

Extra-Political Analysis of Interethnic Relations

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ABSTRACT

The article discusses the main psychological mechanisms that contribute to the formation of interethnic conflicts. The author describes the following psychological phenomena: historical mental trauma inflicted by a hostile group; narcissism of small differences; identification with the aggressor; transmission of traumatic experiences to the next generations; division of all ideas and all people into 'we' and 'they'; importance of culture and language in the formation and personality's social functioning. The conclusion substantiates an original hypothesis about the intensification of interethnic conflicts around the world in the twenty-first century.

Keywords: mental trauma caused by a hostile group, interethnic conflicts, war.

In this article we will address the most general questions and psychological mechanisms of interethnic conflicts and mass mental trauma (3). At first, I would like to note one of its main specifics. When a mass psychic trauma is the result of some ecological or man-made disaster, it usually undergoes specific transformations and, regardless of whether the victims believe in God or not, such events are most often interpreted as "God sending us new trials". They are to be lived through. And gradually traumatic experiences "blink" and pass as if in "an autonomous mode" within 3-5 years.

A totally different situation develops when a hostile group inflicts a mass mental trauma, as it happens in the case of interethnic conflicts, terrorist acts and wars. In these cases, qualitatively different psychological mechanisms start to operate, the most essential of which are projection and projective identification, characteristics of clinical paranoia (5, 11). In its most primitive form, this psychological phenomenon is expressed by the formula: "It is not me who hates and persecutes X, it is he who hates and persecutes me".

And such a collective (pathological in its essence) "shift" in assessments of such situations can last for decades and even centuries. And depending on the ideology and position of the state elite such a (paranoid) shift can be formed in the population of an entire country in a fairly short period. Remember that Hitler came to power in one of the most cultured and civilized countries in Europe in 1933, and in 6 years almost the entire population of the country got infected with the ideas of Nazism and fascism. But it all began with small (aggressive) assault squads of "browns" - essentially a people's militia, acting to maintain public order during the national crisis following Germany's humiliating defeat in World War I. And what happened then? In just 10 years, Hitler's party had 12 million members. Why did this happen?

When an aggressive minority takes power in a country (usually in the capital) and grassroots terror commences, a psychological mechanism kicks in very quickly: the "identification with the aggressor". At its core is fear, and its essence is a primitively simple idea: "If I also become the aggressor, they will not be able to use aggression against me". This is a powerful motivational incentive. And the aggressive minority very quickly becomes the majority.

The mechanism of "identification with the aggressor" acts subconsciously, as a protective mechanism, and at the same time members of such groups form a mythological (justifying *per se*) conviction that "we - the growing aggressive part of the society - are absolutely right and our actions have one or another national or state-guarding reason". Alongside with this conviction, in such groups consistently formed is a cult of strength and cohesion, and a pathological deformation of the personality takes place, in some cases so significantly that it is almost impossible to recognize a former ordinary law-abiding citizen (2, 8). The following psychological phenomenon is extremely important for release of aggression - an image of the enemy (11). It is necessarily to be found or skilfully imposed by the ruling elite, and not somewhere thousands of kilometres away, but nearby, in the neighbourhood. The main thing is that the enemy must be reachable for the release of aggression.

A powerful catalyst for such mass transformations is aestheticization of evil. This is a multifactorial process that stimulates attraction of the aggressive minority, the need to become part of it or, at any rate, the requirement to demonstrate loyalty to the most aggressive part of society. This includes wearing special identifying insignia for "insiders," participating in demonstrations and torchlight marches, creating very brief and vivid unifying slogans, emergence of a new mythology, and glorification of one's own nation, which is always accepted with particular enthusiasm, especially by marginal segments of society. Everyone remembers the slogan of the Nazis: "Germany is above all!"

An independent factor in the formation of aggressive groups is a special morality that liberates the asocial urges usually suppressed by culture. Almost everyone possesses them, but culture prohibits and strictly pursues their manifestations, no matter how strong they may be. But culture as a whole is an extremely fragile social structure (1, 9). As it is well-known, one must keep in mind that along with a lot of lofty ideas, culture is something that imposes prohibitions, and people don't like it too much when they are forbidden to do something. The abolition of prohibitions "for us only" is extremely attractive: "We are allowed to do anything!"

Any masses, when they are already in motion, exhibit a number of other peculiar characteristics: they are highly suggestible and psychologically contagious. At the same time, the thirst for truth is not characteristic to masses, they demand simple solutions formulated in extremely simple slogans. Though the realization of all these mechanisms initially requires another psychological factor - not only the formation of the image of the enemy, but also attributing all possible disgusting to this image (11).

The conditions for formation of any aggressive or even misanthropic ideology are particularly favourable in times of social and economic crises. It is human nature that people do not like to realize their guilt; they try to get rid of it by projecting it outward according to the following formula: "Things are bad in our family, in our national group (in our state) not because I or we

are so bad or have been doing something wrong – it is someone else's fault" (6, 7, 8). And this someone else is easy to be found.

Most often (in the beginning) all the discontent is projected onto a supreme power, as it happened during all the coloured revolutions. But then, under the purposeful influence of the political and state elites, the vector of discontent shifts: either to some national minority in the same state (as it was in Germany in the mid-1930s with the Jews and the Romani), or even to the entire population of some other state. As already noted, the enemy is "suddenly discovered" not somewhere thousands of kilometres away, but somewhere nearby. At the same time, this vector of discontent (which gradually turns into hatred) has real or mythical grounds, most often in the historical past of a particular society about which its majority, especially aggressive young people, usually have very vague ideas. And due to high suggestibility and mental infectivity of those who have come to the movement, any, even the most unimaginable, lie is easily introjected and acquires the form of the nationwide conviction of its exclusivity and historical rightness.

Historical mental traumas may subside, over years and decades, but they always continue to operate, periodically exacerbated (4, 12-13). There are many examples of this kind among related and, no less importantly, neighbouring peoples: Arabs and Jews, Armenians and Azerbaijanis, Serbs and Croats, Englishmen and Irishmen, Spaniards and Catalans, and many others. In the current situation, and this is a qualitatively new psychological phenomenon, it is not even the Russians, but any Russian-speakers, who turned out to be the main enemy in Ukraine (2). It was the Russian language, which was skilfully labelled the ugliest form of the Western Ukrainian dialect that became the main marker of the enemy. The next step to the abyss separating the peoples was the designation (already in the collective West) of the entire centuries-old Russian culture as the enemy and the subject to destruction.

The negative development of all these paranoid processes is catalysed by the "psychology of small differences" (or - "narcissism of small differences"). The essence of this psychological phenomenology can be briefly formulated as follows: "If someone is almost the same as me - in history, in language, in traditions, culture, customs, faith, etc., but slightly different - it is like a caricature of me". Naturally, a caricature of oneself (beloved) is unpleasant and displeasing; and when combined with real or even invented mass mental trauma inflicted by a hostile group, it can become a source of irreconcilable hostility for an indefinite period of history. The issue here is not just about Ukraine. The fact that we Russians just slightly differ from Western Europeans in appearance, modern clothes, level of development, cultural, technical, economic and political achievements is perceived by our former European "partners" with the same hatred - as some unacceptable caricature and even some unwarranted encroachment on their adored Western way of life. They are convinced that those who offer other national traditions and values must be destroyed! This hatred has very definite historical roots. In contrast to us, remembering our losses and our Great Victory, they have never forgotten their defeats in all the "crusades" against Russia. This hatred is equally applicable to the "new Russians from out of town," who brazenly display their wealth and similarly demonstrative adherence to the Western way of life. They are accepted, but more precisely, tolerated, and will be "put down" at any opportunity.

The next psychological factor is "trans-generation transmission". As it has been proved in a number of studies after World War II, survivors' children form a specific memory and a specific

attitude towards the tragic events in the history of their ancestors, which they did not witness and could not have witnessed (10). As a result, one of the psychological tasks of the next generations is the need to keep the memory of their ancestors' trauma alive and to respond to it. In some cases, this task leads to formation of a special psychological phenomenon - "nation's chosen trauma". The most famous version of such a chosen trauma is the Holocaust - the memory of the extermination of 6 million Jews in 1933-1945 (although persecution of Jews has been taking place since ancient times). For Russians, the Great Patriotic War, our incalculable victims (27 million), our national heroes and our Great Victory have the same sacred meaning. We always remember that it is a "Holiday with tears in our eyes." It is our chosen trauma. It is our Immortal Regiment.

Another important feature of the outcome of any conflict is that the victor is always inclined to show generosity to the vanquished, while the vanquished perceive this generosity as another humiliation by the strong. For example, after World War II ended, we artificially exalted the role of Polish and French resistance to the Nazis, as well as of a dozen other countries in Europe and the Baltics, even though these countries formed SS divisions and actively fought against the USSR, and then were forced to celebrate not their but our victory every year with humiliation and accumulated hatred. Unable to take revenge on our heroes, they frantically tear down their monuments and try to destroy everything that reminds them of Russia. In their perception: it should not exist at all. But it does exist and it will exist! But in order to do that we first have to make our former "partners" respect it again. And to remember that the magnanimity of the victor is not always a positive factor.

"Chosen trauma" is not only a special memory of one's fathers and grandfathers, but also a strictly deterministic evaluation of any events a well-defined point of view; to put it simply, the division of all ideas and all people into "we" and "them" (13). This deeply personal mental structure is formed in early childhood and then maintained throughout life. An example that is easy to see in everyday life is as follows: a mother is walking with her child, someone approaches her, and if the mother smiles, the child is calm - "that someone belongs to us". If the mother gets anxious, the child clings to her and even cries: "this someone does not belong to us," and presents a threat.

In the same way, based on parents' stories, formed are ideas about our ancestors, our history, our heroes, and "their heroes". If someone's ancestors have been subjected to mass trauma, it is bound to be responded to. There are a lot of different versions of such a response: from mourning for the heroes and the fallen to various kinds of individual and collective revenge, in some cases elevated to the rank of a state policy.

In the realm of hereditary ties, nothing is forgotten. Grandparents, father and mother are the very first figures of any person's identity, the carriers of language and culture, traditions and principles, the transmitters of historical knowledge, respect for national heroes and national values (7). In general, any person belongs to the culture in which they were formed and to the nationality whose language they speak.

We, in Russia, are adherents of quite certain national values and we have an enduring memory of the Great Patriotic War and hatred for any manifestations of Nazism, which in all cases is projected onto the assessment of any contemporary events. But our enemies are bearers of

different ("embedded" in them) parental images and images of their national heroes. For us, the grandfather of the current German Chancellor is a war criminal, an SS general who was deprived of all his decorations and titles as a result of our Victory. But for Olaf Scholz he is his grandfather who served Germany and was humiliated and killed by the Russians in 1944. Is it appropriate to suspect the Chancellor of loving Russia? And not only him. What was the denazification? Every former SS officer had to visit a psychiatrist, to watch some film about Nazi atrocities, and to admit that it was horrible. That's it! And the main factor in denazification (including East Germany) was our strength and the power of Communist ideology.

Let me repeat once again: the most important factor of identification is the language one speaks. Language is the basis of the spiritual life of any society and any individual, it is a social breath (13). The destruction of the national language is subconsciously perceived as strangulation, as a threat to the mere existence. Therefore, it is understandable why the law banning the Russian language caused such a reaction in the Lugansk Public Republic and the Donetsk Public Republic.

In conclusion, I would like to formulate another hypothesis.

Simultaneously with the crisis of all the recently powerful ideologies (from communist to liberal), the role of national identification is becoming an independent problem. This identification in some cases acquires the character of aggressive nationalism, as the last and most primitive form of unity, which appears when there are no other unifying ideas. According to my ideas, formulated back in 1996 in the article "An Unobvious Image of the Future," the world is entering a major and protracted crisis. And the main point here is not the degradation of the European establishment or the political ambitions of certain leaders.

The main problem is overpopulation of the planet and depletion of natural resources, and first of all, not of energy resources, but of fresh water reserves, first for agriculture (millions of cubic kilometres of water), and then for drinking. And this means famine, and not only in Africa, but also in Europe. Plus rising of the sea level, immersion of large territories into the sea, and salinization of river mouths. And millions of refugees. So, they need our territories, our minerals and our fresh water, the reserves of which in Russia are three times greater than in all of Western Europe. There is no doubt that interethnic conflicts in the 21st century will tend to escalate, not only in Russia's neighbouring territories, but throughout the world. And then the problem of survival of the fittest will come to the fore. The collective West is not fighting against the Russians - it doesn't need us, nor are the Ukrainians; it is fighting for resources, without which it will simply die. These are already agonizing state, but being in agony they will stop at nothing. And we have to be ready for that, as one united nation.

I would very much like to be wrong about the bleakest parts of this prognosis.

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