The Making of Communal Worlds: English merchants in Imperial St. Petersburg

Although this is a study of a specific community in space and time, that comprising English merchants and their families in St. Petersburg prior to the revolutions of 1917, I have had two ancillary agendas: firstly to examine the construction and maintenance of community at a grass roots level, in that this was a social entity which very much created itself; and secondly, to explore the methodological apparatus encompassed by a discourse-centered perspective on culture and community production, which I believe offers the most promising avenue for ethnographic research currently available. The understandings inherent in a discourse-centered approach are that culture exists in its transmission, in its movement from person to person, from group to group; that meanings are contained in the relationships between words, terms, stretches of talk and in the relationships between these 'concrete' cultural artefacts and the 'objective' world of exteriority - of event, geography, 'others' and macro or global process; and finally, that the metaculture - or talk about culture - which accompanies every phenomenon (including discourse itself), dictates the way every item becomes part of the cultural fabric (or does not, as the case may be).

A discourse-centered approach carries with it a specific methodology. If meaning inheres in circulating discourse and its relationships, then this is the locus of ethnographic inquiry. As the group under analysis is long defunct, the data I have used is drawn from the written material produced by this highly literate, bourgeois, records-orientated collectivity. These have been of a both formal/official and a subjective nature. The Minutes kept by the two major organisations concerned with Anglo-Russian trade span the centuries between the 1500s and the 1900s; British Foreign Office records, the Church Registers and archives of official correspondence have all fleshed out the public profile of the community. Private records have included extensive diaries, letters, visitors books, guest lists, memoirs, photographs and so on. Secondary understandings have been drawn from texts produced by the published writers of the era and, naturally, contemporary anthropology and social and economic history. My principal sources in this latter category have been discourse-centered scholars such as Urban, Silverstein, Sherzer, and a number who, while not specifically working within the paradigm, contribute understandings compatible with it.

The paper begins with a discussion of the theoretical/methodological approach taken throughout then explores the growth of the community over the centuries and the emergence of a reflexive understanding of themselves as comprising 'a society'. This leads into an analysis of what, and whom, they referenced in their use of second person plural pronouns: us, we and our. Chapter five examines sources of tradition and innovation contributing to the cultural 'stuff' of the community, and the bases for acceptance and rejection of cultural items in different fields. Chapter six examines the paths along which discourse moved which, as it was a group densely linked by kin ties, involved an analysis of their 'merchant kinship'. Finally I examine local hegemony and conflict. Throughout its duration it was 'governed' by the local association of merchants, the British Factory and chapters seven and eight explore the workings of this community within a community.

Avainsanat-Nyckelord-Keywords

community - discourse
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Muita tietoja-Övriga uppgifter-Additional information