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WEBER'S CONCEPT OF THE NATION

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Abstract. This article examines Weber's theory of the nation in the context of the nation as a community of ethnic groups versus nation as a political community. It is argued that Max Weber connects ethnic and political aspects of his theory of nation. Weberian approach shows that it is of great significance for the ethnic group to maintain feelings of pride in the power of its own community. Weber emphasizes the role of education by introducing intellectuals as a group of people (besides politicians) who contribute greatly to the process of establishing the nation.

Keywords: nation; nationalism; ethnic group; ethnic identity; political community.

The nation is a complex and an ambiguous term which is used all around the world everyday. Studies of nationalism, ethnicity and other doctrines closely related to 'the nation' phenomenon are quite popular but those theories are not well-defined. Those issues cause a great controversy between many scholars of different fields of social science maybe due to the fact that those concepts are considered modern. One may perceive the theory of the nation as a modern one in the sense that it never yielded its own great theorists" [1, p. 5]. However, works of major philosophers from Antiquity to the modern days present certain ideas on this subject matter. The major shift in turning scientific thinking toward exploring the theory of nation was established in the late XVIII century which was marked by rise of such nations as France, Britain and Germany" [4, p. 564]. That process was followed by discussions on national issues. Most thinkers of those times were nationalists and in our era of political correctness their comments to a limited degree sound old-fashioned. Appreciating the fact that most philosophers discussed the topic of the nation, it is obvious that one can hardly identify them as explicit theories. In order to analyze Weber's approach of the nation it is necessary to turn to the definition of nation. Here one must state from the beginning that the term itself is hard to define in a clear-cut unambiguous fashion due to the academic discourse on this subject matter.

Max Weber's concept of the nation is somewhat fragmentary too. Nevertheless, his theory is one of interest and attention due to the fact that to some extent it deals with an everlasting discourse on how the concept of nation should be understood. What is the nation? This question is still controversial. Some acknowledged scholars like Benedict Anderson define it as 'an imagined community' with national identity and sentiment. Others, like Gellner put an emphasis on the political aspect of a nation-state" [2, p. 100]. Another question is of, in other words, dynamic nature: What contributes more to the formation of the nation – ethnic feelings or political power? The Weberian approach to the concept of nation can be looked at from these two major viewpoints.

Thus, the aim of this article is to examine Weber's theory of the nation in the context of the nation as a community of ethnic groups versus nation as a political community. Does political power interact with ethnic feelings or not? And what role do both play in the process of the nation building?

Nation as an ethnic community. Max Weber first defines the terms nation *(Nation)* and people *(Volk)* in his monumental work *Economy and Society*. In Volume I he treats nation in

the context of the community of ethnic groups *(ethnische Gemeinschaften)*, which are described by him as "human groups that entertain a subjective belief in their common descent because of similarities of physical type of customs or of both" [5, p. 389]. Therefore, Weber stresses that the belief in common descent or blood relationship is significant for the ethnic group. Moreover, the more homogeneous the group is, the more likely it will become an ethnic group. The common customs, physical type, religion as well as language influence the formation of the ethnic group. Weber argues that those components are important in constructing a common ethnic group identity. However, later on, after investigating various types of nations (for instance, Switzerland is the case of language differences) he concludes that to some extent those components are not crucial. One may ask then, what is the main component for building a sense of ethnic identity among people? Weber points out that a shared conviction that this group is superior than the other one can be an important part for the process of transformation from the tribe to the ethnic group. Thus, one can link Weber's implicit "belief of common ethnicity" with the dichotomy "us-them" and the modern concept of 'otherness'" [5, p. 398].

Nation as a political community. The second volume of Weber's *Economy and Society* adds to his concept of the nation the phenomenon of political power which plays an important role in the process of nation building. Power *(Macht)* in Weber's theory is "a probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in position to carry out his own will despite resistance" [5, p. 53]. While reading Max Weber's works concerning national issues one can realize that the term power has two dimensions in the context of nation. One, as mentioned above, nation is related to the political power of politicians who "provoke the idea of the state" [3, p. 176]. The other meaning of the term in the Weberian approach has to be understood in its connection with cultural prestige.

It is of great significance for the ethnic group to maintain feelings of pride in the power of its own community. In addition, a group of intellectuals is needed in order to popularize the national idea. Thus, Weber emphasizes the role of education by introducing intellectuals as "a group of men who by virtue of their peculiarity have special access to certain achievements considered to be 'cultural values'". In general, those two groups of people (politicians and intellectuals) contribute greatly to the process of establishing the nation.

Apart from this, Max Weber defined the nation as a community of 'sentiment' meaning that the nation is not just the people or the ethnic group but rather "certain groups of men who possess a specific sentiment of solidarity" [3, p. 172]. As a consequence of obtaining that common feeling the ethnic group has a trend to become a state eventually. Thus, Weber connects ethnic and political aspects of his theory of nation.

In conclusion, it should be mentioned that this brief overview of the problem does not answer all the questions about the nation. The phenomenon of nation is highly complex and is subject to discussions. Rather, it is an attempt to analyze some aspects of Weber's concept of nation. Overall, the current concern with nation presented in this article has been explored through the analysis of the Weber's concept of the nation: nation as an ethnic community and nation as a political community.

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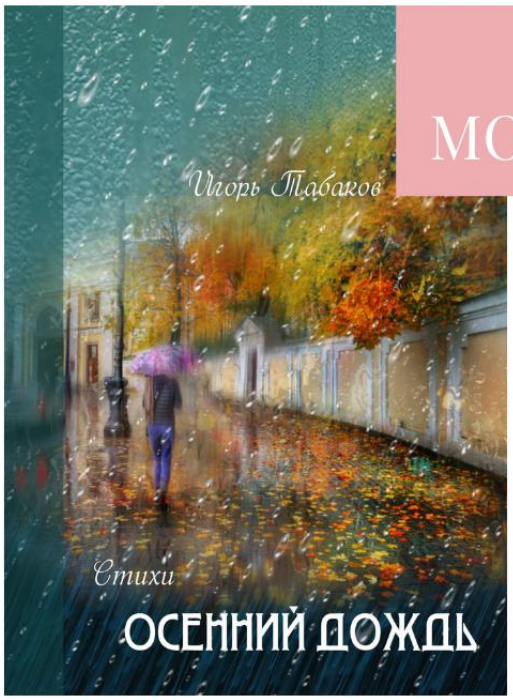

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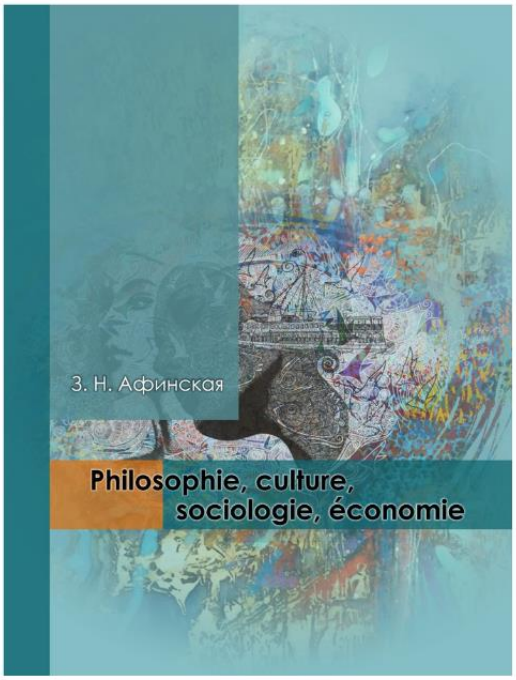

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