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ESCALATION OF ETHNOPOLITICAL CONFLICTS: RATIONAL CALCULATION OF THE ELITES AND THE EMOTIONAL REACTION OF THE MASSES

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Abstract. The authors of the article have tasked themselves with demonstrating that ethno-political conflicts always have a significant emotional component, which lies in cultural stereotypes, unmet (imaginary and real) expectations, historical grievances, parties' mythologized ideas about each other, etc. In turn, the rejection of any dissent by the conflict parties determines a dualistic view of the world, which demonstrates the division into absolute good and absolute evil, and leads to a tough confrontation between the carriers of the "highest truth" with those who prevent its implementation. The authors emphasize that it is due to this excessive emotional component actualized by the demands of ethnic identity that ethno-political conflicts are characterized by a high degree of irrationality, expressed in a huge potential for aggressiveness and hostility, far beyond the rational awareness of the interests of the conflict parties, and the choice of a strategy for interaction and search for a compromise. A particularly rapid escalation of conflict occurs when an ethnic group tends to perceive itself as a "victim" of value claims on the part of "alien" groups. However, the authors believe that it is impossible to reduce the ethno-political conflict solely to the affective behavior of its participants. Long-term use of violence is a social process; therefore, it cannot be based only on strong emotions, but, on the contrary, has to presuppose the development of certain norms, sanctions, roles, etc. That is, violence must be rationalized, explained and channeled. Therefore, the authors emphasize the crucial role of "ethnic entrepreneurs" in the escalation of ethno-political conflicts. Their activity can be viewed as a "production of ideological conflicts", i.e., as a deliberate indoctrination of ordinary conflict participants in order to strengthen ethnic solidarity and/or armed struggle as a means of "national liberation" and achievement of other goals that are significant to ethnic entrepreneurs. Consequently, since emotions cannot be completely separated from rational thinking, the nature of most ethno-political conflicts depends both on subjective factors and on objective structural elements. Thus, all of them, combining rational and emotional activities, in one proportion or another, produce three types of conflicts: the struggle for resources, the clash of interests, the emotional upholding of ethnocultural identity.

Keywords: ethno-political conflict; ethnic and national identity; nationalism; irrationalism; resentment; escalation; ethnic entrepreneurship

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Научная статья

ЭСКАЛАЦИЯ ЭТНОПОЛИТИЧЕСКИХ КОНФЛИКТОВ: РАЦИОНАЛЬНЫЙ РАСЧЕТ ЭЛИТ И ЭМОЦИОНАЛЬНАЯ РЕАКЦИЯ МАСС

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Аннотация. Этнополитические конфликты имеют весомую эмоциональную составляющую, которая кроется в культурных стереотипах, неудовлетворенных интересах, исторических обидах, мифологизированных представлениях сторон друг о друге. Однако эмоции невозможно полностью отделить от рационального мышления, поскольку применение насилия в конфликте должно быть рационализировано, объяснено и канализировано, что является задачей «этнических антрепренеров».

Ключевые слова: этнополитический конфликт элиты, этническая и национальная идентичность, национализм, иррационализм, ресентимент, эскалация, этническое предпринимательство

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Ethnic identity structure

In social identity structure, two main components are always presented – cognitive (knowledge, ideas about the characteristics of one's own group and awareness of oneself as a member of it, based on certain characteristics and markers, knowledge about the so-called "Significant Others") and affective (emotional assessment of the qualities of one's own group, attitude to membership in it, the significance of this membership, the assessment of Significant Others). However, the significance of these components in each specific case of identification may be different. As noted by Donald Horowitz, a well-known researcher of ethnopolitical conflicts, there is a clear difference in the definition of ethnic groups as strong, long-term communities which are hostile to the outsiders, prone to ethnocentrism and violent conflict, on the one hand, or as social constructs based on material gain, whose conflict behavior is the result of calculation, on the other. This difference, however, must be replaced by a synthesis based on the understanding of ethnicity as a powerful community (Gemeinschaft), capable of prompting both rational and emotional actions [1. P. 29].

The nature of the psychological bonds that unite an ethnic community and a nation, distinguishing it from other communities, is complex, ambiguous and, as Sigmund Freud emphasized, not rational in many ways, but rather emotional and even subconscious. Furthermore, Max Weber called the nation a "community of feelings" striving to be embodied in a political form. This is the reason why ethnic and national identities can be viewed as emotional and sensory categories. They are "experienced" by us which ipso facto is not a completely rational action. Therefore, we can talk about a sense of patriotism, a sense of national dignity or national humiliation. Patriotism is often "constructed" by the state, through the system of socialization,

civic education and patriotic upbringing [2], but it is a “construction of feelings”, and not a purely rational attitude to one’s homeland and nation.

The blurring of status’ differences within a nation through shared feelings of national pride and superiority, which can be expressed to external groups, contains, even given its transitory nature, a strong emotional appeal to the masses, since it raises the honor in the eyes of the beholder. The most important political consequence of nationalism’s call for the status aspirations of the lower classes is the ease with which internal social conflicts can be translated into external, national ones [3. P. 111–112]. Thus, at a personal level, ethnicity, as well as nationality, is primarily a special form of sensual/emotional self-identification. Researchers point to the dual nature of nationalism, capable of acting both in the form of ideology and in the form of sensation (emotion). According to Adam Smith, nationalism-sensation had already existed at the pre-national level as an emotion associated with the group identity of an ethnocultural group, while the phenomenon of nationalism as an ideology emerged only in the modern period (17th–18th centuries) and was directly related to the formation of the first nation states in Europe and North America [4. P. 254].

The emotional component of an ethnopolitical conflict

Particularly emotionally meaningful is the perception of those real and imaginary threats that are essential for the security of the identity, status and self-preservation of an ethnic group. Ethnicity embodies an element of powerful emotional tension that can be reactivated, especially if groups perceive a threat to their own interests, which leads to intensification of ethnic intolerance, competition and, ultimately, to violent ethnic conflict [5. P. 127]. Indeed, very often the psychological determinants of the ethnopolitical conflict development are based on an irrational emotional principle – a feeling of “*ressentiment*” that lies in cultural stereotypes, unmet expectations, historical grievances, mythologized hostile ideas of the parties about each other, etc. The concept of *ressentiment*, initially introduced by Friedrich Nietzsche (“Zur Genealogie der Moral”, 1887), in its most general form, can be defined as a feeling of hostility towards something (or someone) the subject considers the cause of his failures. According to a later interpretation by Max Scheler, *ressentiment* is a long-term speculative representation caused by the systematic suppression of certain emotions: revenge, anger, envy, desire to humiliate, resentment [6. P. 45].

The widespread feeling of *ressentiment* leads to the accumulation of discontent, tending to politicize, which in turn, potentially, under certain circumstances, can be transformed into political violence. This collective potential for violence will be the highest in the country (region) where the majority of citizens feel acutely deprived of the goals that are of greatest value to them, at the same time deprived – both individually and collectively – of constructive means to the achievement of these goals, and equally deprived of the opportunity to act through non-violent methods, obeying the impulse of their anger instead [7. P. 142]. Moreover, in ethnic conflicts, for ordinary participants the emotional and psychological factor of the common agenda involvement is important. This so-called “pleasure of agency” (Elisabeth Jean Wood) motivated many participants to collective actions, be it mass political rallies or a military struggle against the state and its army [8. P. 647].

The tension of confrontation and fears of the participants in an ethno-political conflict form a special resource, which makes the use of violence an almost inevitable outcome of psychological confrontation in a situation when one of the parties, unable to withstand psychological stress, loses self-confidence (which leads to factionalism and passivity), and the other, on the contrary, gains confidence and takes the initiative. Herein, a tipping point, a strong collective emotional impulse, is extremely important, since after the establishment of complete emotional dominance, the likelihood of mass violence rises sharply [9. P. 19–20]. After the escalation of an ethno-political conflict into an armed form, revenge for the dead also becomes an important motive for participating in the conflict. At the same time, the harm inflicted is systematically exaggerated by the victims and underestimated by the offenders, resulting in retaliation that looks justified in the eyes of the earlier victims, but is perceived by their new victims as an unconditional evil. As a result, the cycle of violence intensifies.

Rejection of any dissent in the group under the conditions of acute conflict determines a dualistic view of the world, where there is a division into absolute good and absolute evil, which in turn provokes an even tougher confrontation between the bearers of the “highest truth” and those who hinder its achievement. This excessive emotional component of the actualized ethnic identity is the reason that ethno-political conflicts are characterized by a high degree of irrationality, expressed in a huge potential of aggressiveness, hatred and hostility, far beyond the rational awareness of the interests of the conflict parties, which in fact excludes the choice of an interaction strategy and the search for a compromise. Acute emotional experience narrows the range of categories used to describe social experience; in extreme cases it all comes down to two categories – either “with us” or “against us.”

One of the essential dynamic indicators of an ethno-political conflict associated with an irrational element in the parties' actions is a high potential for conflict escalation and its rapid development. Thus, researchers have empirically proved that the possibility of an ethnic conflict transition into an armed confrontation with the central government is twice as high as that for other types of internal conflicts. And the chances that an internal armed conflict will evolve into an interstate war are four times higher specifically for ethnic conflicts [10. P. 143]. However, as David Horowitz notes, Mass “objectified” anger is an integral part of large-scale interethnic riots. Nevertheless, the spontaneous mass outrage soon attracts the attention of those who, expecting to benefit from imminent violence, will try to provoke further mass demonstrations, using (and, undoubtedly, trying to exacerbate) the hostile feelings of those in whose participation they are interested. However, for the successful functioning of a structured community, an emotional component must be initially present. Calculation can mobilize people driven by similar feelings, but only feelings are capable of “total mobilization” [1. P. 36–37].

At the same time, “anger”, “fear” and “frustration” are not only emotions, given that they cannot be completely separated from the process of rational thinking. Anger, fear and frustration always have reasons, and some conflict parties are quite capable of not only formulating them, but also using them to their advantage. Moreover, a protracted ethno-political conflict already presupposes the development of certain norms, sanctions, roles and methods of communication, *i.e.*, it requires planning and calculation, since the cohesion of the group and the willingness to participate in the conflict can no longer be based solely on emotions.

Ethno-political contradictions become especially acute if the subject of the conflict is a disputed territory with country's basic resources or with territoriality problems. In such circumstances, a relatively weak loyalty to the nation can quickly become a powerful force, combined with the belief that one's own nation is being denied its rights [11. P. 200]. As a result, each of the ethno-political conflict parties is ready for the most decisive actions in order to resolve the issue of disputed territory in its favor. The danger of the escalation of an interethnic conflict into a violent phase is especially great, when both conflict parties are fighting for control over the disputed territory, which they regard as the "original territory", the "historical homeland" of their ethnic group. In this case, the very idea of territorial concessions as a form of reaching a compromise is perceived as "sacrilege" by the conflict parties.

Analyzing the Kyrgyz-Uzbek conflict in the town of Osh in June 2010, researchers noted an irreconcilable contradiction of two nationalisms, both simultaneously claiming the land as "their" land, and the status of "indigenous people" and "majority", which made political interaction very difficult [8. P. 33]. The same can be said about many ethno-political conflicts in the post-Soviet landscape and in the countries of the former Yugoslavia. Likewise, this contradiction fully manifested itself in the mutually exclusive narratives of Israel and Palestine regarding the problem of the creation of Israel in 1948. Thus, for the Israelis, the emergence of the state was the realization of the Jewish people's legal rights to return to the land of their ancestors and was not viewed as injustice towards the Arab population of Palestine, since they did not constitute a separate nation and had never had sovereignty on the territory in question. For the Palestinians, who perceived the Jews as a religious group, and not as a nation in need of their own state, who saw Zionism as a form of colonialism, the emergence of the Jewish state was considered as the usurpation of territory by the European settlers who forcibly displaced the indigenous population, destroyed their society, property and way of life.

Therefore, the protracted nature of ethno-political conflicts and the complete domination of the destructive potential over its constructive component are largely determined by the fact that the conflict parties, as a rule, have different value systems. Indeed, people are unlikely to deliberately risk their lives for the sake of satisfying their material interests. Contrariwise, in identity conflicts, the participation of the parties has an obvious sacrificial nature; the willingness to make sacrifices for the sake of identification and value ideals is emotionally experienced and realized by the conflict participants. An escalation of tension occurs when an ethnic group tends to perceive itself as a "victim" of "alien" groups' value claims [12. P. 147].

The role of "ethnic entrepreneurs" in the politicization of ethnicity

A crucial role in the ethnic conflict's escalation, and its transformation into an ethno-political one, is played by the activities of "ethnic entrepreneurs" who seek to unite their people, the "true people", sharply opposing those who, from their perspective, do not fit the description. In other words, their activity is always identity politics. At the same time, the polarization of society taking place in the process of this opposition is perceived not as "collateral damage", but as a way of fighting for power and its preservation. Characterizing the activities of ethnic

entrepreneurs, one can speak of “ideological conflict production” (Vladimir Malakhov), *i.e.*, the deliberate indoctrination of ordinary conflict participants in order to strengthen ethnic solidarity and armed struggle for equality of opportunities, higher status or for the sake of achieving “national liberation”. However, in order to be able to manipulate the masses, ethnic entrepreneurs need to “pull the heartstrings of people which can respond” (Leokadiya Drobizheva).

American anthropologist David Kertzer argues that people do not construct their fundamental political beliefs by critically analyzing rival political ideas and programs. They tend to obtain them from the outside, from the society in which they live, and these ideas and programs are largely controlled by those who exercise political and ideological hegemony. However, the political convictions of the masses can change. Furthermore, the role of beliefs is often exaggerated: political behavior of people is often explained by emotional reaction to events and context, rather than by the desire to follow their beliefs [13. P. 62, 67–70]. Moreover, it would be a mistake to consider the addressees of the elite’s narrative only as passive consumers of ideas and programs. The processes of encoding and decoding of the proposed meanings and symbols do not always coincide, which may lead to the emergence of alternative versions of the interpretation of the narrative spread by the elites, and even an unexpected reaction to their calls. As many researchers emphasize, the motivations of the elites and the masses do not always correspond to each other, even if the goals of conflict actions are coordinated, and primarily because the former are guided by rational political calculation, while the latter are driven by predominantly spontaneous collective feelings and strong emotions.

In addition, the strategy of group behavior is not always conscious, explicit, and is not necessarily a consequence of ethno-political mobilization, but can manifest itself in typical, custom-sanctified forms of behavior of ethnic communities’ representatives. As a result, the status, interests and real goals of the elites do not always allow for successful implementation of the strategy of ethno-entrepreneurship and “ethnic groups” manipulation; therefore, it would be a mistake to consider nationalism in purely instrumental terms, focusing only on the manipulative actions of rational elites which pursue their own interests. Elites themselves, while setting goals and constructing meanings, act within the framework of socially shared systems of meanings and, participating in its production and reproduction, obey its logic [14. P. 10].

Conclusion

Finally, it can be concluded that the majority of ethno-political conflicts should be regarded in the form of dynamic processes that include both subjective attributes (emotions, needs, interests) and presumably objective structural features (*e.g.*, unequal access to resources). Consequently, if one relies solely on either subjectivist approach or objectivist approach, then many of the subtleties of the conflict could be missed [15. P. 53]. Moreover, it should be emphasized that ethnic conflict caused by the clash of so-called “ethnic interests” and external manipulations can be interpreted by interested elites as a quasi-natural process and from this perspective as a “natural”, immanent state of interethnic relations. In this sense, the authorities, in principle, are not responsible for the emergence of conflicts. Since ethnic conflicts threaten the society and security of state, the

authorities are obliged to respond to this challenge. At the same time, the rhetoric of “conflict prevention” and “ensuring interethnic harmony” can be used for precisely opposite objectives, in particular for “legalization of discriminatory practices” [16. P. 65–66].

Therefore, an important particularity of ethnopolitical conflicts is the fact that all of them combine rational and affective actions, based on which, to one degree or another, three types of conflicts are produced: the struggle for resources, the clash of interests, and the emotional defense of ethnocultural identity.

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