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Summary description of the ACLS Collaborative Research Network

*"Official and Vernacular Identifications
in the Making of the Modern World"*

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The American Council for Learned Societies (ACLS) has undertaken to organize and administer an international, interdisciplinary collaborative research network on "Official and Vernacular Identifications in the Making of the Modern World," in cooperation with research teams based in several world areas.

The network consists of research teams in France, Russia, and Thailand/Yunnan (with an associated team in China), which themselves are made up of interlinked local working groups. The primary purpose of this infrastructure is to organize research -- to invite participation of scholars whose ongoing or planned work concerns the topic of "Identifications" and to facilitate communication among them, to hold meetings for planning research agendas (in 2001) and for reviewing findings (in 2002), and to prepare contributions to the final conference at Yale University in 2003.

Network activity (especially through the concluding conference) will provide an opportunity for participant observation and comment on the potential utility of this model of modular, cross-area research for future work. The promise of this project lies not only in gaining substantive knowledge concerning the cultural and historical dynamics of group identity, but also in the development of new trans-regional research methods.

ACLS will organize the network aspects of this project: communication among teams (including travel for representatives from each team to field meetings in the four fieldwork areas), and dissemination of results through the summative conference and postings on the ACLS website.

I. AMBITIONS OF THE PROJECT/IMPACT ON THE FIELD

We propose an interdisciplinary, cross-cultural, and transhistorical inquiry into the specific question of how states and nations come to fix ethnic and national identifications in the modern world, and how social groups contest, displace, negotiate, and meaningfully appropriate these identifications from above. As social scientists and historians examining a variety of cases and sites, we consider how the problem of "identification" 1) describes a process that operates on both the global and psychosocial level; 2) can be considered dialectically in the interaction and slippage between identities imposed and identities lived and experienced; and 3) whose genealogies reveal specific, historically deep, textually rich exemplars of a general set of problems about identity in the making of the modern world.

Our concerns with the making and unmaking of "modern" identities focuses on the processes in which identifications are normatively constructed as totalizing and exclusive. Paradigmatic of these forms of identification is the nation, understood as both a political and anthropological category, a principle of political legitimacy and an organizing framework of collective membership. This project takes nations seriously, not simply as "invented" or "imagined" membership categories, but as structures of social and political belonging imposed by states on diverse, mobile, and ethnically varied populations. But we do not simply view such official identifications as arbitrary, constructed, forms of hegemony. We also consider the vernacular appropriations of state, national, and ethnic identities as categories that may become deeply invested affectively, and transformed violently. The research organized by this project, moreover, focuses on nations, ethnic groups, tribes, religious identities, and other forms of belonging that act as alternatives to the nation.

Indeed, our hope is that research framed by this proposal takes seriously alternative possibilities in the making of the modern nation-state, and alternative ways of thinking about the process of identification itself. Such alternatives preceded the creation of the modern nation state and are continually being created in the modern world by pan-national forms of identity, diaspora, flows of immigration, and the institutions and ideologies of internationalism. Despite the striking hegemony of the modern, territorial nation-state (each with a startlingly similar formal system of bureaucratic administration, ministries, courts, taxation, armed forces, and representation), such forms are challenged and subverted both at the level of daily practice and normatively. For this reason, we propose initially to examine a trio of cases, chosen to address very different institutional settings for official and vernacular identifications: first (Research Theme #1), the inclusions and exclusions in the making of the modern nation-state; second (Research Theme #2), the geographies of identification and belonging in poly-ethnic imperial settings, and, third (Research Theme #3) practices of official and vernacular identifications in settings where the usual forms of sovereignty are absent, weak, or multiple.

The principle underlying these approaches is that narratives of identity are continuously in motion, despite their protestations of deep, essential lineage, which, of course, they posit as natural and necessary. Modernity's attempts at normative stabilization are, therefore, continuously being undermined by identifications that are at root situational, if not oppositional. But it also needs to be observed that strategically and instrumentally deployed identifications often "stick," that is, they are accepted as affective markers of group belonging.

We imagine that scholars committed to these guiding propositions can examine closely and comparatively a range of case studies which would bring a new conceptual clarity to the dialectical process in which grids and classificatory systems of identification interact with social flux, in which official narratives help shape alternative or oppositional identifications, and in which some identifications wane while others, once marginal, assume novel institutional forms.

II. RESEARCH THEMES

Summary:

The shared concern that shapes our common inquiry is the understanding of how official and vernacular identifications are established, how they come to have resonance and force in a society, and how they interact and conflict with each other, producing hybrid and unexpected forms and

expressions of identity. While the cases that we will be examining are distinctive in many respects, we believe that a series of shared thematic frameworks will facilitate and illuminate the parallel inquiries. The research themes developed here thus supplement the subtle and situated case study with a conceptual clarity and analytical focus that permits us both to communicate and to add, collectively, to a broader theoretical understanding of processes of identifications in the context of the modern state system. Each theme is dialectically conceived: that is, each involves the interplay of an officially promulgated identification, always generated partly in response to vernacular understandings, and vernacular identifications which subvert, appropriate, oppose and elaborate these official identifications. It is understood, of course, that official identifications are always generated partly in response to vernacular understandings. Broadly conceived, these common points of orientation are:

Research Theme 1. Membership: Inclusions and Exclusions -- the ways in which the nation state comes to define who is a member/subject/citizen and who is not and the interrelationship between these authorized identifications with the changing vernacular practices and norms of identification.

Research Theme 2. Geographies of Identification -- the ways in which official national identities are defined by territory, landscape, culture, and rites, and how the norms and practices of popular forms of spatial identification inflect these geographies of power.

Research Theme 3. Placement and Displacement -- the ways in which official efforts to 'fix' populations in space [their residence, their movement, their classification, their property] encounter an inevitable flux of movement and identities that cannot ever be firmly codified.

1. Membership: Inclusions and Exclusions

Official identifications mark the boundaries of collective identity -- juridical and political -- which the "nation-state" imposes on its members. In this sense, the process of identification is political: it entails the ability to define and distinguish by law insiders and outsiders, nationals and foreigners, citizens and others. But scholars of the "nation-state" have not always been attentive to the genealogy of such official identifications. Nor have they always been attentive to the vernacular responses among "citizens" and "foreigners". This research theme examines the official languages and discourses defining the nation, nationality, and citizenship. In this, we are interested in the problem of the nation as a category of social closure, of inclusion and exclusion in the juridical and political spheres. And it considers the ways in which foreigners, nationals, and citizens take on such identities both in opposition to and collusion with official identifications.

The last twenty years have seen a renewal of scholarly interest in these topics, impelled by the dramatic changes in European labor markets, migratory patterns, and debates about citizenship and its exclusions. To the rise of far right-wing parties (France, Austria, northern Italy), the intellectual left in Europe responded with a brand new scholarship about immigration, nationality, and citizenship. As a result, much work has been done on the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the period of the nation-state's apogee, but only recently have social scientists and historians begun to examine the problem of the "nation" and its alternatives in a pre-modern world. Part of the research focus of this group will look at these early or pre-modern

identifications, as early as the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Studies might examine the juridical bases of membership in the nascent monarchies of the sixteenth century or the persistence of republican values and institutions at the heart of absolutist Europe. A second, and central focus of this group would focus on the historical process of making of modern identifications: the constitution of a "modern" state apparatus and the invention of the "nation" as a category of political legitimacy and popular sovereignty (in the eighteenth century), and the formal definition of the rules of access to the collective membership in the nation-state (e.g., "nationality" codes in the nineteenth century). We are thus interested in the ways in which states have defined the boundaries of membership in the modern polity, a genealogy of the "consecration of the citizen," to use Pierre Ronsenvallon's phrase. Thus the nineteenth century process in which democratic participation, grounded in the principle of national self-determination, developed alongside the formalization of the rules and procedures of citizenship and nationality.

But if identification is the process by which states and political elites create nation-states, it is also dialectically that which individuals and social groups enact in the practices of daily life. This first research focus will also consider the realization and articulation of identification from below, and from outside, the normative definitions of "nationality" and "citizenship." One obvious area of research is the process by which foreigners and outsiders acquire nationality and citizenship, a research problem at the intersection of a social history of migration and a legal history of nationality law. Other projects could include the study of social groups who do not fit neatly under the state's categories, whose social identity disrupts the totalizing aspects of state identifications -- peoples such as the Roma. In addition to considering the problem of official, state identifications, we thus seek to explore the vernacular dimensions of the process, and consider the definitions of membership as they are disrupted, and made meaningful, by social groups who contest and redefine the formal identifications of states.

2. Geographies of Identification

Spatiality is one of the existential conditions of the national unit, and since the nineteenth century -- indeed, as one of the conditions of modernity itself -- the norm of nations was to possess a distinct and significant geographical dimension that underlies or at least impinges upon various aspects of an historical experience and a social constitution. But the "geography of national identity" speaks not to the timeless material objectivity that the non-anthropological natural environment would seem to represent. Rather it points to the virtually unlimited ways in which this environment can be subjectively interpreted and assigned significance. Effectively, nature and space are absorbed into and utilized by an ideology of identity as they are refracted through the ideological prism of the respective national imagination, even as the nation's ideology typically inverts the calculation by ascribing an absolute objectivity and formative influence to these geographical factors.

The geography or spatiality of national identity may be approached through an examination of the following themes:

i) Territorialization of the national idea: the historical-psychological process by which a portion of territory is apportioned a specific significance as the native zone of the group. This process of territorialization can be examined as part of the state's identification of a territory, in the

development of a territorial form of administration. But it can also be examined as a series of representations, an iconography of homeland, in which a series of characteristic physical features in this zone are invested with special meaning and value within the framework of the respective identity structure as a whole. Such iconographies -- maps, landscaping paintings, geographical manuals, but also administrative surveys of territory -- would all be subjects of research. While some scholars might examine the pre-modern iconographies of the nation, which has already produced a fruitful scholarship (Helgerson), attention will be paid to the iconography of the modern nation during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

ii) Fixing and negotiation of boundaries: The historical process of territorial identification necessarily rests on fixing the geographical extent of internal cohesion and homogeneity, while simultaneously and contrariwise marking difference. Beginning in the later eighteenth century, states began to demarcate and delimit their territorial extensions, and during the nineteenth century the idea of demarcation and "territorial violations" became part of the political rhetoric of nationalism. Border studies can examine the development of these processes of territorial identification over time. Simultaneously, the study of borderlands permits us to examine the dialectical process of identifications, situating the norms of territorial integrity in the context of local customs, usages, and identities that both ignore and make use of state identifications.

iii) Civilizations: Recent scholarship has returned us to the idea of essentially constituted civilizations, covering specific territorial extensions, on which boundaries violence is inevitable (Huntington). This research topic challenges such essentialist thinking, by looking at the widely divergent ways in which zones of culture and civilization have been iconographically and textually conceived. The definition of continents, of civilizations, of cultures, and their territorial extensions is an essential part of the process of territorial identifications, and through case studies we will be examining both official mappings of human difference and diversity, and the lived, daily experience of individuals and social groups on the borderlands of civilizations and cultures whose own identifications disrupt such normative classifications.

3. Placement and Displacement

Sedentarization, as the attempt to settle migratory peoples permanently, is perhaps the oldest and most continuous project of states. But modern state-making projects produce a unique mode of sedentarization, a project of spatial and political identification. The attempt to locate, fix, identify, order, and monitor population, property, and exchange is the project of colonial, national, and post-colonial states alike.

Thus, for example, anthropologists and historians have long studied the processes in which colonial states identified populations as 'tribes', constituted them as administrative units, and (not always) successfully produced state subjects through censuses, mapping, cadastral surveys, and other administrative means. But peoples entangled in both colonial and European state projects of sedentarization have always escaped these forms of identification through movement. Nomadic and semi-nomadic populations presented peculiar problems in terms of power holders, with whom, historically, they were often in intimate relation (e.g. as the core of the army; as a source of dynasties established after overthrowing their predecessors; in complex regional alliances and factions etc.) But other kinds of subject populations have remained mobile fugitives from such

official identifications, and for a wide variety of reasons. Vagrants and the mobile poor, for example, escaped the control of the state. The geographical periphery (mountains, marshes) bred populations who escaped the attempts to "place" and prescribe sedentarization, but who were often carriers of the values and technologies of modernity (Pollard). Pastoral nomads or gypsies were not easily identified, while migratory traders and larger populations of mobile laborers disrupted the normative ideal of autochthony, an ideology frequently at the core of modern state projects of sedentarization.

In the project of modernity, then, states attempt to place and identify mobile populations, immigrants, fugitives, and others. In the official state representation, such people and spaces are frequently glossed as barbarians and hence the project of domesticating and incorporating them becomes a 'civilizing process.' The official story, then, is one of a largely beneficent and voluntary incorporation into a wider, refined, and higher cultural order. But the vernacular identification in this dialectic rests on the fact that mobile, illegible peoples, are likely to assert both identities and practices that are counter-hegemonic. In some cases, such mobile peoples are continually being newly generated as a consequence of state action (e.g. runaway serfs who became the Cossacks, deserters and those ruined by taxes who flee to the frontier). In other cases, popular cultural forms linked to movement and displacement give voice to vernacular identifications of individuals and social groups caught in the fluctuations of different national and regional economies, concepts of state, citizenship and identity. The constitution of vernacular discourses, forms, and spaces in reaction to state projects of identification in turn are seen as deeply troubling and threatening.

The success of such modern projects creates new kinds of nomads, sometimes deliberately, by policy (the recruitment of a labor force), sometimes not. They drive massive movements of populations that no controls seem able to regulate and that have major unintended consequences. Rural-urban movement in Morocco, Algeria, Turkey, Egypt, Iraq, linked to complex economic and political changes, threaten in different ways the whole notion of 'the urban', 'the civilized', the 'city' itself. And so too the movement from the southern and eastern Mediterranean to the northern and western, where debates about foreign "invasion" (often of racially and ethnically distinct groups) are shaped by cultural expectations of sedentarization and placement.

In sum, **the Collaborative Research Network on "Official and Vernacular Identifications in the Making of the Modern world"** revises current thinking about "identity" by substituting the concept of "identifications" and by recognizing that group identities are dynamic processes that implicate both official and vernacular definitions of membership, criteria of inclusion and exclusion, and modes of legitimating the placement and displacement of populations.

III. NETWORK STRUCTURE

The network is designed to stimulate and coordinate an interdisciplinary, international, collegially organized set of research collaborations on the historical-cultural contexts of transformations in group identity in several world areas. ACLS has undertaken to act as secretariat to coordinate network activities (meetings for inter-team communication, summative conference, dissemination) and to administer funds.

France/Martinique

Team coordinators:

Peter Sahlins, Professor of History, UC Berkeley

Laurent Dubois, Assistant Professor of History, Michigan State University

Thailand/Yunnan

Team coordinators:

James C. Scott, Professor of Political Science/Anthropology, Yale

Janet Sturgeon, Centre for East and SE Asian Studies, Lund University

Chayan Vaddhanaphuti, Director, Ethnic Studies Network, Chiang Mai, Thailand

Xu Jianchu, Director, Center for Biodiversity and Indigenous Knowledge, Kunming

Russia

Team coordinators

Ronald Grigor Suny, Professor of Political Science, University of Chicago

Marietta Stepaniants, Director of the Institute of Oriental Philosophy, Moscow

[A team of researchers working in China will be associated with this network. They will work most closely with the Thailand/Yunnan team, but will also take part in the scheduled network meetings.]

Western China

Team coordinators

Dru Gladney, Professor of Anthropology, University of Hawaii

Yang Shengmin, Dean of the Ethnological Research Department,
Central Nationalities University, Beijing

Although each team is area-based, the project's **innovative modular structure** is intended to allow analysis of findings comparatively across nations and cultures, and historically through defining moments of prior constitutive development. **Methods** to be employed span an interdisciplinary range from anthropological fieldwork to archival research, all conducted in close cooperation with local researchers and institutions.

The teams' research programs could stand alone as independent research projects, whose findings could be compared externally by team members or by outside observers. **What makes this project different from a serial set of research projects conducted under an umbrella of common themes is their planned interaction throughout the stages of active fieldwork, write up, and dissemination.** The role of ACLS is to organize this inter-team communication and assure that it is as effective and efficient as possible.

The network structure is designed to facilitate communication both within each team and among teams. Within teams priorities include sustained working relationships of US and regional researchers, interdisciplinarity, openness to new participants and to sharing of information with scholars who are interested in following the work but not necessarily themselves full participants in the ongoing archival investigations or fieldwork.

Each team is to consist of working groups investigating specific topics relevant to the team's research agenda. The agenda, the formation of groups, and how their interim objectives fit into the team's overall workplan are to be discussed at regularly scheduled meetings. There will be

three principal meetings of each team. The first, to set the overall research agenda, and to identify and coordinate the fieldwork of sub-groups, will take place in June-July of 2001. The second meeting, to review interim results and to coordinate the analysis and write-up, will take place the following summer (2002). Each of these meetings (two for each area-based team) will be organized in a field location by the coordinators of that team. They will be scheduled in such a way (succeeding each other in time) so as to make it possible for representatives of each team to visit other meetings. This will facilitate the flow of information from team to team, and enrich each research agenda through comparative reference.

The final meeting will bring together all area-based teams at Yale University's Center for International and Area Studies in 2003 for presentation of findings, for a continuation of the comparative analysis conducted during the period of active research, and for a discussion of the relevance of this sort of international, interdisciplinary collaborative effort for the work of others.

Overall goals of the Collaborative Research Network on "Identifications"

The goals of this project are of two distinct kinds -- substantive results of research and development of new mechanisms for international, interdisciplinary, collegially organized collaborative research. In particular, we plan:

- To establish new conceptual categories for the field of identity studies. Since landmark work such as Benedict Anderson's and Hobsbawm/Ranger's in the 1980s, the field has fragmented, pulled apart by the competing claims of psychoanalytic and literary discourses. It has become increasingly removed from the real world experiences of sovereign states and subject populations.
- To develop a new model of modular, interactive structure for research planning, fieldwork, and dissemination.
- To strengthen the capacity of local institutions and informal research communities for sustained cooperation with colleagues in other parts of the world.