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И. СЕМЕНЕНКО (ред.). Политическая идентичность и политика идентичности, М., РОССПЭН, 2012, т. 1, Идентичность как категория политической науки: словарь терминов и понятий, 208 с.; т. 2, Идентичность и социально-политические изменения в 21 веке, 470 с.

I. SEMENENKO (ed.). *Political Identity and Identity Politics*, Moscow, ROSSPEN, 2012, vol. 1, *Identity As a Category of Political Science: Dictionary of Terms and Concepts*, 208 pp.; vol. 2, *Identity and Sociopolitical Changes in the 21st Century*, 470 pp.



The structure and format of the two volumes made it an event at least on the scale of Russian political science. The first of the two volumes is a dictionary, or a sort of glossary which explains the main “bunches” indispensable for the political analysis of the categories of identities and related concepts. The second volume deals with the phenomenon of identity in the context of contemporary sociopolitical changes, trends and actors of the identity politics, an analysis of discussions and spaces within which identity exists. The problems of Russia are dealt with in a special section. The editorial board includes prominent specialists (Irina Semenenko, Vladimir Lapkin and Lyubov Fadeyeva); there are many famous names among the contributors. The two volumes are the product of the concerted efforts of scientists from Moscow, St. Petersburg, Perm, Yekaterinburg, Krasnodar united into a network which has been studying the problems of political identity for many years. Time will show whether this publication will become an event; today, however, it is clear that it will be noticed and appreciated by the Russian reading public.

The two books cover a wide range of approaches, ideas and suggestions related to the politically highly topical and scientifically very interesting phenomenon. Identity in general and political identity in particular has become an

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important factor of human life in contemporary society open to risks, indefiniteness, crises and changes. A large part of the contemporary world finds it hard to point to its identity as an individual, a group, a community (big or small): dissatisfaction with everyday consumerism of industrialism and postindustrialism throws into bolder relief the deeply rooted foundations of the crisis of metaphysical interpretation of the meaning of human life. The transition to modernization encourages the quest for joining of culture and civilization. Globalist universalism is both accepted and doubted: cherishing vain hopes on the effectiveness of a new totality of living forms runs into the resistance of the “soil,” culture, the meaning and the comfortableness of belonging to what feels like home. At the same time, it is impossible to protect this “home” under pressure of an obvious requirement for globalism and modernization. This creates a dramatic sensation of a gap, incompatibility, the feeling of loss; in some cases there is a tragic forebodingness (presentiment) of an approaching catastrophe, even if in a subdued form of a decline. I should say that the authors’ position is not quite radical; they do not concentrate either at millenarianism or at eschatology even though they do not deliberately avoid such issues. The task of scientific or analytical approach, as the authors describe them, forces them to be quite cautious in the choice of terms. At the same time, this analytical, objectivist and rational approach to the problems of identity allows to obtain its X-ray photograph, a true picture of reality.

Indeed, the authors have coped with the main task of synthesizing the discursively available (mainly scientific) materials. The two volumes of the book under review registered the current crisis of identity in its modern manifestations (“the crisis is inherent in the nature of the phenomenon of identity,” vol. 2, p. 18), its numerous forms (plurality of identities and analytical approaches) and the problem of their combination (hybrid identity, multidimensional identity, multi-component identity, national-civilizational identity, etc.), the policy of identity as the desire of different actors to build up sociopolitical affiliation. In this respect the “mental card” of the studies of identity offered in the first volume proved equal to its analytical task. It permitted to “reach the interdisciplinary synthesis, which is meant as the applicability of a specific concept within the field of the subject matter of political science” (vol. 1, p. 15). This synthesis allowed the authors’ team to set up a very solid scientific basis to encourage further studies of identity and political identity in Russian political science. We should probably accept the general approach to formulating and solving the question of identity while all its modes (not only political identity) should become subject of political studies. I use the word “probably” because there is no agreement about this: identity is a multi-aspect phenomenon while political approach is commonly believed to be only one of many. The work under review interprets identity not only as an object of analysis of political science but also as a concept related to politics and the political. This is another explanation of my “probably.” Everything is more or less clear when it comes to the identity as an object of political studies. Indeed, why not? This is all straightforward because any social phenomena can become an object of politological analysis, especially those which



belong to the subject range of political science. While the first volume discusses identity as a subject matter of political science, the second volume directly interprets identity as a category of political science; it is pointed out that “inclusion of the studies of identity in the subject range of political science is explained by an extension of scientific knowledge about politics and the very concept of the ‘political’” (vol. 2, p. 8). The authors have identified two relatively independent justifications of this inclusion. The first is caused by the formation of a “subjective factor” or an agency of a political actor. Identification is the basic condition of political activity; it becomes a political phenomenon when the individual (and the referent community) is involved into deciding/acting with an aim to establish a certain political order or to choose a road of social development. This means, on the whole: those who were defined not only know what to do but also how to act. The second argument: politics is exposed today to various factors of social and cultural nature. The Introduction to the second volume says, in particular: “Identity in its political dimension has become the general aspect of analysis. Our studies rely on an extended interpretation of political identity as a projection of the national, civilizational, ethnonational, religious and confessional, territorial, age-related, gender, cultural and other components of social identity in the political sphere. Political identity is shaped in the process of politicization of these identities and the involvement of their vehicles in the relations connected with the realization of political interests and specific practices which embody an understanding of social boon” (ibid.). So far, the last phrase can be forgotten—I will return to it later. I should say that the first and second interpretations can be accepted since they correspond to empirical reality (which is true) and numerous publications about politics. The new trends—ethnopolitology, economic politology, gender politology, political theology, etc.—confirm this conclusion. The authors of the glossary and in the corresponding chapters of the monograph offered numerous examples derived from political practice, sociological studies, and quotes from scientific publications to confirm the above. We should probably agree. Or shouldn’t we? We should accept the statement and good or even brilliant analysis of what is going on in the contemporary political world. The authors have revealed the contradictions of the contemporary policy of identification, the incompatibilities of different identification projects and the dangers of uniting some of the identification modes or, vice versa, the prospects of integral collateral subordination of some of them. Both volumes abound in highly interesting ideas about Russia’s national and civilizational identity, political identity in other countries and other civilizational spaces (significantly, the civilizational principle in the studies of identity was selected as one of the basic ones). The authors have discussed globalization and identification, the possibilities, complications and risks of global citizenship within contemporary mainstream. This is true but...

One of the lessons of the philosophy of postmodernism learned by contemporary political philosophy says that in the world of modernity knowledge about modernity is subordinated to power discourse while activities of the subject (agent), to disciplinary practices, that is, to the dominating type of organization





of life too. In this respect everything which dominates should be deconstructed (discourses, practices, concepts, organizational forms, etc.) since power camouflages its domination with different masks of legitimation. Unlike monism, hierarchy or totalitarianism, postmodernism, having pushed forward pluralism and the politics of diversity, reconsidered the critical function of science in the broad sense of the word. Today, it is not referred to as a description (what) or explanation (why) but an explanation of the purpose (what for) since postmodernism accepted, as one of its postulates, the constructive ability of the human world, that is, to use common words, unification of the objective and the subjective, of the fate and valor, the material and the ideal. In general, in this case constructivism is not the methodology of opposing the natural and the artificial but a special idea about building up reality in the process of which human activity is involved together with external forces. Postmodernism as a trend spearheaded against representation and integrity treats identification and identity with suspicion, that is, the ties between all sorts of certainty and something more general, whole, clear, etc. Zygmunt Bauman's *liquid modernity*, whom many of the authors of the present collection of articles quote with obvious pleasure, is nothing but a loss of certainty. The authors agree with this interpretation but do not accept the principle of suspicion of identity or suspicion of fixed belonging. Instead they come to a conclusion about all sorts of mixing and combinations but not about a radical rejection of the principle of fixed belonging, one of the principles of modernism. This explains derogative comments about postmodernism—otherwise the logic of the book would have been destroyed. Yet postmodernism is present in the book under review, though in a somewhat indirect way. Here is the central idea of the book which belongs by birth to postmodernism—the politics of preserving distinctions is aimed at the predominant identification of liberalism.

The authors have indeed recognized this politics as the central one for modernity; it is impossible to ignore the fact of proliferation of functional roles¹ and the fact that nobody can be brought under the universal definition without a certain degree of coercion (the universal is understood as a horizon rather than sustainable definiteness). In the book the assertion of this idea (the cornerstone of the entire subject range of identity) lacks consistency. Identity can be described as fixed specifics, while identification presupposes certain treatment of these specifics (see, for example, vol. 1, chapter 4). Hence the “melting pot” idea cannot be accepted; the authors, however, have demonstrated that multiculturalism as an ideology of the politics of diversity, likewise, proved ineffective. The following puts the methodological principle in a nutshell: “Identification can rest on different foundations yet axiological choice serves the point of departure: it regulates, in different ways, our treatment of diversity” (vol. 1, p. 22). Devotion to the principle inevitably sounds as a warning which forces the authors to try to beat off the threats of differentiation born by the identification issue. There are attempts at interpreting the identification politics as a need to preserve meta-narrative in the form of national, state or even global identification despite its immanent description as the politics of distinction. This supplies even “ontolog-



ical identity” with the traits of all humanity. The authors write about a hierarchy of identities which undermines the idea of its plurality and its liquid nature. The treatment of the political as an arrangement of distinctions blends with the idea of the political as an achievement of integrity, universality and unity, even if varied unity. This shows that the essence of the ideas of postmodernism are treated negatively (at least to a certain extent): postmodernism, with its scathing criticism of modernity (contemporaneity), proved unable to formulate a constructive program of drawing out of the situation of deepening distinctions, that is, identities. This explains why the authors have concentrated at Jürgen Habermas, quotations from whose works predominate in the reviewed publication, who opposed postmodernism with the idea of “modern—an incomplete project.” It seems that external opposition between the politics of distinctions and the politics of unity conceals the problem of the dialectically resolved political; this is the only way to resolve it in the context of identity and identification (even if a liquid one).

Probably (another probably) the political is devoid of identifications or, to be more exact, the political relies on totality as its only identity. Culture has (creates) numerous identities; this explains why “the nature of identity is invariably cultural” (vol. 1, p. 114) is an exact and substantiated paradigm of what can be found in the two volumes. All attempts to find a total (political) identity in culture are doomed to failure while the politics of universal identification oriented at culture paves the road to violence. The authors have demonstrated a lot of caution when trying to reach political identity through culture/civilization or through the legal universality of citizenship (the cultural phenomenon of the Anglo-Saxon world); they underpinned these theses by references to the individual, tradition and rationality. There is an indirect admission that the problems defied solution: I have in mind the last thesis from the extract quoted above to which I promised to return. Let me remind you that the authors introduced it with their deliberations about the possibility of projecting varied components of identity to politics. Here is the thesis: “Political identity is shaped in the process of politicization of these identities and the inclusion of their vehicles in realization of political interests and specific practices which embody an understanding of social boon” (vol. 2, p. 8., italics is mine.—*L.S.*) Here “politicization of identities” means that they are included in total comprehension of social boon, that is, the particular is transformed into the universal that in contemporary political realities cannot be realized without power which makes legitimate use of physical force possible (Max Weber). From this it follows that the class, ethnocultural, religious, national-civil, civilizational, gender and other identities may claim the role of the vehicles of social boon but, in fact, they are not related to society as a whole. Political identity alone can claim this role. This constitutes a problem: What is political identity? There are two diametrically opposite approaches to the culture/politics problem. Carl Schmitt, whose ideas are being revived today (the authors refer to Seyla Benhabib without pointing to the post-Schmitt intention of her works), looked at the totality of the political by opposing the friends and the foes; he substantiated the political through human nature rather



than culture. Unlike politics, culture has certain degrees and collateral subordination. Culture (law, economics, morals, aesthetics) captured politics; it is a form of liberal expansion into politics; it camouflages the essence of the political under the flag of dying off of politics. The political is preserved in the potential of “war”; this supplies Huntington’s “clash of civilizations” (the idea rejected by the authors of the reviewed publication) with logical substantiation while its rejection testifies that the liberal ideas of death of politics have been accepted. The second tradition resides in the works of Hannah Arendt, who believed that the political was not a natural or a cultural layer of the human substance, but a higher supracultural (suprascular) *modus* of human life (supranatural, that is, biological to an even greater extent) connected with freedom and creations of history. Political identity (devotion to historical mankind) was much more important than the family, national, racial and even civilizational affiliations. Totalitarianism was born by the oblivion of the political and its relegation of the political to the sphere of biological and/or cultural (economic) states.

The authors present the political in the form of politicization of the cultural. I have already written that this is true, that empirical reality clearly confirms this. It is not enough to register the phenomenon of “capturing the political.” The projecting ability of political science (in the wide sense rather than in Durkheim—Bourdieu’s interpretation) presupposes not merely an academic assessment but also an assessment in the context of universal interest which, according to the authors, constitutes the center and the nerve of the political. Should political science be objective and impartial or should it be passionate? This is determined by its correlation with political practice, that is, its inclusion in the political. What if the political has been captured by “other”? The authors hail constructivism, imagination and discourses. “Culture is important”—this is absolutely true. To which extent is culture important for the political? More often than not the answer is: it is a mobilizing force for politics of our days and age. By mobilizing nations, civilizations, religion, etc. we can bring about political and social changes with due account for the emerging threats which affect political, rather than economic, development. The authors demonstrate this in relation to ethnonationalism, religious fundamentalism, liberal universalism, global citizenship, territorial exclusiveness, etc. The extremes are frowned upon while culture tends to extremes in the process of politicization. This means that we should grasp the meaning of cultural expansion to the political sphere and its limitations rather than the legitimation of the process. This allows science to contribute to the process of construction of political spaces by joining in the discourse about the political based on imagination (the ability of man to tie together rather than disunite). Both volumes jog imagination, while interpretation of the ideas seen in the context of the far from simple interaction between politics and culture allows us to move further in understanding of the political.²

Is Russia a political community? In the very general terms the answer supplied by both volumes is: it is still looking for it. The interpretation of Russia’s identity follows the patterns of the last two decades. In the conditions of vast cultural variety, obvious cultural and civilizational fractures (today there are also



social and economic fractures), “catching up” development and highly engaged nationalisms, the foundations of unity deserve special attention. The authors are looking for answers, in particular, by interpreting the national-civilizational identity; the national is interpreted as national civic consciousness, while the civilizational aspect, through a comparison between Europe and Asia, the West and the East. Numerous repetitions betray a certain tiredness of interpretations. The authors have written with a great degree of bitterness: “The theory of identity in Russia is inevitably connected with the inferiority complex and the feelings of backwardness and defeat” (vol. 2, p. 322).

The psychoanalytical strategy of overcoming complexes (through utterances) is positive at the individual level. In public discourse insistence on “uniqueness without future” inevitably breeds aggression. Hopes are kindled when Russia is likened to China and India yet Russia (essentially, not in the form) is neither the former nor the latter. Having read the corresponding sections in both volumes the reader concludes that the cultural-civilizational paradigm contributes to the uniqueness but not to politics. Is a “new identity” which emerges, as the authors suggest, on the basis of contradictory “cooperation/rejection” of tradition possible? The political is not correlated with the museum; it is perfectly interpreted in the historical context if the political community has it. The Russian political community not only took shape in history; it can rely on it in the times of troubles to continue history. Both volumes confirm this. Today, the politics of identity in Russia is fairly contradictory; this is amply confirmed by volume 2. It is confirmed that political community should be reproduced; this is the dominating trend in Russia’s politics even if its present state invites far from unambiguous assessments. Russia has demonstrated and goes on demonstrating its ability to accept divisions and preserve political community; it is pursuing the politics of identification probably on the basis of a “conservative” idea of unity of the state and society. Is this true? The book registers, in a variety of forms, disruption rather than unity; for example: “The very low level of trust and involvement in the state/society format is explained by the dominating role of officials and bureaucracy. The stratum expected to remain ‘servants of society’ became its ‘master’ by either usurping many of its functions or placing society under harsh bureaucratic control; officials and bureaucracy suppress even the weakest shoots of independent public activity which break through this increasingly impenetrable wall” (vol. 2, p. 296). Few people will question the above yet the conclusions stemming from the descriptions of contradictions of contemporary development take the reader by surprise: progress is possible only if public activity and responsibility of the state blend. Russia has already embarked on this road: “The above suggests that Russia is entering, or rather, has already entered a new period and that it is impossible to predict, at this early stage, with any degree of certainty which model of power/society relationship will replace the old and dying system. This and the outcome of the conflict of trends will determine, to a great extent, whether the anomalies which interfered and continue interfering with the positive development of Russia’s political identity, its civil component and its stronger statehood will survive or will be eliminated” (vol. 2,

pp. 304-305). In this respect the “World” of a Russian is not particular no matter how specific historical collisions between the state and society develop.

The length of a review does not allow me to discuss several other general and specific subjects created by the discussions of political identity and the politics of identity. Experts might be interested, in particular, in the subjects connected with the studies of identity; they will find some of the answers in the volumes reviewed.

The books under review not only summed up the studies of identity in contemporary Russian political science but formulated new problems. The level of interest in any given book is determined by its overcoming the narrow subject-range which attracts few readers. The present two-volume book formulated the problem of correlation between political identity, culture and the political; it has progressed in finding the answers and in conceptualizing identity as a political phenomenon.

NOTES

- ¹ The authors frequently refer to the concept of “role” as used by structural functionalism or dramaturgical approach of Erving Goffman. It seems that the role dominant (multitude of roles) is no longer an important factor of shaping “liquid identity.” The boundaries between different spaces of human life became obliterated which inevitably undermined all typologies and classifications. The typological methodological approach contradicts, to a certain extent, the thesis of contemporary ambiguity.
- ² Here is another important scientific fact: it was postmodernism which encouraged criticism of the political as the total and confronted it with the cultural politics of diversity. In fact, the political was wrongly identified with the contemporary form of the political realized by power through coercion (even if this erroneous interpretation supplied us with certain instruments.)

L. Smorgunov

Translated by Valentina Levina