

God has nationality too

Religious nationalism and identity among Ukrainians

We cannot deny the power religion once had over the lives of people. It shaped (almost) all institutions as well as everyday lives of individuals. But together with modernization and the growing disenchantment of the world, religion was predicted to be losing its power and then eventually disappear. As Hadden (1987:587) puts it: “the few forecasts have been uttered with more unshakable confidence than belief that religion is in the midst of its final death throes”. So called secularization thesis was for a long time taken for granted in Europe. Not only is Europe seen as secularized, in the sense of the separation of religion and public institutions, but some may even call it atheistic. But what we are now witnessing does not fit into this secularization framework. Some scholars of sociology of religion (see for example Nešpor 2004, Heelas, Woodhead 2005, Davie 2000, 2007 and others) argue that people are leaving traditional forms of religiosity in searching for new religious and spiritual movements. Certain churches¹ gained insight into what is often called religious market and changed their “PR strategies”. They claim return towards traditional values and stress individual’s experience with god. Traditional forms of religiosity are not disappearing either, although their role and focus are shifting.

A lot has been written on nationalism but the amount of attention given to religion in that matter is far less. One of the reasons for this might be the transnational nature of religion and religious institutions that does not coincide with nation-states’ units of analysis. Moving beyond such a methodological nationalism (Wimmer, Glick Schiller 2003) will allow us to see religion. Other reason for leaving religion out of these debates is that very often it is seen as something that is in direct opposition with modernity, as opposition to “modern” or “civilized”. Hadden (1987) argues that this belief reached the level of doctrine among social scientists, which resulted in the idea rarely being subjected to any real scrutiny. This presumption of inherent incompatibility of religion with modern institutions is not only shared by public discourse in European countries but is still present in social science, even though many scholars of religion (see for example Juergensmeyer 2003, Casanova

¹ So called pentecostal or charismatic movements, sometimes also known as Born again Christians.

2006, Roy 2006) are pointing out that we are now witnessing worldwide resurgence of religion (if there ever were signs of its decline). Some may object to this growing-importance-of-religion-claim by calling upon the secularization thesis and the somewhat unique example of Europe (Willson 1982). And in some ways they would be right. Looking at “hard” data from polls and indicators such as church attendance, Europe seems to be not only very secularized but almost atheistic, at least in some parts.² Yet debates around Muslims’ presence on the Old continent or the accession of Turkey to the European Union reveal that by simply accepting the secularization thesis we might be missing the bigger picture.

The aim of this paper is thus twofold. First I would like to address the role of religion in the nationalism debate and to point out that religion should be taken into account when we are dealing with nationalism. This paper first introduces the debate around nationalism and the growing body of literature that calls for recognition of the role of religion and religious organizations not only in the formation of nationalism but also their current position in nationalist movements. I will then continue with the example of Ukraine, looking at the connection of religion and development of national idea and current role that religions play in Ukrainian public and political space. At the conclusion I will suggest some implication for potential religious nationalism in Ukrainian Diaspora.

Fundamental to this paper is the understanding of religion as central to lives of many individuals. As such religion have implications not only for the way everyday live is structured but that it consequently also influences human relations, politics and cultural identity by producing and shaping worldviews and beliefs.

Theories of nationalism – is religion missing?

Prominent theorists of nationalism, like Anderson, Gellner or Anthony Smith, whose works now create a dominant pattern or almost a canon in the nationalism literature, often neglected (or, in my belief, not stress enough) the role religion has in origin of nationalism and in national movements.

² Polls show that the number of people who attend church at least once a month is incredibly low – less than 19 percent in England, 12 percent in France and the Czech Republic, under 10 percent in Sweden and Russia (<http://www.europeanvalues.nl>; 2007).

In fact, religion and nationalism have various attributes in common. Both share an imagined community and they both rely on the importance of symbols³ to provide shared meanings for their members (Anderson 2008, Levitt 2003). According to Rieffer (2003) they both provide their members by a belief system to guide them and assist them in a complex world. And what is also important here is that both religion and nationalism develop a common identity for their followers to relate to. Religion and nationalism address a fundamental human need – need of established identity and sense of belonging into (imagined) community. Such strong identities allow their bearers to relate to each other. Religion can offer sense of identity that can be as strong, or even stronger in some cases⁴, as national identities (Levitt, Glick Schiller 2004, Levitt 2007).

Benedict Anderson (2008) is one of very few theorist of nationalism that addresses the role of religion in the origin of nationalism. He understands nationalism in relation to big cultural systems that preceded it. Nationalism, for Anderson, has arisen from these cultural systems and delimited against them. Imagined communities of nations once were “sacred imagined communities” bound together by religious belief. He acknowledges some religious elements of collective identity required by nationalism. But that is basically all the credits he is willing to put down to nationalism’s account when he states: “It would be short-sighted, however, to think of the imagined communities of nations as simply growing out of and replacing religious communities.” (2008:28). Anderson then stresses the role of what he calls “print capitalism” and also the role of language.

Another theoretic of nationalism, Gellner (1983), considers culture as an important element in the formation of nationalism and the nation state, but his definition of culture stays vague⁵ and does not include religion. For Gellner culture is important as a shared characteristic of nation that allows people to relate to each other trough understanding of symbols and ideas. These shared characteristics serve for self-recognition of any two members of a given nation. If we try to fit religion into Gellner’s definition of culture as element of nationalism then we may succeed only in nation-

³ which may sometimes overlap – for example crosses or crescent moons on national flags, national anthems and mottos that incorporate religion (American’s In God We Trust)

⁴ In her book “God needs no passport” (2007) Peggy Levitt identifies people for whom belonging to religious community creates a stronger bond then belonging to nation states. These are for example some Muslims who consider themselves as members of transnational Umma at the first place.

⁵ He defines culture as ‘the distinctive style of conduct and communication of a given community’ (Gellner, 1983: 92)

states which are religiously homogenize or maybe states that provides their citizens by what Bellah (1990) calls civil religion that arch over different faiths and beliefs.

Anthony Smith's understanding of the role of religion in national movements varies throughout his work. In his early essays, he suggests that religion is an essential aspect of the nation (Smith 1981:64) but as he continues, religion in his work loses its position. For example when he analyses conflicts among ethnic groups (Sikhs, Tamils, Indians and Pakistanis (1999) he does not stress religious elements of these conflicts. What he acknowledges though is the cultural component of the nation (usually incorporation of either language or religion or both).

Looking at the prominent authors we can identify a certain perspective, dominant in this field, which leads us to a modern understanding of nationalism as secular (Rieffer 2003). As was said above, religion is thought to be in opposition to modernity and nothing more then a private affair of individuals in secular democracies of Europe. Nationalism on the other hand is understood as a product of modernity. It is therefore understandable (but not justifiable) that there are only few analyses of relation between two of them. But there is a growing body of literature that brings about a new perspective on this subject.

A new perspective

Regarding the neglect of social science it is wise to ask first whether there actually is a relation between religion and nationalism. A connection between them can be revealed by placing religion in the centre of our focus.

Beliefs that religion provides are connected to the sacred sphere. This sacred origin of ideas and values ensure that they are given authority which is hard to challenge and therefore give religious group and/or leader the legitimacy (Bradley 2009). As such religious beliefs can be politically salient with politically influential institutions to back them up. Religious ideas and symbols help constitute group identities and give meaning to them in a variety of ways (Mitchell 2006). Asad (1993) goes even further when he links the personal dimension of religion to the formation of national power bases. Concentrating on the impact on people's everyday's lives that power has, he highlights the connection between power and religion. Asad argues that religious symbols and ideas support or oppose the dominant political power.

Similarly, Reychler and Paffenholz (2000) argue faith is often a soft power shaping discourses that offer a vision to people of how world should be and driving them to act accordingly. If we understand religion as central to lives of people not only in terms of its impact on human relations, politics, economics and cultural identity, but also in regard to its role in creating and shaping worldviews and beliefs (Bradley 2009), then we will be able to understand its interconnection with nationalism.

Mitchell (2006) says religion is not a constant force but that it responds to context, power and politics. The importance of religion consequently ebbs and flows according to changing contexts and crises. She points out that in times of political stability religion might be of less importance but stays under the surface of society to emerge in more turbulent times. Mark Juergensmeyer (2003) argues in the same way that not only we are experiencing revival of religion but due to globalization and what he calls “loss of faith in secular nationalism” religion is increasingly politicized and politicizing. According to him this happens as a response to the political and social crises. Religion in times of social and political instability is ready to serve as a repository of traditions of symbols and beliefs and offers a framework for ideas about social order. As Juergensmeyer continues some forms of religious nationalism are largely ethnic which make them providers of identity that most people share.⁶

But why is religion such an important factor in many nationalist movements? By simplifying nationalism to its core we can say that its basic principle is founded upon the difference between “us” and “them”. Nationalism provides its followers with identity based on definition of who *they are not* at first place. Most religions, on the other hand, are transnational and universalistic with inclusionary tendencies (particularly Catholicism, Protestantism, Islam or Orthodoxy). But in spite of this fact, religion plays a part in national identity. Barker (2009) argues that religion becomes an important factor in nationalist sentiment (and also nation formation) when it is able to play some sort of differentiating role for the nation. We can draw here on Bruce’s (2002) concepts of cultural defense and cultural change. Bruce understands religion in modern world as too privatized to be of any importance at social level. Instead, religion is serving non-religious functions according to Bruce. It can provide support at times of endangered social identity (cultural change) and it also offers sources for

⁶ In agreement with Juergensmeyer, Jonathan Fox (2004) using two datasets measuring conflicts, comes to conclusion that religion is very important factor (even though it is not the only influence) mainly in conflicts where there is nationalism present: “thus, it is nationalism that is a primary cause of ethnic conflict, and religion acts as an exacerbating factor” (2004:728).

the defense of national, local, ethnic or group culture (cultural defense). In cultural clashes values are called upon to help reveal possible endangering of own culture by other (2002:34-36). Although Bruce's arguments go hand in hand with secularization thesis his concepts of cultural change and defense show that religion is vital for nationalism when and where it is useful for identity formation.

To answer the question of when can religion serve as identity provider for nationalism, Barker (2009) employs the concept of religious frontiers. He describes them as "geographic borders where two regions or peoples, each prominently influenced by a specific and unique religion, come together" (2009:31). In these situations religion is the easiest way how to differentiate one group from another since they often share the same language or history. Religion in these cases is ready to be used as a group marker. Barker points out religious and cultural lines of division do not coincide with political ones. However, it is not only the existence of religious frontiers that give rise to religious nationalism but according to Barker it is also the presence of threat that fuels it.

Barker's main focus is on religious conflicts and that shapes his concept of religious frontiers. As such the concept suffers from its open tendency to take groups of people as granted/real entities. To avoid this tendency of groupness (Brubaker 2002) we have to use this concept differently. In this paper religious frontiers are understood not as more or less fixed lines of division and to some degree as group identifiers. Rather I will use it more as analytical tool that enables us to understand how is religion connected with nationalism. I will look at religious frontiers not as fixed geographic borders but as tool that people employ under certain circumstances in political projects to mark themselves as a group different from other group. Tool, that helps people to differentiate.

Religion and nationalism in the case of Ukraine

In this part of the paper I will draw on example of Ukraine and Ukrainian immigrants in Czech Republic. First I will introduce shortly the historical and social context in Ukraine, and then I will focus on the role religion played in the development of nation idea. Religious institutions “returned” back into political realm after the collapse of communist regime and at times of social and political instability they continue to influence politics as well as they are themselves object of political aims. The last part turn to immigrant religious institutions outside Ukraine which are in direct connection with Ukraine and their political projects.

Religious identity

What is now known as Ukraine is situated on the borderland where three culturally different empires met. Prussia (Poland), Russia and Austria-Hungary empires fought over the territory with fluctuating results leaving their influence there. Gradually it was religion that became identifier for groups of people living there, the tool to distinguish “us” and “them”. Under the thread of different cultural domain religion proved to be a ready-to-use set for identity formation.

Religious situation in Ukraine is often oversimplified by dividing it into three regions according to religious affiliation of their inhabitants – the south-east region which is mainly Orthodox, the central region where three Orthodox churches⁷ fight with each other and also with growing influence of Roman Catholic Church and then there is the western region which is predominantly Greek Catholic (Mitrokhin 2001, Krindatch 2001).⁸ As Riabchuk (2009) argues such division along western Catholic/eastern Orthodox lines, very often taken for granted by Western scholars, proves a lack of understanding of the real situation by taking all Ukrainian Orthodoxy as one. Even though this division does not mirror religious situation clearly and in depth it can serve as a start here for it reflects some historical and social circumstances.

⁷ Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Moscow Patriarchate, Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Kiev Patriarchate and Ukrainian Orthodox Autocephalous Church.

⁸ Ukrainian religious landscape is surely more diverse – there are growing protestant communities, Jews and Muslims and others. Here I will concentrate on those Churches that have majority of believers and therefore bigger potential to influence politics.

Looking back into the history Greek Catholic Church (GCC) occupied particular position in creating the idea of Ukrainian people. According to Mitrokhin (2001) it played important role in the development and sustenance of Ukrainian “national idea”. This is mainly due to historical, social and even geographical circumstances. It was GCC and its clergy which developed, consolidated and sustained the idea of Ukrainian (or at the time Rusyn) people in the absence of educated elite and under the rule of Austro-Hungarian Empire (Mitrokhin 2001). In the past it was Greek Catholicism that created group (and even geographical) boundaries. It differentiated its carriers from western Roman Catholics⁹ (especially Polish) and from eastern Orthodoxy. Therefore Greek Catholic Church enabled its clergy to develop imagined community based on religion and culture. People from western Ukraine were those who played a fundamental role in the dissemination of the idea of Ukrainian statehood. By claiming themselves Greek Catholics and by celebrate mass according to byzantine rite they clearly marked frontiers. This also connected Greek Catholic Church thanks to historical development and also geographical location¹⁰ with Ukrainian ethnicity making it ethnic church.

Nationalist movement was put down by Soviet authorities who were more fond of and therefore enforcing the idea of Soviet identity instead of particular national ones (Mitrokhin 2001). Between years 1946 and 1989 the Ukrainian Greek Catholics survived underground being persecuted by communist regime. But the ideas of Ukrainian nation stayed central to the church and they were also inseminated in its followers just to be call back after the regaining of autonomy.

Another source of Ukrainian national identity is Orthodoxy. As Wanner (2009) says Orthodox churches consider Orthodoxy a fundamental component of Ukrainian nationality. Significant exceptions are the very Greek Catholics who for historical reasons belong to the related national denomination. For Orthodox Churches identity is geographically defined and automatically inherited. All Ukrainians thus have religious identity whether or not they choose to act on it.

But the situation among Orthodox Churches is not simple. Under the communist regime Ukraine Orthodox Church of Moscow patriarchate was the only ‘legal’ church in Ukraine. After the Ukrainian regain of independence there were strong voices

⁹ Even though Greek Catholic Church recognizes Pope as the head of the Church, they differ from Roman Catholicism in the way they celebrate mass – according to byzantine rite.

¹⁰ There were very few parishes of GCC outside Ukraine (Krindatch 2003).

calling for independent (autocephalous) national Orthodox Church which eventually led to a split and creation of Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kiev Patriarchate. There is also Ukrainian Autocephalous Church that came to existence in short period of Ukrainian independence in 1917 (Krindatch 2003). Agadjanian (2001) interprets these clashes between different religious denominations as conflict between modern secular state and religious nationalism. In religiously pluralistic state such as Ukraine we face the situation where political secularism is the only possible way how to avoid conflicts but we still cannot deny the religious component of the dominant ethno-national identity because this religious component happens to be included in the political process.

All the Orthodox Churches follow their own political projects and the split of Orthodoxy in Ukraine just demonstrates this case. But the popular perception of a choice between a national (belonging under the Kyiv patriarchate) or foreign (of Moscow patriarchate) faith is misleading as all religious communities are link together globally. They are thus force to negotiate the local and national contexts in which they situate themselves as well as to offer links to individuals, communities and institutions beyond the borders of Ukraine (Wanner 2009).

Political religion

After the collapse of Soviet Union, Ukraine experienced religious resurgence that was according to Agadjanian (2001) part of a larger societal process of change which beginning can be traced back into the 1960s. Agadjanian says that after the collapse in the early 1990s the whole former Soviet Union was experiencing rapid disintegration of society and particularization of identities that eventually led to a growing entropy in the societal system of meanings and symbols and then to an increasing anomie both in the social and political realm. A natural outcome of this was “the growing importance of such symbolically strong identities as those of ethnic, linguistic and religious grouping” (Agadjanian 2001: 474). Religion after the collapse could offer quickly a ready-made set of symbols and values that many people could relate to in times of Bruce’s (2002) cultural change.

The role of religion became increasingly controversial as main religious institutions followed (or continue to follow) their own political projects. This was caused by the distinction between private religiosity and public religion in the late 1980s which open space for the latter to be use as a repository of symbols and

values. This resulted into a new public discourse of which religion was part and religious identity became a source of mobilization and political legitimation. Religion was politicized for political purposes as well as politicizing (Juergensmeyer 2001) for asserting its goals. Finally, religious identity became an auxiliary source of ethnic and national consolidation. As Agadjanian (2001: 477) argues “religion was one of the latent (or active) components that first supported revived ethnicity and then moved up to the level of nation building as one of the major cultural boundary markers”. As religious institutions remain the most trusted institutions in Ukraine¹¹ the potential to influence their followers is big.

Another strong element negotiating the role of religion in public space is also religious pluralism that has been recently institutionalized in Ukraine making it one of the most vibrant religious markets in Europe (see Wanner 2009, Mitrokhin 2001, Krindatch 2003 and other). Religious communities offer competing visions of worldviews, values and moral orders and a variety of transnational connections. They articulate the expectations and reciprocal commitments not only towards each other but also in the relation between citizens and a state. As Wanner (2009) says “as the symbolic boundaries between religion, politics and morality fluctuate, religion hold sway over believers – and politicians – for it offers a repertoire of values and practices from which to foster collective action to realize a political worldview” (2009: 97).

To understand the role of religion in times of cultural change (Bruce 2002) and also dependence of religion on context, we can turn up our attention towards the Orange Revolution. It is not a surprise that an overwhelming majority of Greek Catholic voters voted for pro-Western Yushchenko in all rounds of 2004 elections. Also Ukrainian Orthodox voters (especially those of pro-autocephalous Ukrainian Church of Kiev Patriarchate) vote for Yushchenko. Supporting Yushchenko was seen as a mean of escaping Russian domination. Churches played important role in the Orange Revolution as they promoted their ideas about political order in the country among their believers. Some scholars (for example Filiatreau 2009) also points out that active involvement of churches was a crucial factor in the nonviolent outcome of the Orange Revolution.

¹¹ With almost half of all the respondents claiming they trust them and that religion should be part of political life (Krindatch 2003).

Religious nationalism in immigration

Not only threatening of religious frontiers leads to the formation of a religiously based national identity. Religious frontiers are also challenged under the experience of immigration.

One of the features of Ukrainian immigrants is the higher level of religiosity (Leontiyeva 2006). Even though after the immigration it is often hard to find the time to visit the church, those immigrants who have the opportunity to do that (usually in bigger cities) often benefit from it. Although ethnic Churches are not common in Europe as they are in USA religious landscape is changing due to immigration which brings Churches with ethnic traits to existence in some countries. This is the example of Greek Catholic Church outside Ukraine.¹²

Where there are no churches for Greek Catholics or Orthodox Ukrainians to visit we might see some alternation that would not be possible in Ukraine. Some immigrants start visiting other, more available churches – usually Roman Catholics; others do attend masses only when on visit in Ukraine and part of immigrants leave their religion completely (Sedláčková 2010 compare with Pavlíková, Sládek 2009).

These churches then help to develop and maintain connection with Ukraine and they are the place where immigrants can get social contacts, news from Ukraine, hear Ukrainian and talk with their fellow-countrymen and create the (imagined) community with connection to their country of origin. As Solari (2009) points out that despite the fact these Churches might be seen through the dominant settlement model as crucial in the terms of integration of immigrants into the hosting society we should not neglect their transnational political projects and the ways these larger political aspirations shape clergy interactions with immigrants.¹³ Being important providers of instruction manual for everyday live, religious institutions influence the level of civic engagement not only in the hosting society. By watching closely the situation in the country of origin they also affect what political and social visions the immigrants may bring back home to their communities (Solari 2009). That is what

¹² Greek Catholic Churches outside Ukraine, even though they are under the jurisdiction of Vatican, have close connection with Ukraine, usually have Ukrainian priest and serve masses in Ukrainian. There are also Orthodox Churches but they are very often under the Moscow patriarchate and do not aim at specific ethnic groups – their followers are usually immigrants from post-soviet republics as well as from Balkan.

¹³ Solari (2009) carried out an ethnographic research in several parishes of Greek Catholic and Orthodox Churches in Rome. She argues that clergy's understanding of the transnationalism and the level of involvement of the particular parishes are shaped by political projects they employ.

John Lie (2001) calls “diasporic nationalism” which directs our attention to the political and discursive work of nation building that happens outside the national borders.

Conclusion

Both religion and nationalism were predicted to be fading away or retiring into a private sphere with no or insignificant influence on the public affairs. These predictions are now questioned by the global rise of strong religious and national or ethnic identities and the role they play in conflicts. Religious instances still influence state politics, society and ethics more than they were expected. Since the “classic literature” on nationalism leaves religion out or does not consider it to be of much relevance we should re-think our understanding of modern forms of nationalism and their potential relation with religion. The basic argument of this paper is that religion can, under certain circumstances, provide a ready-to-use solid platform for nationalistic ideas. Working with Barker’s (2009) concept of religious frontiers I argue that these frontiers when under the threat can form a religiously based national identity.

In the second part of the paper I drew on the case of Ukraine. Ukraine is lying not only on the periphery of Europe but also at its borders being a grey zone between EU and Russia which is very well visible when looking on the religious division of the country. Struggles between “Western” Catholics and “Eastern” Orthodox are intertwined with politics making religious institutions to be one of the political forces in the state. Religion played important role in the development and sustenance of the idea of Ukrainian people by marking the cultural lines between “us” and “them”. Religious frontiers with Russia to the east and a number of Catholic states to the west Greek Catholicism created a visible group identifier. This influence could be probably stronger if it was not for the internal division of the state along the religious lines. Fights for all-Ukrainian autocephalous Orthodox Church just underline the connection of religion with politics not only on the local and national level but also on the international level with Moscow patriarchate unwilling to leave its prominent position in Ukraine. The situation on Ukraine also shows that religion is not a stable force but its power rises on the surface when is needed as we could see on the example of the role of religious institutions during the Orange revolution.

After almost seventy years of persecution post-Soviet Churches have been forced to re-negotiate their relation towards state and nation since the fall of communist regime. As Solari (2009) says they magnify the aspect that propose a social and national order and therefore contain a political project that requires active participation of clergy and consequently of parishioners. This also translates for immigrant Churches outside Ukraine. By focusing on their transnational political projects we can get the insight into nation building that happens outside national borders.

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