

The National Question and The Young Engaged Experts

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The study explores attitudes of young, not yet established experts and the manner they define and contextualize different aspects of national topics. It is based on semi-structured interviews and presents a deep division in regards of nationalism, national identity and consciousness. The study shows the existing confusion around value orientation of citizens of Serbia. It is an explanatory case study, with expected outcome of an overview of the variety of perception of national question, which can further be used to investigate nationalism in Serbia. The research was finished slightly before unambiguous announcement of Kosovo independence, and captures attitudes and meanings which are marked by unique situation in the recent past. I do not wish to intake any other hypothesis in my paper on the possible results of the research, but to observe attitudes in all shown differences.

Keywords

nations, nationalism, national identity, orientation, young experts.

1. Introduction

Extreme attitudes regarding nation have often been the cause of conflicts in the relations of people in former Yugoslavia. This paper explores attitudes of young, not yet established experts on different aspects of national question. The basic goal of the paper is to analyze the manner they define and contextualize nation, nationalism, and other topics regarding the national question.

“National question” is the term used in some European discourse from the eighteenth century until today. It is aimed at the problem of non-existence of national states. I would prefer to use a less contextually defined term, but I still give an advantage to this one, because of its’ overall meaning. Hence, national question incorporates several different elements of a very wide area dealing with nation, national identity, nationalism and rights of minorities. The task of the study was to attempt to shed some light on the aspects of the mentioned question in the consciousness of young members of our society, more to the point, of the members of university community in Belgrade.

This study is an explanatory case study. Its' expected outcome would be an overview of the variety of perception of national question, which can further be used to investigate nationalism in Serbia.

Analysis of respondents' attitudes follows the contextual introduction and the short overview of the existing theoretical approaches. There has been made an effort not to apply any of the existing theories of nationalism. The aim is to analyze collected material in theoretically open manner, in order to gain theoretical assumptions, which are the goal itself of an exploratory study. I accent here that I do not start with specific theory of nationalism, with purpose of strengthening or denouncing it, but instead, I'll turn to theories after I introduce "content of the raw empirical consciousness" of the targeted population.

Real consequence of this paper would be modifying some of the existing middle range theories regarding the basic topic, as also pointing to the borders of their significance regarding the observed group.

The research itself, field part, was finished slightly before unambiguous announcement of Kosovo independence, and captures attitudes and meanings which are marked by unique situation in the recent past, namely seriousness of the separation of the one part of the state.

As a summary, I would repeat two assumptions prior mentioned. Beside assumption of existing attitudes on national question, there is other general assumption on future actions of young people in the sample as a potentially affecting social development on social and political life in Serbia. I do not wish to intake any other hypothesis in my paper on the possible results of the research. My goal is to observe attitudes in all shown differences.

2. Sample

The notion of an expert can be defined in several manners. Here, I have to emphasize that the term expert used in Serbian language has much clearer meaning then in English. One, the most acceptable solution in my view, is that an expert is a social actor who owns a resource of knowledge which he uses in his actions.

The best solution seemed to be university students and graduates with clear generation borderlines. Those are students coming to an end of their studies, attending last year of study and graduates. Young experts who graduated in the last thee years, regardless the area of study were also appropriate choice. This choice is grounded in my interest in the people whose professional identity and intellectual self-consciousness are just forming. Relative homogeneity of the population allows the observation of the fine differences and the matters that can influence the mentioned attitudes.

High education as a criterion chosen for this research is accompanied by widely defined socio-political engagement. It incorporates active engagement in student, youth NGO-s and political parties. I, also, differentiate between organizations which in public have labels "anti-nationalist", "non-nationalist" and those with labels "pro-nationalist" and "nationalist". In between are moderately oriented organizations or parties. The exact meaning of moderate orientation could be discovered solely through research.

I believe that there is a large possibility that attitudes of these people have impact on creation of socio-political life in Serbia in recent future. The question is how they see the term nation, nationalism and which actions they would participate to address problems grounded in the national question.

Sample finally had 12 “non-nationally” oriented, 7 “nationally” oriented and 7 “moderately” oriented respondents. The reason for larger number of “non-nationally” oriented is that the research had shown that some of the expected moderately oriented respondents have shown attitudes close to non-nationally oriented; hence they were added to that group.

Semi-structured interview was a best form of interview for the goals and tasks of this paper. This form of interview allows me to gather the answers in the “how”, “why” and “in what manner” form, namely to deeply investigate the attitudes on the basic topic.

3. Theoretical Background

This overview has no desire to pose for the full picture of what nation and nationalism is. Such endeavor would be too much for a single author, regardless dedication, even in a study of greater volume. Hence, the named authors and theories are just the most commonly quoted in debates on nationalism in Serbia.

Several definitions of nation appear in the analysis of gathered data:

- Political definition of the term nation, the most common, is about people that managed to organize and form a state [1].
- Cultural definition defines nation as cultural group of people, which survives through language, customs, habits, values and norms, and independently from political power and territory.
- Naturalist definition sees nation as a natural community of common origin, not just those who believe they are a community. Common ancestors are the bondage of communities perceived in this way.
- Finally, there is a definition of nation as a community of all of its citizens, where the nation is equalized with the state.

Bell-Fialkoff and Markovits state the difference between two forms of nation, which in turn produce different types of nationalism. But, this difference does not take sufficiently in consideration political factors, and they further state that both forms of nationalism can be recognized in almost every state.

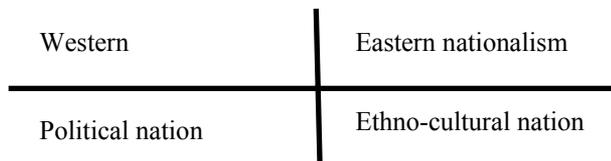


Figure 1

The difference between two types of nation is understanding of identity. While in USA nation is formed regardless of ethnic and cultural characteristics, in Europe nation was, and it seems it will be for a long time an ethno-cultural form. A parallel can be made with the view of Benedict Anderson who stated that all nations are imaginary communities [2] in such manner that every individual pictures him/herself as a member of a group he/she prescribes certain characteristics, that differ from group to group, nation to nation. Those imagined nations evoke national consciousness which asks for institutionalization and independence.

All forms of nationalism need to give a response to what does the belonging mean and who belongs to a nation. Nation as an idea underlines “being the same” in the sense that all of us are one. Nationalism can, and doesn’t have to signify that ones own nation is better than the others.

Nationalism is often matched with political movements, who ask or have administrative government and justify it by using nationalist arguments, in other words, acting for the good of the nation [3].

Nationalism is tightly connected to the appearance of the national state, in the modern period. According to Gellner, nationalism is a specific form of patriotism which becomes dominant under specific social conditions, which first occur in the modern world, and no where else [4]. Nationalism is dedication to the national state or the modern doctrine built around that dedication.

Maria Todorova defines nationalism as a merge of ethnicity and the state [5]. She points out communist nationalism as just camouflaged classic nationalism, which reemerged after 1989. She point out the significant fact that nationalism is relational ideology; it can be defined only in relation to someone, not on its own.

Anthony Smith describes nationalism as ideological movement directed towards achieving autonomy, unity and identity of human community [6]. Nation, on the other hand, is named human community which has common historic territory, myths and memories, mass culture, unique economy and common rights and obligations for all members.

Many authors do not speak of nationalism, but of nationalisms in plural, claiming the variations to be numerous and they are trying to put them in different categories. Rogers Brubaker speaks of three types of nationalism: nationalism of the majority nation [7], so called nationalizing nationalism identifiable with politics sending the message that state should be national, state of the nation; nationalism of the mother state or patriotic nationalism and nationalism of minorities which can but doesn’t have to be the same as nationalism of the mother state. Nationalizing nationalism can lead to increasing intensity of nationalism of mother state and nationalism of minorities, which leads to the magic circle.

Here, I finish with theory on nationalism, and in following passages I will describe political context that aided development of nationalism in former Yugoslavia, with giving more attention to situation in Serbia.

4. Historical Context of Nationalism in Serbia

Complexity in the area of social events in Serbia in the past period has made clear reasoning on any topic very difficult. Several years prior to the dissolution of Yugoslavia attacks at Serbia were more and more common in media, supporting Albanian movements in Kosovo. The root of these attitudes can be placed in pre WWII period, when Karadjordjevic royal family ruled the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. First Yugoslavia was put together rapidly, lacking thorough negotiations. Consequently, Serbs saw only enlarged Serbia [8], which liberated brother countries Croatia and Slovenia from Austro-Hungaria. This has always been a problem for Slovenians and Croatian

The second Yugoslavia was built upon ethno-federal principle. Real socialism in Yugoslavia was non-liberal ideology, collectivist and antagonist [9]. Communist regime, instead of working on national unity, just announced it, and qualified it as a result of the people's resistance in WWII. National identity was suppressed by ideology of brotherhood and unity. Division of government positions was according to the national key in order to dismiss possibility of complaining. Yet, Serbs were reproached as more in governing positions than others. Serbs were the majority in partisans, and therefore the majority in post war governing group, recruited according to war merits.

State regime was socialist, with command economy and dominant leader. Yugoslavia with Tito was developing its own direction of development balanced between East and West. Yugoslavia similarly to USSR had a difficulty to merge ethno-cultural and political model. Belgrade capital, number of Serbs, dominance among partisans where new government was recruited, were the torn in other nations eyes [10]. The conflict became more visible with decentralization of the state. Center, unfortunately for the Serbs, grew weaker and less able to hold members together.

When real-socialism started dissolving along with brotherhood and unity ideology, nationalism was abused as a shade to change legitimization of government. Wider masses had compensation in nationalism for the lack of modernizing towards modern civil state. Instead, authoritarian system caused lack of autonomy and submissive followers' mentality [11]. Domination of party state was exchanged for domination of nation state.

After the dissolution, Serbia faced with sanctions and was marked as aggressor. A short peace after Dayton Peace Conference finished with the Kosovo crisis and NATO bombing. Feeling of injustice and hostility dominated in the wider public opinion. Although October 2000th brought changes and hope for getting back in the European streams, recent aggravation of Kosovo crisis made very difficult attempts of breaking with nationalistic discourse and nationalism itself.

This is the situation which marked this study and all expressed attitudes.

5. The Young Experts and their Attitudes

One can see two dominant stands regarding nationalism among respondents. The “moderate” group is introduced as a result of incoherence inside their answers which made it impossible to mark them as “national” or “non-national”.

Respondents belonging to “non-national” orientation, see nationalism in negative terms. In their attitudes, nationalism is practically equivalent to chauvinism. They see nationalism as *“irrational and surreal conviction that my nation is special”*, and *“you love your country, but to the harm of other countries, we are the best, we are the strongest, and everybody else are nobodies and nothings”*.

Also, nationalism is equalized with ideology, and it represents *“imprisonment of peoples’ consciousness”*. Such definition implies existence of the group of people, usually political elite, which conducts such imprisonment to assure their goals. *“This region in general is nurturing such authoritarian climate, and it is easier not to coerce but to mobilize people for the goals of the elite”*.

Patriotism, on the other hand, is the agreeable way of expressing affection. But, this affection isn’t expressed towards nation, but towards country. This clearly separates state from the nation. The nation is perceived as the ethnic community, while the state is home to all nationalities that live on its territory and can not be linked just to the majority nation.



Figure 2

“Non-nationally” oriented respondents claim that relation towards nationalism should be shown through all available means. In order to eliminate the presence of nationalism as unwanted “enslaved consciousness”, there has to be political will. Besides efficient laws and public performances, it is necessary to develop tolerance through the uplifting of media culture. Respondents of this orientation feel that education *“in sense of promoting openness, development of tolerance of children and making them stronger and again, building their personal freedom and some other human relations”* is yet another one of the important paths of eliminating nationalism. Opening foreign spaces for young people, for travels, for facing the near past, because *“the worst criminals and assassins were hiding behind nationalism”* has been seen as a way of eliminating nationalism. But, there are attitudes that nationalism should not be repressed, because it causes counter effects. *“Nationalism should be lessened in strength, not repressed, because it, nationalism, is aggressive”*.

Respondents who belong to “national” and “moderate” orientation feel that nationalism is a positive form.

Only, these respondents point out that the phrase nationalism has been abused and contaminated in the ex-Yugoslavia, throughout the nineties. The authentic meaning of

nationalism is the love for one's nation, signifying *"expressing love towards ones own people, ones own state, ones own tradition, ones own history, customs, belonging to your own nation"* which is *"as natural as mother's love for her child"*. This positive concept used by "nationally" oriented respondents to describe the phrase, should be, according to them, slowly revived, and the wrong concepts, negative ones should be slowly eliminated. Nationalism *"should be strengthened, it can not hurt, because most of the people in the world are nationalists, and are not ashamed of it"*.

Nationalism, in "nationally" and "moderately" oriented respondents, is different than chauvinism, which is a negative form. "Illiterate people link it with national-socialism, fascism; a lot of them with militarism, and often with chauvinism, which really have no contact points with it". Chauvinism represents endangerment of other nations. Chauvinist is "the one who can't stand any other then his own nation".



Figure 3

Part of the respondents differentiates between nationalism and patriotism, in the same sense as "non-nationally" oriented respondents, meaning, as loyalty towards the state. Nationalism is mainly seen as the more natural and older form of attachment, because it is attached to own nation. *"Europeans who love their country and their people are more likely to say that they are patriots, not nationalists"*. For them nationalism is problematic, because, *"nationalism has very illusive meaning in our parts. You can be nationalist in positive sense in our political culture, and you can be a nationalist in negative sense. Depends on who is interpreting, who is deciding on that and who will call himself like that"*. The rest of the respondents of "national" and "moderate" orientation, mostly, equalize nationalism and patriotism on the level of one own personality. But, *"Croatian can love Serbia, if he is a loyal citizen of Serbia, so it means that he is a patriot"*.

Respondents of that orientation feel that nationalism should be strengthened and the basis of national identity should be taught through socialization and schooling from an early age. The majority of respondents clearly distance themselves from abuse of national symbols and nation that threatens other nations.

National orientation has quite various definitions, but it is always connected with parents' national group. Among strong "nationally" oriented respondents, the most common criteria of belonging is the origin, *"that is my blood, my DNA"* or *"I was born Serb"*. Feelings and consciousness of belonging to the mentioned nation accompany prior attitudes. Other respondents put more accents on the upbringing, socialization. *"I see myself as such because of the learning, surroundings, adopting some behavioral patterns, style, education, and lifestyle"*. "Non national" respondents often name, as the reason for their own national orientation, that *"that is what is written in the passport"* and they are, generally, closest to the model of citizens nation.

"Moderately" oriented put more accent on the significance of culture, religion, language and customs, as marks of belonging to a group, which are accompanied by

existing consciousness on belonging. They formulate it as: *“customs, culture I grew up in and in general consciousness on the fact that I belong to a group of people”*.

When asked directly “Why do you see yourself as a member of certain nation?” the majority responds “Because that’s my parents’ nationality”, and quite a lot of respondents state “my ancestors said they were that nationality”. This response speaks for the significance of cultural pattern transmission, values and beliefs through generations.

Personal experience of nationality is what clearly distinct “nationally” from “non-nationally” oriented respondents. “Non-nationally” and “moderately” oriented respondents experience nationality as an adopted characteristic. They state that nationality is *“as they taught me”* or *“environment conditioned it”*. Also, the part of “non-nationally” oriented respondents see national orientation as linked to dissolution of Yugoslavia, when this orientation became of vital significance in public speech. They say: *“I had to know what I was, we had to accept it, because ninety first and second came”*. “Nationally” oriented respondents feel that nationality is intrinsic and natural characteristic.

In terms of differentiating ethnic and national orientation there are no great differences among respondents. Ethnic belonging is equalized with belonging to national minority, meaning, national groups which do not live in the territory of their own national state, or they have no state. Ethnic groups are *“specific groups which have their cultural and ethnic characteristics, and which are incorporated in people who live in a territory that does not belong to their mother country”, “group of people of common origin who live on a territory, and who mostly have common ancestors and are blood related”*. Nation is always political creation which is organized in form of a state, has its culture which it develops and spreads further through institutions of the state. National state, as a state with one dominant nation, is present in all of the respondents’ perceptions, except “non-nationally” oriented ones who define national belonging through citizenship.

Language, religion and customs are most commonly mentioned along with tradition, culture and common history and existence of the consciousness of common belonging. National identity consists of *“common history, religion, interests and goals”, “the existence of collective consciousness of common ancestors, heroes, destiny”, “something that sets you apart from other nations, common geographical origin, religion, customs, tradition, history”*.

National identity is, similarly to Durkheim’s collective consciousness, perceived as social construct shared by all who belong to one nation, as a *“string of cultural patterns people grow up with”*. It is ancestral identity carried on which stipulate us to accept it and carry it on.

Most of the respondents of all orientations see national identity as highly developed, maybe even too developed for “non-nationally” oriented ones. It is manipulated, overpowers the personality and isn’t corresponding to other identities in adequate, balanced manner. It isn’t leaving space for identification on distinct levels, other than national. National identity has *“overpowered personality”*, instead of being the part of it.

Yet, national identity should develop in different direction, “It should develop in direction that allows people to stop feeling that they live on an island”; “education is necessary, through media, round tables”.

With extremely “national” respondents, national identity isn’t developed in the way they would want to be. Obstacles for development are “*various NGO-s, some political parties, and foreign services*” but also “*staying down-hearted*”. The rest of “nationally” and “moderately” oriented respondents have excessive feeling of guilt which is pushed upon Serbian nation; “*you are blamed for something all the time*”.

National consciousness is perceived as manifestation of the “nation” and “national” in everyday life and public arena. In that sense, “non-nationally” oriented respondents feel that changes in national consciousness are small, but also negative, in the past couple of years. After the changes in the year 2000, there were expectations of significant positive changes in national consciousness, and they were betrayed. “*Nation is still spoken of as a value per se, the highest value*” which is devastating for these respondents. They say “*I heard all that when I was a twelve year old kid, and I am hearing it again, same rhetoric*”, “*there are still those more conservative forces who put the nation on the throne of our interests*”.

Differently to the prior, “nationally” oriented respondents feel that national consciousness slowly disappears, after “*notable growth of national introspection after communism*”. Now we “*give up belonging*” for “*blasé internationalist road*”.

“Moderate” respondents feel that “we blame ourselves more than we should” but that nation today is seen “more down to earth than in the nineties, when it was abused” so that “we begin to realize some things”.

The significance of national belonging is the highest for respondents in “national” orientation group. They also feel that this position can not come to its full expression, because the environment they live in is dominantly Serbian, so that element of identity is being lost. “*Here Serbian people are safely tucked in, national consciousness has been more notable in SFRJ¹ in other areas, here, it is less noticeable*”. They see the significance of national belonging as expressed through consciousness and pride, shown patriotism, and readiness to engage for the good of the nation.

“Non-nationally” orientated respondents feel that national belonging isn’t significant for them or their friends, but they see that such belonging gets a lot of significance in the society. This prescribing of significance is manifested in the late eighties and it is the consequence of the feeling of threat and national mobilization. National mobilization is the consequence of suppressing the national identity in communist times and its efficient usage of the part of elite. Generally speaking, the idea of conflicts caused from the outside with nationally oriented or from “above” with non-nationally oriented respondents, is evident in responses.

The significance of national belonging is expressed today in communication as a matter of pride for nationally oriented respondents, and as identification marker for others. Moderately oriented respondents give certain significance to national belonging, but

¹Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia

they feel that it isn't a primary element of personal identity, which is nothing to be ashamed of, as it is now.

Observing, through responses, the relation of respondents to other nations, Serbian nation has the worst relation towards Kosovo Albanians. For non-nationally oriented respondents, this is a consequence of deeply rooted prejudice that Albanians are extremist nation, but also large cultural differences between Serbian and Albanian nation. Also, governing structure has a share in creating described relations because such attitude *"is coming from above in order to mobilize the public and use it for political goals"*. Besides Albanians, Serbian nation does not nourish the best of relations with some of the *"nations with whom we share some parts of history"*. The most of non-nationally and moderately oriented respondents feel that it takes more efforts to close the circle *"bad relations due to the war, war due to the bad relations"*.

Nationally oriented respondents see the origin of bad relations with Albanians in their irredentism. Kosovo Albanians are trying to *"take part of the Serbian territory"* meaning *"most Serbs have negative relation towards Siptari², because Siptari want to take part of Serbian territory"*. Also, *"one cannot submit one nation to such humiliation"* as it is done to Serbian nation. Among other nations, Croatian stand out because they *"have anti-Serbian relation as their backbone structure"*. These respondents feel that if relations are bad on the state level, meaning nation, and individuals should be loyal and not to have individual relations with "enemy" nations.

Good relations are traditionally nourished towards "friendly" Russian, Greek and Macedonian nation, which especially shows through *"talk with the people"*. Non-nationally oriented respondents feel that good relations exist with states with which Serbia has economic cooperation, like Norway or Slovenia. Nationally and moderately oriented respondents feel that Serbian nation has the best relations with nations of similar religion and temper, so they add Italians, Bulgarians and Slovaks as proven friends of Serbia. Slovaks are underlined because *"Slovakia said that they would not acknowledge the independence of Kosovo"*. Also, there are good relations with *"oppressed nations"* as Iraqis, some Arab countries etc. There are no expansionist pretensions towards neighboring countries, as BiH, Macedonia or Croatia.

Ideal international relations are, according to the non-nationally and moderately oriented respondents, those which are not based on nationality. What is needed is first *"to appreciate people, and then their nationality"*. Tolerance and cooperation are necessary based on mutual understanding of differences, solidarity and *"mutual respect based on positive values"*. Common interests are perceived as the best base for building such relations. The major obstacle for achieving such relations, according to the non-nationally and moderately oriented respondents, is *"the lack of sincere desire to start with improving relations"*. There are *"vast prejudice"* in the society and a fear of changes towards tolerance, because *"conservative stratum feel that would make them lose their identity"*. Apart from these obstacles, detest left over from the wars in Balkans is part of the reality.

²Siptar – Kosovo Albanian, from Sipotar in Albanian, meaning "inhabitant of land of eagles", become pejorative term.

Non-nationally and moderately oriented respondents feel that the improving of relations can be achieved through persistent efforts of government and non-government sector through media, promoting national rights, tolerance, and common living. Excessive influence of “NGO rhetoric” is present in promoting non-government sector as one of the key, if not the key actor of changes.

Nationally oriented respondents feel that reciprocity is the best basis of international relations. It is needed to “*sustain relations, respect others, and not sell yourself*”. It would be for the best that everybody has the same rights and obligations and that there is a consciousness of needs of others on both sides. Besides prior, it is important to “*hold on to the right to defend your own, but to hate no one*”. According to them, in Serbia, relations among different nations are on high level, and any obstacle to their further developing comes from outside intervening. Besides, consequences of events in these parts “*had to stay engraved somewhere*”.

6. Conclusions

Preceding text gives an overview of the complexity of the phenomena describing the last twenty years’ period. It can be concluded that image changes into two separate poles on the value scale.

One can, by observing young engaged experts in this research, see that there is a deep division in regards of nationalism, national identity and consciousness. Study has shown that non-nationally and nationally oriented respondents can be observed as two faces of the god Janus. One is turned towards the future, observing nationalism as a relic that should be eliminated by persistent work on changing social consciousness. Second face, turned towards the past, is accenting conservation of traditional values, a certain level of self-sufficiency, and independence in the globalised world.

Nationally oriented respondents ascribe to non-nationally oriented ones that their views are too progressive and damaging for the national identity and preservation of national consciousness. What one find very meaningful the other sees as insignificant or harmful.

Analysis of acquired data led to perception that the notion of nationalism, national identity and belonging is very diverse, even opposite. The question poses it self on how to proceed in defining basic directions of further research of these matters.

Searching for such common ground, I see the best way to define nationalism as *existing consciousness which, in any sense, gives advantage to members of their own nation over another*. This definition allows avoiding obstacles that can be presented as the origin of nationalism or understanding of nation as community of origin or citizens. Definition is wide enough to cower any expression of nationalism regardless the orientation.

National identity I observe as a construction of common subject matter, meaning beliefs and also attitude towards customs, expressed in the same language, perceived as ones own. National identity has different elements for differently oriented respondents. It is possible to single out several symbols (Kosovo Battle and October the Fifth) that aid us in interpretation of the cases. National identity incorporates national consciousness,

meaning the consciousness on belonging to a specific national group and manifested acceptance of the contents of the national identity. The significance of the national consciousness and identity is yet another differentiating point of the two opposing orientations.

In the end, I hope this study has provided more in detail view of the matters on national problematic. This paper gave a partial overview of the results considering a large quantity of material. But, a lot of questions remains unspoken of and unanswered. In that sense I see this study as just a step in the road of research of specific features of nationalism and national problem in Serbia. Forming a theory is a lasting process, and I see this part as a starting point.

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