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**EMPIRE
AS A CONTEXT SETTING CATEGORY***

The present situation with the development of “empire studies” is routinely characterized as “expansion.” Yet, apart from the quantitative growth of publications that evoke in their title the term “empire,” there is also a qualitative shift in understanding “empire,” as well as multiplication of perspectives from which that phenomenon is approached. Moreover, the growing intensity of debates on empire should not be (mis)taken for a seamless process of accumulation and expansion of knowledge. I contend that the contemporary conceptualization of “empire” in cross-disciplinary research literature presents an intellectual challenge that has to be deciphered and explicated. The second thesis that I would like to present in this brief intervention comes from the historical perspective. This thesis argues that the intellectual challenge of understanding “empire,” if creatively explored, can provide us with means to critically reflect on the plurality and the paradoxical nature of historical experience. The challenge of empire can also help us in discussions about historical categories that aspire to organize and

* The present essay is a revised text of the paper that was given at the presidential panel “The Persistence of Empire” at the 39th National Convention of the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies, New Orleans, November 15-18, 2007. The author expresses his gratitude to Mark Beissinger, the chair of the panel and president of the AAASS, for the invitation of a representative of *Ab Imperio* to participate in this panel.

interpret the space of the past experience.¹ While arguing this position, I draw on the main specifics of the logic of historical thinking. This logic may be broadly, and in a somewhat reductionist way, summarized as consisting of the following aspects.

First, the logic of historical thinking is particularly attentive to the notion of historicity that includes the analysis of the constitution of historical time, and the conception of social phenomena as framed by continuities, ruptures, and changes. There is little doubt that questions of change are also of paramount importance for sociology and political science, yet the historical perspective differs from other social sciences in that it takes into account the nature of modern historical time, which, through its single direction from the past to the future provides the ground for the analysis and categorization of historical phenomena.

Second, the logic of historical thinking is sensitive to the individuality of historical phenomena, which includes the peculiarities of historical contexts and the idiosyncratic ways of their signification. There is no question that such disciplines as old-style ethnography and cultural anthropology were the driving forces of thematizing alterity and were the heralds of the importance of signification for the social sciences and humanities. However, it is in historical thinking that we find the conceptualization of difference as constituted by changing time, as well as by the varying territory, culture, and traditions. Moreover, these latter differences are also necessarily historicized in the modern discourse, for telling cultural difference necessarily involves pointing out the different origin and the trajectory of development. It is not accidental that when hearing a different opinion we ask where does this person come from, and that the penultimate category for describing difference in Russian legal and administrative practice is *inorodtsy*, that is literally “of one other progeny.”

Third, the logic of historical thinking is particularly predisposed to reflect on the logical constitution of the space of historical experience in its synthetic totality. Of course, since the Braudelian project of total history there is a lot of skepticism toward the possibility of reconstructing the

¹ The argument is developed from the earlier thesis of the necessity to take into account the semantic status of empire as a category of self-description that was presented in Ilya Gerasimov, Sergei Glebov, Aleksandr Kaplunovskii, Marina Mogilner, and Alexander Semyonov. In *Search of New Imperial History // Ab Imperio*. 2005. No. 1. Pp. 33-56. The development of the argument was greatly aided by discussions with my colleagues in the framework of the collaborative research project “Sprachen der Selbstbeschreibung und Selbstrepräsentation im imperialen Russland” supported by the Volkswagen Stiftung.

totality of historical experience, and there are also rival projects of total history that subsume its totality in the linguistic turn or historical memory.² Yet, despite the fact that total history remains an unattainable ideal, there is a persistent reflection among historians on how to describe the space of historical experience without losing agency or structure, discourse or practice, normativity and relativity. Finding themselves in this situation, historians may call themselves students of the fragmented concept of historical experience, who are still distinguished by a persistent and often intuitive idea of the interrelatedness and totality of that experience.

What, then, constitutes the intellectual challenge of contemporary studies of empire from the vantage points of these peculiar features of historical thinking? In what follows I attempt to demonstrate that there is something in the so-called “imperial turn” that resonates with and provides insights into the epistemic status of historical knowledge, and thus the problem of empire cannot be explained away by references to external circumstances of present-day political relevance of empire-talk and academic vogue for grandiose titles.³

² Reinhart Koselleck, the founder of the German historical school of conceptual history, conceived of *Begriffsgeschichte* as a return to the ideal of total history against the drop “historical specialisms”: “There can be no history, no historical experience or interpretation, no representation or narrative without social formations and the concepts by means of which – whether reflexively or self-reflexively – they define their challenges and seek to meet them. To this extent society and language belong to the metahistorical givens without which history (Geschichte, Histoire) is inconceivable.” (Reinhart Koselleck. *Social History and Begriffsgeschichte* // I. Hampsher-Monks, K. Tilmans, F. van Vree (Eds.). *History of Concepts: Comparative Perspectives*. Amsterdam, 1998. P. 25). Although Pierre Nora consciously shaped the project of “historicized memory” as an alternative to the homology of national history and what he termed “history-memory,” he himself acknowledged that the “realms of memory” were turned on their head by practices of commemoration that ran counter to the critical approach of highlighting the plurality of historical views and experiences: P. Nora. *The Era of Commemoration* // P. Nora and L. Krizman (Eds.). *Realms of Memory: The Construction of the French Past*. Vol. 3. New York, 1996. Pp. 609-637.

³ This is not to deny the state of contemporary “imperial turn” as linked to the thinking about present day dilemmas of globalization, unilateralism, nation and sovereign state. The nodal points in discussion of empire evoke the contemporary relevance of empire, be it of positive-analogical or negative and critical type. See, for example, the discussion forum in the special issue of *Daedalus* (Spring 2005) with participation of Anthony Pagden and Niall Ferguson among others. The critique of thinking of empire as an analogy or metaphor for the present day dilemmas may be found in: Craig Calhoun, Frederick Cooper, and Kevin W. Moore (Eds.). *Lessons of Empire: Imperial Histories and American Power*. New York, 2006. Pp. 1, 2.

The brilliant dictum by Benedict Anderson highlights the intellectual challenge of the current imperial turn: “We study empires as we do dinosaurs, as things of the past, irretrievable except in the laboratory.”⁴ Compare it with what Frederick Cooper writes in a chapter on empire in his book, *Colonialism in Question*:

France only became a nation state in 1962, when it gave up the last vital element of its imperial structure, Algeria. ...In 1960 a world of nation-states finally came into being, over three centuries after the peace of Westphalia, 180 years after the French and American revolutions, and 40 years after the Wilsonian assertion of national self-determination.⁵

Anderson returns to the point by addressing the question of explanatory power of the category of empire compared to that of nationalism:

It is also true that the history of nationalism is a short one, by comparison with that of the old empires. But this simply means, as we all know, that History is speeding up all the time. The history of the automobile and the steamship is also short compared to that of the horse cart and the sailing vessel. This does not mean that the horse cart and the sailing vessel have a bright future before them.⁶

It appears, according to Anderson, that the category of nation gains explanatory power because it is, or rather it has been, the referent for the modern perception of political and social reality, and thus able to serve as an organizing thread for the process of historical development from the past to the future. The category of nation also appears to be linked to such modern categories, as the argument of Ernest Gellner goes, as social space and the state, with the help of which we still describe the space of experience.⁷

⁴ Alexander Semyonov. Interview with Benedict Anderson “We Study Empires as We Do Dinosaurs.” *Nation, Nationalism, and Empire in a Critical Perspective* // *Ab Imperio*. 2003. No. 3. Pp. 72-73.

⁵ Frederick Cooper. *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History*. Berkeley, 2005. P. 156.

⁶ Alexander Semyonov. Interview with Benedict Anderson. P. 71.

⁷ Gellner defines nationalism as “parasitic” upon two concepts, the state and the nation. With respect to the state, he follows the Weber’s definition of the public authority with a claim on the monopoly of violence and notes that such a form may be in a stretch of the ideal type applied to the agro-literate society of medieval Europe, but cannot be applied to other periods and contexts. Interestingly enough, Gellner cites the British rule in Iraq alongside with the struggle for fiefdoms in medieval Europe as an example of the impossibility to indefinitely stretch the concept of the state without losing the analytical value of this concept (Ernest Gellner. *Nations and Nationalism*. Ithaca, NY, 1983. Pp. 3-4).

Viewed from this perspective, empire is associated with the radically different historicity to which, like to the Middle Ages, categories of the state, society, and the individual have a problematic appeal. The challenge of the imperial turn to this picture of theories of nationalism comes in the form of radical recontextualization of the process of modern nation-formation in the normative historical experience of Western Europe. From the viewpoint of the wave of revisionist studies of the British and French colonial empires, it becomes evident that the history of empire cannot be told as a mere appendix to or projection of national history. This mode of relaying the past would reassert the normative boundary between the first and the third world. A history of empire should necessarily integrate the history of colonial expansion and different forms of accommodation of the imperial situation.⁸ In some revisionist accounts the history of empire as a broader historical context helps to explain the dialectical process of building the national core out of the patchwork of different groups of population through the contrast with the imperial periphery, as in the case of “forging the Britons.”⁹ Still in other revisionist accounts the history of empire as a broader historical context is used to relativize the very boundary between the national core and colonial periphery by pointing to its functionality in the process of rationalizing imperial entanglements and legitimizing imperial rule.¹⁰ The question that emerges from the latest revisionist trend in the history of Western empires is whether empire as an analytical concept should be understood as an alternative to the set of modern categories whose temporal character gives us a structure for a description of historical experience and historical time. The creative field of revisionist studies of Western empires suggests that the impact of the concept of empire is of a different type. Empire is not used to obliterate the existing set of modern categories, including the category of nation. The negation of the centrality of nationalism for the normative historical experience of Western Europe is rather grounded in the idea of mapping a broader context of historical experience, and thus

⁸ See the beginning of the turn and setting a research agenda in: Frederick Cooper and Ann Stoler (Eds.). *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*. Berkeley, CA, 1997.

⁹ Linda Colley. *Britons: Forging a Nation, 1707-1837*. New Haven, 1992. See also a more pointed explication of this argument in: Linda Colley. *Britishness and Otherness: An Argument* // *The Journal of British Studies*. 1992. Pp. 309-329.

¹⁰ Nicholas Dirks. *Scandal of Empire. India and the Creation of Imperial Britain*. Cambridge, MA, 2006. Dirks praises Linda Colley for including the East India Company in the history of British national identity formation and criticizes her for downplaying the constitutive impact of empire (*Ibid.* P. 342).

unsettles the view of a one-dimensional historical process as leading up to the Modiglianesque (or Gellnerian) pattern of social and political organization. According to Nicholas Dirks, whose *Scandal of Empire* underscores the intellectual move of recontextualization and restoring interrelatedness of processes of the constitution of Western supremacy, formalizing empire, and nation-building: “the greatest scandal... has been the erasure of empire from the history of Europe.”¹¹

Imperial traces were erased not only in Europe but in other parts of the world as well. Studies of the regions of Central, Eastern, South-East Europe, and Eurasia are still characterized by a well-entrenched view of persistent ethnic nationalisms as the defining feature of the region writ-large. Reverberations of this view may be found in the discussion of whether the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth could be characterized as empire and in Rogers Brubaker’s criticism of civic-cultural typology of nationalism that is accompanied by the reinstatement of the persistence of ethnicized conceptions of nation in the region.¹² In the political language of the region, empire is externalized in the discourse of victimhood of the nations of Central and Eastern Europe. This view is reasserted at the expense of recognizing transnational historical contexts of multiple points of connection and mutual influences. Structural comparisons based on the framework of a continental type of empire proved the difficulty of overcoming this view.¹³ In part, the limited impact of this comparative history in terms of asserting the centrality of empire for the history of this region was due to the fact that it ignored the semantic field of the languages of self description of these empires. The

¹¹ Dirks. *Scandal of Empire*. P. 29. Despite disagreements between Dirks and Colley about the degree of interdependence and blurring of imperial and national historical experience, the latter also puts the reconstruction of a broader imperial context (what she calls “connexity”) into the center of new research on empire: Linda Colley. *What is Imperial History Now?* // David Cannadine (Ed.). *What is History Now?* Basingstoke, 2002. Pp. 132-147.

¹² See the analysis of analytical uncertainty and an argument in favor of seeing the history of the Polish Commonwealth through the prism of empire in: Andrej Nowak. *From Empire Builder to Empire Breaker; or There and Back Again: History and Memory of Poland’s Role in Eastern European Politics* // *Ab Imperio*. 2004. No. 1. Pp. 255-289; Rogers Brubaker. *Myths and Misconceptions in the Study of Nationalism* // John A. Hall (Ed.). *The State of the Nation. Ernest Gellner and the Theory of Nationalism*. Cambridge, 1998. P. 296.

¹³ Dominic Lieven. *Empire. The Russian Empire and its Rivals from the Sixteenth Century to the Present*. London, 2000; Alexei Miller and Alfred J. Rieber (Eds.). *Imperial Rule*. Budapest & New York, 2004.

criticism of this structuralist approach by Benedict Anderson is still valid for the contemporary state of comparative studies of empires, and has not been answered by the general histories of empire as a transhistorical form of organization of political space and power springing from the model of the Roman and Mongol empires:

The problem with “empire” is that, at least in English, it is a hopelessly blurred concept, which is also ceaselessly used for polemical purposes. To use the same word for Ancient Rome, Dutch Indonesia, Tsarist Russia, and Bush America, as well as Aztec Mesoamerica, shows clearly the difficulties.¹⁴

Moreover, there is a danger of swinging with the interest in empire to alternative historical narratives of the region that emphasize the condition of backwardness and the weakness of nationalism, and thus provide a ground for the essentialization of empire.

The lesson that can be drawn from the above mentioned difficulties of the historical definition of empire, is that “empire” in the repertoire of historical thinking may be more aptly defined as a context-setting category that frames the historical reconstruction of a historical context, and creates a critical perspective on boundaries and thematization of historical experience, thus ensuring that scholars do not fall pray to the discursive power of totalizing and one-dimensional categories of the modern mindset.

Yet, the challenge of the imperial turn in itself is in the impossibility of avoiding the dialectical frame of defining empire in terms of negation of the nation state and the dominant narrative of the triumph of the principle of national organization of political and social space. In this dialectical frame the thesis of the nation-state as an instrument of homogenization is countered by the antithesis of empire as the governance of diversity, national monologue and uniformity – by imperial polyphony and states of exception. At the same time, it remains the greatest difficulty of the business of definition of empire to think of empire without the concept of the state with its uniquely modern connotations of secular, public, and territorial agency, without which a medieval city or present day university also becomes an empire.¹⁵

¹⁴ Alexander Semyonov. Interview with Benedict Anderson. P. 72.

¹⁵ The argument about preserving the analytical link between the category of empire and the realm of the political is presented in: Ronald Grigor Suny. *The Empire Strikes Out: Imperial Russia, “National” Identity, and Theories of Empire* // Ronald Grigor Suny and Terry Martin (Eds.). *A State of Nations: Empire and Nation-Making in the Age of Lenin and Stalin*. Oxford, 2001.

An attempt to resolve the paradox of the dialectical negation of nation in the conceptualization of empire could lead to understanding empire as a concept of radically different historicity. But taking empire as a category of a different type of historicity would make it imperative, first of all, to negotiate the terms of translation of cosmological, eschatological, and ecclesiastical languages into the language of analysis of evolution of public and territorial state forms. As the case of the Third Rome doctrine in Muscovy demonstrates, it is not always easy to do. Despite the historical reconstruction of this doctrine as primarily eschatological and religious in nature, it is still occasionally interpreted as an analogy of modern ideology of territorial expansion and political legitimacy.¹⁶

This is not to say that there is no possibility of using a radically different historicity of the concept of empire for critical reflection on the phenomenon of empire. In fact, it might be a very creative step with regard to how empire is understood in contemporary Russian public discourse. The usage of the concept of empire in contemporary peaks of political eloquence, such as the “liberal empire” by Anatoly Chubais and the “empire of freedom” by Georgii Kas’ianov, reveals the idea of empire as thoroughly nationalized and presuming the existence of the Russian nation and the Russian sovereign state at the core.¹⁷ Such an assumption resolves the paradox of ruptures and incongruities in the history of the Russian empire/Soviet Union/post-Soviet Russia, and contributes to the perpetuation of inheritance logic of the great power or the practice of essentialized ethnic identities and illiberal politics. An empire of radically different historicity would help to conceptualize ruptures and discontinuities in the history of state formations and collective

¹⁶ Note the appearance of the doctrine of the Third Rome in the account of the theory of empire by Geoffrey Hosking in his overall history of the Russian empire: Geoffrey Hosking. *Russia: People and Empire, 1552-1917*. Cambridge, MA, 1997. Pp. 6-8, 40. The critique of this “analogical thinking” may be found in Paul Bushkovitch. *The Formation of a National Consciousness in Early Modern Russia* // *Harvard Ukrainian Studies*. 1986. No. 10. Pp. 355-376. A much revised version of this text with pointed discussion of translation of languages of self description of religious epoch and imperial politics is: Paul Bushkovitch. *Pravoslavnaia tserkov’ i russkoe natsional’noe samosoznanie XVI-XVII vv.* // *Ab Imperio*. 2003. No. 3. Pp. 101-118.

¹⁷ Anatoly Chubais. *Missiia Rossii v 21 veke* // *Nezavisimaia gazeta*. 2003. No. 209 (3041). 1 October; Georgii Kas’ianov. *Imperia Svobody* // *Kommersant*. 2006. No. 159 (3490). 29 August. In a telling phrase Chubais talks about “twenty five million of Russians that reside abroad” that should be called back to the motherland and will be welcomed by their home. The epithets of “motherland” and “home” reveal a very nationalized and essentialized perspective from which group identities and political loyalties are approached.

identities. It is especially important given the presence of the view of the history of the Eurasian region as reflecting long-term legacies and lacking in revolutionary experience of rapid development and transformation. This view may be refracted in different ways in historiographic paradigms and political discourses. One of the refractions of this view is the neo-Eurasianist conceptualization of Russian history through the metaphor of space (“island-Russia” in the sea of Eurasia) as the agency of historical process.¹⁸ Such a view of the agency of historical process underscores the slow historical temporality and the possibility to factor the legacy of the seventeenth century in the context of the twenty-first century. Though this refraction might seem totally unrepresentative, the debate on the constitutive legacy of the Chingizid empire on Russian history is reminiscent of other possible refractions of this “slow history” view.¹⁹

The relevance of ruptures for studies of empire is reinforced by the fact that the cognizance of empire is often prompted by crisis and discontinuity. Mark Beissinger suggests the centrality of the challenge of nationalism for the emergence of perception of certain polities as imperial. However, the challenge may not always present itself in the form of modern nationalism, and the crisis may be of an epistemological as well as of a political nature. The problem of empire as viewed from the analytical concept of empire-as-context-setting category is that it appears to be a space of historical experience with an infinite variety of imperial situations. This thesis may be explained with the history of the State Duma, which is now regarded by historians as an imperial parliament and a window on late imperial society and politics. The conventional view would hold that this institution was imperial because it represented the multinational population of the Russian empire and its organizational structure was also multinational. However, what made the State Duma a microcosm of empire was not its heterogeneity in the space of national distinctions, but its uneven or multidimensional heterogeneity. The caucuses in the Duma of the revolutionary period were defined on the basis of incongruous and asymmetrical criteria: political caucuses of right-wing parties; monarchists; the Union of October 17; Constitutional-Democrats; the Party of the Democratic Reform; the Labor group;

¹⁸ V. L. Tsymburskii. *Ostrov Rossiia. Perspektivy rossiiskoi geopolitiki* // Polis. 1993. No. 5. Pp. 6-23.

¹⁹ For account of this debate that occurred at the Moscow conference on Comparative Study of Empires, see Alexander Semyonov. *Obzor raboty mezhdunarodnoi konferentsii “Istoria imperii: sravnitel’nye metody v izuchenii i prepodavanii”* // Rossiiskaia imperia v sravnitel’noi perspektive. Moscow, 2004. Pp. 15-30.

Populist-socialists; Socialist-revolutionaries; Social-democrats (which in the first Duma represented the overlap of political, regional and national categories dominated by Georgian Mensheviks); and even the caucus of deputies without party affiliation; confessional caucus of Muslim deputies; regional caucus of representatives of Siberia; regionalist and estate caucuses of Cossack deputies; national caucuses of Polish Kolo and Ukrainian *hromada*; and national and regionalist caucus of Autonomists with a strong affinity to the political program of the federalization of empire. This uneven heterogeneity presents a challenge for historians of how to categorize this diversity and interaction in the diverse space of public politics. To be sure this was also a challenge for modern governance and politics. The leadership of the Second Duma attempted to rationalize this situation by insisting that only groups with a distinct political platform may constitute a caucus. Contrary to the intention of the leadership, it appeared that the diversity of empire was politicized and articulated in different shades of political doctrines so that attempts of reducing the heterogeneity onto one plane of difference fell through.²⁰ Given the predicament of uneven heterogeneity, the historiographic notion of a multinational empire and the policy of the institutionalization of nationality in the Soviet Union may be understood as a way of rationalizing this imperial predicament.

The oft-quoted John Robert Seeley started his advocacy for reorienting the context of English history, thus making it British and imperial, with his observation on “ignorance” of and “indifference” to the fact that in the eighteenth century “the history of England [was] not in England but in America and Asia.” In the very paragraph which contains his famous phrase on the conquering and peopling of half the world, “in a fit of absence of mind” he also says:

While we were doing it, that is in the eighteenth century, we did not allow it to affect our imaginations or in any degree to change our ways of thinking: nor have we even now ceased to think of ourselves as simply a race inhabiting an island off the northern coast of the Continent of Europe.²¹

There is a certain tension between the state of absence of mind and preventing the imagination from encompassing the broader context of imperial

²⁰ RGIA. F. 1278. Op. 1 (II), 1907. D. 667, Zhurnaly Soveshchania prezidiuma Gosudarstvennoi Dumy s predstaviteliami fraktsii.

²¹ John Robert Seeley. *The Expansion of England. Two Courses of Lectures*. Leipzig, 1884. P. 17.

history. After noting this paradox of British history, Seeley proceeds to his own rationalization of “Greater Britain” as a polity of the future – bound by race and state and dividing the space of empire into white colonies and empire in the proper sense of the term, that is India. A dutiful student of John Robert Seeley, Petr Struve, follows his teacher and offers his own way of rationalizing the imperial context by suggesting a mental division of Russia into a national nucleus and peripheries, and a structural unity of empire as supported by necessary geographic and economic relations between northern and southern parts.²² Like Seeley, Struve departs in his rationalization of empire from a paradox of unnoticed colonization in the eighteenth century, which was a “centripetal and centrifugal” process and still within the “bonds” of Russia. The history of different rationalizations of imperial context was intimately linked to the discovery and cognizance of empire. These rationalizations did not have an innate imperial nature – they were often articulated in the languages of modern social sciences and permeated by the logic of nationalism. Yet, it is important for historians of empire to unveil the impulses to rationalize the empire that came out of the tensions and incongruities of the context of empire with the modern mindset of ideologues, politicians, as well as historians themselves.

SUMMARY

В своем выступлении А. Семенов предлагает взглянуть на бурно развивающиеся имперские исследования (попытки создания синтезирующей теории империи и типологий колониальных и континентальных империй, а также изучение отдельных империй) с точки зрения интеллектуальных вызовов, которые они бросают традиционной логике исторического мышления. Автор показывает, как осмысление имперского опыта соотносится с историчностью понимания времени, с принятым значением категорий исторического анализа; как оно реконфигурирует диалектику личности и разнообразия феноменов прошлого и стремления к тотальности образа исторического опыта. Рассматривая современные тенденции в интерпретации западных колониальных и периферийных империй, автор подчеркивает начав-

²² Peter Struve. *Past and Present of Russian Economics* // J. D. Duff (Ed.). *Russian Realities and Problems*. Cambridge, 1917. Pp. 47-82.

шуюся ревизию “империи” как архаического по отношению к нации и национальному государству феномена. Автор предлагает подвергнуть анализу творческий потенциал осмысления радикально иной историчности империи. Такой анализ сродни принятым в медиевистике процедурам, обеспечивающим понимание средневекового исторического опыта и его адекватный перевод, в результате чего обнажаются линии исторического разрыва и семантического смещения. Семенов считает подобный подход плодотворным применительно к изучению так называемых континентальных империй. Занимающиеся ими исследователи склонны преувеличивать их историческую протяженность, детерминацию их развития прошлым и всесильность их исторического наследия. Более того, обнажение линий разрыва в историческом развитии оказывается неизбежной отправной точкой для исследования империи вообще, так как империя не дана нам в языках самоописания и восприятия исторических акторов. Зачастую под самоидентификацию империи подводят глубоко национализированную (территориальную, горизонтально-стремительную, связанную с понятием публичной власти) рамку восприятия социальной действительности. При таком подходе империя видится как нация, господствующая над другой нацией, или как разнородная многонациональная полития, основанная на однородном структурообразующем признаке – национальности. Идентификация империи как ситуации, контекста и стратегии поведения возникает только в результате столкновения, конфликта и смещения нормативных и эгоцентричных языков самоописания, когда исследователь обращается к ситуациям оспаривания и конфликта понимания империи, позволяющим увидеть разнопорядковые языки описания группности, власти и пространства. Развивая этот тезис, Семенов предлагает рассматривать империю как аналитическую категорию, задающую контекст анализа и связанную с языками идентификации империи и рационализации имперской ситуации. В качестве примера подобного подхода в выступлении рассматривается опыт первых двух Государственных Дум Российской империи. Автор прочитывает их как ситуацию репрезентации имперского разнообразия, не сводящегося к “национальности”, но включавшего в себя сословные, региональные и конфессиональные категории.