of Russian empire this model is more suitable for major non-Russian nationalities rather than to the Russians. What was clearly illustrated by David Rowley's article, discussed above, the radical versions of these modernist and structuralist approaches find themselves in a blind alley when trying to explain the nature of Russian nationalism. It became widely acknowledged that, as these theories failed to adequately explain Russian attitudes in the era of modern nationalism, they need modification when being applied for the Russian case and beyond the West-European context in general; that is, we need to redefine the very concept of and our approach to such notions as "nationalism", "nationhood", and "national identity", as well as the methods of their investigation. On the following pages, I will analyze some of the recent studies, which view these phenomena on their own terms and suggest new and original approaches.

Empire/Nation Nexus Reconsidered

As the editors of Ab Imperio journal suggested,

Given the uneven relationship between Russian history and modernity, the field of Russian nationalism studies may benefit from the current turn in theories of nationalism from classical modernist (and ontological) assumptions about nation-formation as a process leading to materially entrenched social and political bodies of nations to studies of nationhood as a system of discourses and practices that frame and change social relations in the national locus.

This new approach conceives Russian nationalism as a modern phenomenon developing in the context of a multinational empire and often in opposition to challenges of non-Russian national projects and, what is the most important, closely resembled them. It perceives Russian nationalism as one of the actors in imperial history, and makes it possible to reflect the paradoxes of Russian nation-building and its context. Besides, this theoretical turn gives us an opportunity to offer alternative and different conceptions of Russian nationhood.⁴⁷

One of the factors that influenced the turn in the studies of Russian nationhood were doubts concerning Russians' dominant position which was reconsidered within the previous paradigm. Some historians have criticized the use of the term "dominant national group" with reference to the Russians, who, as Dominic Lieven argued, "actually had more in common with that of the native peoples in European overseas colonies than with these 'mpires' 'master races'." This finding caused reconsideration of empire/nation nexus in the Russian empire putting under question Hosking's thesis, which, as we saw, until recently dominated historiography.

One of the first original analyses of the empire-nation relationship in Russia comes from Mark Bassin, who, rather than simplified dichotomy of imperialists versus nationalists, suggests a rather different framework. Although Bassin acknowledges that "without any question, this has been a critical distinction for Russia", he nevertheless argues that

national discourses in pre-revolutionary Russia stood not in contradiction to an imperial identity, but rather were subsumed almost without exception within a broader and more fundamental geopolitical vision of Russia as an empire. Indeed, one must search very hard to find any significant subjective

sense of mutual exclusivity between the two. Identity was of course problematic and contested, in Russia as everywhere. This contestation was not, however, expressed through the nation-empire juxtaposition, but rather through alternative visions of Russia as an empire.

In his study, Bassin singles out three major types of these visions in the Russian society: Russia as a European empire, Russia as an anti-European empire, and, finally, Russia as a national empire. He concludes that, despite the appearance of the extreme rightist nationalist parties and organizations in the beginning of the twentieth century with their slogan "Russia for Russians", the multiethnic national framework was prevailing among the wide spectrum of Russian public and the crystallization of the multiethnic nation was becoming a resonant ideology. ⁴⁹ Therefore, from his point of view, "nationalism and imperial vision were joined in a common project and could not be divorced." ⁵⁰

A quite different framework for the research of nationalism in Russian imperial conditions was also offered by Alexei Miller, one of the leading specialists in the politics of the multinational Russian Empire. First of all, he argues against the general applicability of the Ernest Gellner's definition of nationalism in the case of the Russian empire and points out that it often leads to a misuse of this term in many researches. Miller argues that the two main categories of Gellner's definition, the "national territory" and the "space of political control", which are often congruent in the case of non-imperial nations, may differ significantly in the case of imperial nations:

The point is that an effort to consolidate the nation, including the definition of the 'national territory' within the empire, does not necessarily signal an intention to 'disband' the empire. [...] At the same time, for Russian nationalism, just as for French, British, or Spanish nationalisms, an attempt to consolidate the nation was far from irreconcilable with an attempt to preserve and, given the opportunity, to expand the empire.

Thus, he concludes, Gellner's formula of nationalism "fits the experiences of the movements that tried to 'cut' new states out of existing ones, but it does not work in cases when a particular nationalism could adopt as its "own" an already existing state, including an empire." The second point of his argument concerns the thesis that Russians did not differentiate between the empire that "leads many writers to conclude

that the Russian nationalist program was limited to the clearly unrealistic project of transforming the empire into a nation-state." Stressing the need of a more detailed and sensitive use of the sources in order to avoid misinterpretations, Miller tries to prove that Russian nationalism was selective in its project and argues against the statement that "its discursively predominant versions contained an attempt to encompass the whole empire as the "national territory." He points to an obvious fact that "the very tension of the debates on the limits of Russian-ness and the criteria of belonging to it serve as a convincing proof that the Russian project of nation building, while expansionist, was not aimed at encompassing the whole empire and all its subjects". Under these conditions, he concludes, "the Russian nationalists' desire to "russify" the empire was not at all utopian in the sense that the Russians, as a nation, were supposed to occupy a dominant position in the Russian empire, similar to the position of the French and the British in theirs." ⁵²

Further criticism of Hosking's thesis was developed in some recent writings of Russian historians. Olga Maiorova, for example, argues that close examination of divergent expressions of Russian nationhood calls into question an assumption that Russian national identity was totally subsumed under that of the empire. She points out to the fact that the "rossiiskii/ russkii" dichotomy, as one of the pillars of this assumption, is misleading as "these two words, and hence the two concepts of Russianness they implied, overlapped and could even be used interchangeably in many contexts". While acknowledging that 'finding' the nation in the empire proved difficult, since the edges of Russia's core were undefined, the boundaries between the center and periphery were porous, and the state's outward growth seemed unstoppable", she nevertheless stresses that "these challenges did not necessarily prevent drawing a line between the two, much less imply a strict subordination of the national to the imperial." She points that while the participants of the Russian nationalist discourse "celebrated the empire"; at the same time, they

produced a constellation of aspirations, attitudes, and impulses aimed at fostering a vivid sense of national belonging. For them, the empire was a stage where the Russian people's historical drama unfolded, and as such, it served to reinforce rather than to obliterate Russian national identity. Indeed, many expressions of Russianness symbolically plucked the nation from the shadow of empire, assigning central significance to the nation itself.⁵³

Another argument against Hosking's thesis was expressed by Mikhail Dolbilov, who points out to the fact that it "implicitly counterposes nation-building to empire-building as an emerging, at least potentially dynamic force to an irrevocably static, nearly frozen structure (with territorial expansion as the only exception)." From his point of view, this is hardly true:

Archaic though the Russian empire might seem, empire-building was certainly not stagnant, even as late as the 1860s. And it is precisely the nation-building efforts that, in some respects, came to obstruct the completion of the empire's edifice, or the internal power structure of the empire. In other words, the relationship between empire-building and nation-building included both mutual support and mutual weakening.

Without denying the conflict of nation and empire in Russian history, Dolbilov argues that it had a more complex dynamic and points to the fact that not infrequently, it "was a clash of two streams of discourse in the mind of the same person." ⁵⁴

"Soft Theories" of National Identity and the Studies of Russian Nationhood

The next reconsideration in a scholarship concerns the nature of the Russian national identity, particularly, the thesis about its weakness and underdeveloped character. Most of these new researches agree that the manner in which we have conceptualized national identities is fundamentally problematic and that the interpretational turn can be accomplished only by posing different questions about the formation of the Russian nation than were common within "modernist" theories of nationalism. This recent approaches, which have been favored in theoretical discussions of national identity in recent years and had an impact on the further scholarship on Russian nationhood, generally coincide with what Rogers Brubaker and Frederic Cooper called "the soft conceptions of identity."55 They have moved away from viewing the nation as a timeless, substantive reality and have come to focus more on the process by which nationalist ways of thinking and behaving come into being and multiply, in other words, see national rhetorics "as plural", and stress that "national identities are not completely consistent, stable

and immutable" but, to the contrary, must be understood "as dynamic, fragile, 'vulnerable' and often incoherent" ⁵⁶

Thus, Katherine Verdery views nation "anthropologically as a basic operator in a widespread system of social organization", as "an aspect of the political and symbolic/ideological order and also of the world of social interaction and feeling", and a kind of a "sorting device". ⁵⁷ Particularly useful for explaining paradoxes of Russian nationhood is her suggestion to take "nation" as a symbol that

has come to legitimate numerous social actions and movements, often having very diverse aims. It works as a symbol for two reasons. First, like all symbols, its meaning is ambiguous. Therefore, people who use it differently can mobilize disparate audiences ... who think that they understand the same thing by it. Second, its use evokes sentiments and dispositions that have been formed in relation to it throughout decades of so-called nation-building.

Her approach sees nation as "a construct, whose meaning is never stable but shifts with the changing balance of social forces." According to this perspective, nationalism can be perceived as "the political utilization of the symbol nation through discourse and political activity, as well as the sentiment that draws people into responding to this symbol's use." Hence, it has "multiple meanings, offered as alternatives and competed over by different groups maneuvering to capture the symbol's definition and its legitimating effects".⁵⁸

Similarly, Prasenjit Duara states that a particular convergence of factors may crystallize various conceptualizations of a "nation" at different points of time or among different social groups. The main criteria for defining every particular concept of nation may also vary, although these variations tend to stay within parameters consistent with a particular cultural and historical setting: "The way in which the nation is imagined, viewed, and voiced by different self-conscious groups can indeed be very different. Indeed we may speak of different 'nation-views', as we do 'world-views', which are not overridden by the nation, but actually define or constitute it." Thus, "in place of the harmonized, monologic voice of the Nation, we find a polyphony of voices, overlapping and criss-crossing; contradictory and ambiguous; opposing, affirming, and negotiating their views of the nation." ⁵⁹

The similar view was expressed by Rogers Brubaker, who called to concentrate more upon the nation as a "category of practice" than upon states of consciousness or properties of collectivities. His approach is completely critical of modernist theories that viewed the "nation" primarily as a product of industrialization and modernization. Brubaker, on the contrary, proposed to view "nationness" as an event, "something that suddenly crystallizes rather than gradually develops, as a contingent, conjecturally fluctuating, and precarious frame of vision and basis for individual and collective action, rather than as a relatively stable product of deep developmental trends in economy, polity, or culture". Nationalism in this perspective is a "heterogeneous set of 'nation'-oriented idioms, practices, and possibilities", and, in order to understand it, we "have to understand the practical uses of the category 'nation', the ways it can come to structure perception, to inform thought and experience, to organize discourse and political action".⁶⁰

Nowadays, these approaches, which highlight the multiplicity and heterogeneous quality of national identity, have finally started penetrating into writings about Russian national identity and allowed to get out of the blind alley of the previous paradigm. The fact that in the Russian case it is almost impossible to offer a precise theoretical definition of a "nation" or even of "Russian" that was problematic for the scholarship, which's methodological and theoretical apparatus was not able to deal with this "puzzle", within this approach ceased being problematic and is perceived as a natural state of any national identity. As Stephen Norris argues, "this 'amorphousness' describes any national identity and sense of nationhood".⁶¹

This general theoretical turn had several impacts on the studies of Russian nationhood: firstly, its stress on variability and plurality of Russianness allowed to challenge the thesis about weakness of Russian national identity, and, consequently, in admitting that the heterogeneous nature of Russian nationalism is in fact a "normality", to concentrate on analyzes of its different versions and factors of their empowerment throughout history. Here I will cite examples from several of the most recent publications.

One of the most interesting attempts was made by Joshua Sanborn, who proposed a vision of Russian nationalism as a "space of contestation" that allows for competing concepts of the nature of the Russian nation. Sanborn argues against the modernist outlook and states that "the nation neither brings about nor is dependent upon homogenous thought or unified

action. Instead, it provides a systematic structure for negotiating power in a world of multiple subjectivities and multiple political behaviors."62 As he suggests, "segments of the population do not need to 'devour' each other to be co-national; neither do they have to 'share more common interests' than they have sources of conflict. Unity is a national desire, not a precondition for the nation itself." Sanborn views the nation as "an arena where multiple subjectivities and multiple behaviors interact within certain parameters" and argues that we must concentrate on the question of how political action is framed in order to get to the heart of questions relating to the nation. Sanborn further developed Brubaker's conception with the thesis that "nationness is an event, but it "is a kinetic event that requires the building up of potential energy beforehand. Nationness is both an event that suddenly crystallizes and one that is the product of deep developmental trends".63 Ås for Russia, all those processes that built up "national potential" happened there as they did in Western Europe, though, maybe, later and not quite as comprehensively. He agrees here with Steve Smith, who argued that a Russian ethnic identity developed over a long period of time. This development "allowed the Russian people to imagine themselves as a community with its own history, territory, and particular beliefs and practices, and [was] capable of becoming politicized in times of war or foreign invasion."64

The similar approach can be traced in Dominic Lieven's writing about the development of Russian national identity. He points out that in history we can find many examples of communities "whose sense of solidarity, mutual commitment and collective identity wax and wane over time". The same happened in Russia, who, due to various factors, had a weaker sense of national identity in 1914 than in 1550, but it does not necessarily mean that this identity did not exist altogether. 65

A view on the national identity as a "field of possibilities" is the framework for the collection of essays "National Identity in Russian Culture". Its editors Simon Franklin and Emma Widdis criticized the previous discussion of Russian identity, which was driven by the assumption that "Russianness is a 'thing' to be located, described, and explained". Instead, they argued that "identity is not a 'thing' to be objectively described. It is a field of cultural discourse". Hence,

Russian identity is and has been a topic of continual argument, of conflicting claims, competing images, contradictory criteria. ... The multiple cultural expressions and constructs *are* the identity, or the identities. ⁶⁶

They observed that the theme of national identity in Russian cultural discourse reveals the "varied, contrasted, perhaps contradictory ways in which Russia and Russianness have been imagined and represented". What is most important in their work is their proposition that national identity should be viewed as "a process rather than a result" and that "Russian national identity lies not in the resolution but in the nature of the discussion and argument".⁶⁷

The next revision in historiography concerned national identity among Russian masses. While almost nobody rejects the fact that regional consciousness was stronger in Russia than "national feelings" and, without a doubt, at the beginning of the twentieth century the Russian nation was hardly a political community, the recent scholarship has started criticizing the traditional interpretation. It has begun to deal with the issue of national identity among the Russian masses insisting that

the many ways in which Russians articulated a sense of belonging to a Russian nation, however varied this imaginings may be and despite the fact that Russia was not a nation-state in the European sense, points more toward the existing of a Russian nation than against it.⁶⁸

Analogically, David Moon insists that for articulation of national identity "action" is more important than "awareness" or "consciousness". Therefore, he states, what is most important is not whether Russian peasants were aware of events of national significance but whether they would act as "members of a wider, national society with which they felt they shared more common interests than they had sources of conflict".⁶⁹

Variability of Russian Nationalism and the Widening of its Spectrum

As we saw on the previous pages, many researchers who have discussed in their work Russian nationalism have paid attention to the fact that these notion is used to denote a whole group of diverse views and practices. Nevertheless, they never applied this thesis as a methodological premise and later in a text continued to speak about RN as one unified subject. Although some authors operate with such types as "ethnic", "statist", or "traditionalist", "dissident", "prestige" Russian nationalism, or distinguish between its "benign" and "malevolent" (or extremist) forms,

we can nevertheless state that these are not established terms with clearly defined meaning in a scholarly literature. Firstly, many authors put different content into these terms. Secondly, these studies generally do not explain the fault lines amongst different trends of Russian nationalism, tending to treat it as monolithic. Indeed, it is indubitably the case that a fully satisfactory method of classifying these different types of nationalism has proved to be very difficult for scholars. Only recently have different versions of Russian nationalism started acting as independent actors in analyzes, though we still can find just a few works developing this approach. In the scholars is the state of the scholars in the scholar in the

On of the most recent "discoveries" in the field of Russian nationalism studies is the discovery of its *liberal forms*, which became particularly articulate after the events of the 1905 Revolution. We can see that historians have moved from traditional interpretations of Russian nationalism as exclusively a rightwing ideology, in contrast to the previous studies that limited their attention to political radicals, that is, purely on its rightist or chauvinist forms, thus widening the spectrum of Russian nationalist vision. Although this topic is still largely underresearched, we still can fight a few insightful studies, one of them being Olga Malinova's book on Russian liberal nationalism that presents a liberal alternative to its familiar right-wing and anti-Semitic versions.⁷²

Some of the works discussed here are essentially case studies, while others attempt at presenting a broader overview of differnent issues concerning Russian national identity. Historians thus far have not come to a consensus regarding methodology of the research, neither have they described in detail all the sides of the issue and have not solved all the relevant problems. We found out that the very questions "Who are the Russians?" or "What constitutes Russianness?" offer no simple answer and has yet to receive adequate attention in the otherwise vast literature on the topic.

NOTES

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- 4 Ibid.
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