

IDENTITY AS A SOCIOCULTURAL FACTOR AND A SOURCE OF MODERN ETHNIC CONFLICTS

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Abstract: Ethnic conflict as a destructive phenomenon of modern human civilization is the object of the study. The specific subject under examination is identity that presents one of the characteristic foundations of an ethnic group. The research goal identified by the authors is to conduct an analysis of the identities of the ethnic groups of India, Middle East, and African and European countries to identify their characteristic features and sources, as well as examine them as a sociocultural factor in the system of ethnic conflict origin and development.

The theoretical basis is composed of a set of scientific papers examining the process of the formation of ethnic groups and conflicts, sociological survey results, and statistical data. The methodological foundation of the study is formed by the retrospective analysis of scientific works revealing the process of ethnic group formation and the systematic approach that allowed identifying and justifying the role of identity in the genesis of ethnic groups and the structure of modern ethnic conflicts. The epistemological potential of statistical and sociological methods of quantitative and qualitative research

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made it possible to adequately interpret the current scientific research results regarding the hypothesis proposed by the authors. The novelty of the study and its results are determined by the original approach towards identifying the characteristic features of identity and studying its systemic relationships with the nature of modern ethnic conflicts. The results acquired in the course of the study support the conclusion that identity plays a significant role in the process of ethnic group formation, is closely intertwined with other characteristics of ethnos, and contains a specific structure of elements classified by the authors into three groups. In the context of the formation of dangers and threats to the identity, the ethnic group takes comprehensive action to counter it, which ultimately leads to the emergence and development of the ethnic conflict.

Keywords: ethnos, ethnic conflict, India, European countries, Middle East, Africa, identity, sociocultural factor, society

Introduction

Planet Earth is currently populated by over 7.7 billion people. It is predicted that this number will be

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escalating in the 21st century and, according to demographers, will reach 9.7 billion by 2050. Moreover, said the population will not be distributed evenly across the land, but concentrate primarily in the countries of Africa and Southeast Asia (Nigeria, Indonesia, India, China, etc.). Spectral analysis of humanity shows that its ethnic system is rather complex and includes more than 5,000 different kinds of communities that have united and formed more than 200 mainly multi-ethnic nations. India presents the most striking example of a union of different cultures. Indian society has absorbed several socio-cultural aspects that eventually became the foundation of its civilization. P. Rajeswari notes that the social structure of India has become a unique combination of different religions, cultures, and ethnic groups. Historically, India has been a hospitable land for numerous immigrants and invaders from the remote parts of Europe and Asia. The cultural patterns of the newcomers had been intertwining with the local culture for centuries, creating a magnificent cultural heritage of this society (Rajeswari, n. d.). The uniqueness of the social structure of India lies in its unity along with the diversity of society. Aside from the

2,000 known casts, there are 8 major religions, more than 15 languages with various dialects spoken in 28 states and 9 union territories, as well as a significant number of tribes and sects present.

World history teaches us that the variegated ethnic structure gathered on the same territory within a single country gives rise to various kinds of problems, contradictions, and tensions that in the process of communication of social communities lead to the emergence of conflicts. The number of such conflicts was rising sharply since the mid-1950s until the mid-1990s. Starting from the end of the 1990s, the number of ethnic confrontations started to go down but hit a rise again in 2010. Conflicts in the Balkans (Serbia, Kosovo, Montenegro, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina), the South Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Abkhazia, South Ossetia), Sri Lanka, Ukraine, Rwanda, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Iraq, Indonesia, India, Darfur, as well as the Middle East (Israel, the West Bank, Gaza Strip, Palestine, Syria, Lebanon) are some of the most famous and deadly examples of the modern times.

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This serves as a serious reminder to the 21st-century civilization that the community roots are not a relic of the past but act as an effective force in modern life. Based on this, our study hypothesises that the nature of ethnic conflict lies in the ethnic community defending its identity manifested in its specific features. Ethnic conflict is, therefore, perceived not just as a political event but as a drama challenging the very existence of an ethnic group.

Methods

The methodological foundation of the study was formed by the retrospective analysis of scientific works revealing the process of ethnic group formation and the systematic approach that allowed us to identify and justify the role of identity in the genesis of ethnic groups and the structure of modern ethnic conflicts. The epistemological potential of statistical and sociological methods of quantitative and qualitative research made it possible to adequately interpret the current scientific research results regarding the proposed hypothesis. The novelty of the study and its results are determined by the original approach towards identifying the characteristic features of identity and

studying its systemic relationships with the nature of modern ethnic conflicts.

Discussion

The first step in substantiating the rightfulness of our hypothesis is discussing the scientific views on the nature of ethnos formation that does not have a singular interpretation in modern science. The systemic analysis of the works of the classics of ethnology allows us to identify three major competing scientific schools, each of them being rightful and variously describing the genesis of ethnos and ethnic identity: the primordialist school (L. Gumilev, P. Van den Berg, D. Horowitz, W. Sumner, etc.), the instrumentalist school (W. Schlichting, H. Colborn, D. Smith, V. Tishkov, etc.), and the constructivist school (V. Dominiguez, K. Young, R. Brubaker, B. Anderson, E. Gellner, R. Lipshutz, etc.).

According to primordialists, ethnic identity is incorporated in the inherited biological attributes and the long history of the practice of cultural differences. In particular, D. Horowitz argues that ethnic groups are real and objectively existing human communities that have a certain internal substance called “ethnicity” and due to this fact one

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ethnic group differs from another in certain features. Kinship “makes it possible for ethnic groups to think of one another in terms of family similarities” (Horowitz, 1985). One can agree with this approach since history demonstrates that the mobilization of identity and nationalism nurtured on its base present a powerful tool for achieving the goals of an ethnos. For example, the concept of ethnicity has become a critical variable in the formation and reform of countries. Some researchers argue that the division of colonial India into two new countries, India and Pakistan, is rooted in the ethnic identities of the two peoples. What followed much later in the form of emergence of a mono-ethnic country of Bangladesh in 1971 (98% of the population are Bengali) has become the next step in the development of the ethnic separatist movement.

The approach introduced by L. Gumilev is no less important for the support of our hypothesis. Gumilev believed the process of ethnogenesis to be associated with the creation of an ethnic field that has a physical nature and is characterized by an oscillation frequency. Passionaries are attracted to each other because their passionary fields oscillate with the same frequency.

They then “infect” other people with their ideas and lead them, passing along their vibration rhythm (Gumilev, 1992; Gumilev, 1991). The ethnic field of each ethnos is also active while coming across other ethnoses. If the oscillations of the fields match and are harmonious, the ethnoses will become friendly to each other and feel the so-called complementarity – a subconscious sense of disposition. If the oscillations do not match, the contact will be impossible or extremely difficult and people will sense the presence of a “stranger” (Zelenkov, 2015a; Zelenkov, 2015b; Zelenkov, 2006).

At the same time, the analysis of the scientific works of a range of sociologists and political scientists demonstrates that they reject the above-mentioned approach in favor of viewing the institutional, political, and economic confrontation as the cause of ethnic conflicts. For example, professor V. Suvorov presents his idea that the ethnic conflicts of the 20th century in “Lebanon, Sri Lanka, East Timor, Northern Ireland, Cyprus, Eritrea, Burundi, South Africa, Western Sahara, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Pakistan, and Canada present the form of political confrontation between an ethnic group

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and an ethnocratic state, i.e. a state controlled by a dominant ethnic group” (Suvorov, 2004). R. Lipshutz notes on this: “What became known as ethnic conflict is nothing more and nothing less than a struggle for state power” (Lipshutz, 1998).

This one-sided view, however, is difficult to agree with. Numerous ethnic groups exist across Africa, each having its unique culture, infrastructure, and political institutes. Given this diversity, the great number of civil wars and genocides that have happened in Africa and were directly related to the cracks in the relationships that developed on the base of ethnicity is not surprising. Not that long ago four African countries (Mali, Niger, Sudan, and Chad) survived riots and civil wars that were based on ethnic or racial differences. C. Cordell and S. Wolf agree with us on this point and define ethnic conflict as a situation where goals, at least on one of the opposing sides, are defined exclusively in ethnic terms and the mainline of confrontation is one of the ethnic differences (Cordell & Wolff, 2010).

Turning to the constructivist theory, we should note that its representatives deny the very existence of ethnicity and believe that ethnicity is

not a relation by blood or genetics but the result of a social agreement. Identity is created by social interactions between people and groups and, therefore, remains outside the scope of a person's choice but can change along with the social conditions. P. Weinreich indicates that people can avoid situations where their ethnic identity is disputed, threatened, humiliated, or criticized (Weinreich, 1986). Although separate subjects can not avoid the existence of ethnic differences, they decide what to do with them on their own. Since identity, in this case, is objective and not subjective, only the person's self-identity is important, i.e. the way a given social group representing as a separate ethnos calls themselves, how they describe their identification "character", etc. For example, B. Anderson claims that a nation is an imagined political community and it is imagined as something inevitably limited but sovereign (Anderson, 2001).

This theory is echoed by the representatives of the instrumentalist school who usually do not oppose identity but also consider ethnic differences not sufficient enough to explain the nature of ethnic conflicts (Schlichting, 1997; Smith, 2003).

According to the instrumentalists, ethnic identity is a result of personal choice and is mostly independent of the situational context or the presence of cultural or biological characteristics. An ethnic conflict emerges when ethnos compete for the same goal – especially power, access to resources, or territory. The selfish interests of the elite of society play a more important role in mobilizing ethnic groups for confrontation. Ethnic conflict is, in this case, identical to the conflicts based on political interests.

However, this approach can also be invalidated by theory and practice. E. Irobi notes that "in Africa, where poverty and deprivation become endemic mainly due to distributive injustice it is the identity that remains the most effective means of survival, rallying, and mobilization of ethnic groups in order to achieve the goals of their leaders" (Irobi, 2005). T. Gurr, D. Rothschild, and E. Azar also consider the modern ethnic conflicts taking place on the African continent to have deep racial, linguistic, and religious roots.

Ethnic identity has a great impact on social status. For that reason, ethnic conflicts often present an attempt of a certain group to acquire more power or access a significant amount of

resources. For example, the poverty levels in modern India are currently generally declining, however, this does not apply to Adivasi (the “tribal” people; poverty is experienced by 45% of Adivasi in the rural areas and by 27% in the urban areas), the Dalits (former “untouchables”, poverty experienced by 34% and 22%, respectively), and Muslims (poverty experienced by 27% and 23%, respectively). At the same time, in 2011-2012 among the Indians of the highest caste the poverty level reached only 16% in the rural areas and 8% in the urban areas (Khan, 2015).

The formation of an ethnos is based on an identity that can become a source of contradictions and lead to the emergence of ethnic conflict under the influence of various factors. However, it should also be noted that ethnic conflicts do not include all the tensions between ethnic communities but only those that occur under the influence of chauvinism or nationalism and are led by their political entrepreneurs. Since gaining independence in 1962, Burundi has experienced several episodes of mass violence, including massacres in 1972, 1988, and in the early 1990s, which led to a 12-year civil war (more than 300,000 people killed). The problem of this

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ethnic conflict arises from the confrontation between the two ethnic groups, Hutu and Tutsi, and is interconnected with the social and economic factors and the history of discriminatory politics. The history of Burundi mirrors the history of Rwanda. Both countries are populated by the same ethnic groups that survived the massive violence of ethnocracy. In Rwanda, the repressive government of Hutu conducted the genocide of Tutsi in 1994 and in Burundi, the identical Tutsi government committed mass violence against the Hutu. Both governments forgot that the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide of October 9, 1948 (the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, 1948) established that genocide, regardless of whether it is committed in peace or during wartime, is a crime that violates international law.

Ethnic identity is defined as a person’s recognition, feelings, and affection towards an ethnic group. Studies by T. Smith and L. Silva confirmed that ethnic identity is a critically important component of a person’s self-esteem and is connected to dignity and psychological adaptation

(Smith & Silva, 2011). For example, today, people of different ethnic groups from Africa and the Middle East immigrate and move to other regions or countries (Germany, Belgium, France, and other states of the European Union) in search of a better life, which in turn often leads to outbreaks of ethnic violence in these territories. M. Verkuyten explains this phenomenon in the following way: the representatives of ethnic minorities have a cultural origin that is different from that of the native people of a certain country. Immigrants cannot simply abandon their childhood and everything they recognized as their culture (Verkuyten, 2012). The religious component of culture makes the existing differences even worse, since people of Christian and Muslim ethnoses may use religion to rationalize radical actions.

Identity as a sociocultural factor can change depending on the situation or over time. The representatives of the ethnos choose what features of their identity they do or do not want to support in certain situations. For example, the Kurds in Turkey have long been associated with various negative images prompting them to downplay their ethnicity. Only when a large number of Kurds went to Germany as labor

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migrants after World War II they were finally able to study in the Kurdish language (in accordance with the German law, all students have the right for primary education in their national language and not the language of the German state).

The analysis demonstrates that the approach most similar to our hypothesis is the one introduced by a professor of London School of economics, E. Smith, who identified the following characteristics of communal identity: common historic experience and memories, the mythology of common origin; common culture (language, religion, laws, customs, clothes, music, crafts, architecture, food); connection to the historic territory (Encyclopædia Britannica, n.d.). In addition, similarly to our hypothesis, O. Khalliste included the following factors into the structure of identity: public consciousness (language, self-awareness, norms of behavior, traditions, customs, etc.), cultural monuments (documents, artifacts), and the unconscious (archetypes, ethnic gene pool) (Khalliste, 2015).

Most countries of the world confront the problems of ethnic diversity regularly. The presence of the competing

ethnic groups in a single country generally signifies that maintaining sovereign statehood requires the cultivation of national identity. This goal can be achieved either by expanding and strengthening the identity of the indigenous ethnos imposed on other groups of “less” indigenous people, usually on minorities or by developing a new supra-ethnic identity that treats different ethnic groups equally. In any case, an ethnic conflict should be expected. The problem thus resides in the need to reconcile these two aspects quickly and smoothly to counter the threat of ethnic conflict escalation.

Results

The conducted study demonstrated that there are certain characteristics of an ethnic group that correlate with the nature of ethnic conflict genesis quite deeply and the impact centered on these factors allows countering the threat of ethnic conflict genesis and development. The classification of these traits allowed us to reduce the list to three main groups. The results of the study are described below.

1. Own name, history, and mythology of origin and development. A name is

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important not only for the self-determination of an ethnic group but also as a symbol, an exponent of the collective “personality” emblem. Oftentimes the name presents an informative indicator of the genesis of an ethnos. History demonstrates that the historic memory of ancestors presents an effective destructive identity characteristic that introduces a socially constructed “image of an enemy” into the public consciousness of the ethnos which further allows to:

justify the previously committed acts,

focus on the negative historical experience of the ethnos,

identify an external historical enemy who will then be blamed for the current unsatisfactory position of the ethnic group.

As a result, the past begins to be perceived through the prism of the present.

The most striking example is the ethnic conflict between Armenia and Turkey that flared up anew at the end of the 20th century over the tragic events of 1915 when more than 200,000 of Armenians died innocently. A good example is also presented by the Baltic countries (Estonia, Latvia, and

Lithuania), where historically a part of the modern society rejects everything related to the USSR, commemorates and glorifies the veterans of the Wehrmacht divisions, and falsifies historical events via false interpretations.

The Russian-Polish relationships tracing its history from the late Middle Ages are also currently problematic. For many centuries, as a result of armed conflicts between the two peoples (1558-1583 – the Livonian war, 1609-1618, 1654-1667, 1792 – the Russian-Polish wars, 1632-1634 – the Smolensk war, 1919-1921 – the Soviet-Polish war, etc.), the struggle for border territories and sovereignty was present. A new stage of deconstructive development of this relationship was entered after the collapse of the USSR. According to the World Service survey (2013), only 19% of Poles reported a positive attitude towards Russia and 49% expressed a negative attitude. After the return of Crimea as the Russian territory (2014), more than 60-80% of Poles worried about a future conflict with Russia.

J. Eller indicates that ethnoses will go to great lengths to discover and systematize the past in which they lived, prevailed, excelled, and dominated rival

groups or in which they were defeated or disgraced by these groups. Both versions of the story equally call for action. In the process of “nation-building”, the groups often highlight that the state of national history is the national priority (Eller, 1997). The practice of ethnic groups gaining sovereignty in the late 20th – early 21st centuries shows that ethnic groups can mythologize their history to comply with the current political and geographical realities. The Ukrainian ethnos, for example, is currently in the process of an active and aggressive mythologization of its genesis, the search sometimes reaching the point of absurdity. The historian, P. Iushchenko, the brother of the ex-president of Ukraine, V. Iushchenko, argued that the Scythian philosopher-wanderer Anaharsis and the founder of the school of cynics, the ancient Greek sage Diogenes of Synapse, both spoke Ukrainian. According to P. Iushchenko, “Anaharsis wrote maxims in this language, then they, together with Solon, created the foundations of legal philosophy and 300 years later, Diogenes recommended using this language for public affairs” (Drevnegrecheskii Diogen znal ukrainskii iazyk, 2017).

2. Common culture (language, religion, traditions, customs, clothes, music, crafts, architecture, food).

This set of identity characteristics shared by the members of an ethnos determines their everyday lifestyle and, therefore, distinguishes them from other ethnoses (since 2014, this element has become quite evident in the process of the emergence of migrants from North Africa and the Middle East in the countries of the European Union). Another example is India, a civilization with ingrained cultures and traditions. With the presence of such a background, the attempts of the authorities in large cities like New Delhi, Gurgaon, Mumbai, and Bangalore to imitate the Western cities in their urban infrastructure models were catastrophic. This is related primarily to the majority of the regions of the country, especially the rural areas, rejecting the exogenous traditions and fully aware of the lack of congruence of their interests. At the same time, the lower-class ethnic minority experienced this as a “historical injustice” and developed a natural desire to restore justice by both peaceful and armed means. As a result, the ethnos rallied around the idea of “revenge”.

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In the process of defending their identity, the representatives of ethnoses refer to traditions, customs, and symbolism. Usually, their culture has to be contrasted with the “alien” culture of another ethnic group in the process of increased interethnic exclusion manifesting in the promotion of ethnically homogeneous marriages, mono-ethnic communication, the minimization of contacts with the foreign ethnic environment except for the inevitable interactions within professional or household settings (Zelenkov, 2012). A major role in this process is also played by language – a powerful identity indicator. Linguistic confrontation often presents a source of increased sociocultural barrier between the ethnoses residing on the same territory (for example, the expansion of the communicative distance between the Russians and the Ukrainians in Ukraine began not in 2014 when the Maidan happened but much earlier; oftentimes in Ukrainian cities, especially in Kyiv and in Western Ukraine, in response to a question asked in Russian e heard a Ukrainian answer us with the following phrase spoken in pure Russian: “*I do not understand Russian!*”).

The separation also expands due to the lack of correlation between the behavioral stereotypes of ethnoses. For instance, India's cast system of hierarchical social organization has been developed and practiced almost since the beginning of early human civilization. As a result, it formed the foundation of the Indian pluralistic social structure. However, the importance of caste often remains a mystery to the representatives of the Western culture, confusing it with the class division. From the point of identity, the importance of the caste system lies in the fact that castes are found not only among the Indians strictly preserving and practicing this system but also to some extent among the Indian Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Jains, and Jews.

The dialectics of the relationship between identity and ethnic conflict are also heavily influenced by *the religious factor*. This is related to the fact that the ethnic and the religious always interact and are closely intertwined. Religion is an integral part of the culture of the ethnos that stimulates its development and acts as the guardian of values, customs, and traditions. It is not surprising that the President of the Russian Federation, V.

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Putin, considers it appropriate to supplement article 67 of the Constitution with the following words: "The Russian Federation, united by a thousand-year history, preserving the memory of the ancestors who transmitted ideals and faith in God to us, [...] recognizes the historically established unity of the state". When contradictions arise between the ethnic groups, religion automatically plays the supporting role for ethnic interests and requirements, thereby contributing to the struggle against the non-believers (Orthodox Cyprus – Muslim Northern Cyprus, Orthodox Serbia – Muslim Kosovo, India – the hostility of Hindus and Muslims associated with the history of Muslim rulers' invasions centuries earlier). This results in the religious factor acting as a catalyst for the process of the ethnic conflict emergence, especially if the ethnic groups participating in the conflict hold different beliefs.

To be fair, we should note that the practice of ethnic conflicts of recent decades illustrates that the ethnic factor often turns out to be a stronger accelerator than the religious one, especially if the ethnic groups belong to the same religion. Despite the unity of

faith of the indigenous peoples of Central Asia, in the late 20th – early 21st centuries conflicts were arising between the Kyrgyz and Uzbeks, Tajiks and Kyrgyz, Uzbeks and Meskhetian Turks. Another conclusive example is presented by the religious specter of India that as a secular country, does not have an official state religion. Indian Constitution allows for freedom of religion and belief. The amazing diversity of India is reflected in the number of religions and faiths practiced by the Indian people, some of them originating from the Indian land and others brought about by consistent political and cultural invasions. Nevertheless, religion cannot be considered the basic characteristic of identity since there are ethnic groups professing multiple religions (Arabs, Russians, Jews, etc.).

3. The historical territory of the ethnic group serving as the basis of the economic and political structure and the basic unit in the life of the ethnos.

In the consciousness of mankind, most ethnic groups are identified with a specific territory that is not only a living environment but also the historical place of birth of a particular ethnic group (Homeland, Fatherland,

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etc.). For example, Serbia denies the right ethnic Albanians have for Kosovo due to the historically important (for the Serbian identity) battle that took place on the Kosovo field in the 14th century.

This characteristic of identity emerges when it comes to the reunion of ethnic groups fragmented in the past or the demarcation of ethnic groups living on the same territory in a single country (Germans of the Volga region, Arabs in the Middle East, the population of Punjab in India, Crimean Tatars, etc.). Moreover, the right of another ethnic group to reside in the disputed territory (Jews in Israel) may also be debated. The consequences of this characteristic of identity emerging include “an internal, political, and often armed conflict between the government in power and a national liberation movement or a separatist group that has the political and military support of the neighboring state” (Zelenkov, 2006). The prime examples for this are the situations in Nagorno-Karabakh (Armenia – Azerbaijan), South Ossetia, Abkhazia, and Georgia, Transnistria and the Republic of Moldova, the Middle East (Jews – Arabs).

Conclusion

Thus, an ethnic crisis “ripens” in the mass consciousness of an ethnos along with it becoming aware of the discrimination of its identity. Ethnic identity has more importance for the ethnos than political or economic factors. History teaches us that ethnic groups that form based on economic reasons are easily disbanded upon reaching the goal.

Most major ethnic conflicts are rooted deeply in history. Even if the historic roots of the conflict are lacking, the opposing sides tend to create them by the means of pseudo-historical research, for example: “Our ancestors have always been lived here!”. The characteristics of identity defended in the course of ethnic conflicts (language, culture, customs, traditions, life, religion, territories, etc.) compose the everyday life of every representative of the ethnos which is the exact factor ensuring the mass nature of the movement in its defense.

Ethnic conflicts are “chronic” in nature, they do not have a final resolution since an ethnos is unable to change the characteristics of their identity in an instance. In certain cases, this process takes millennia to complete. We can, therefore, conclude the rightfulness of the proposed hypothesis.

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