

PERSONAL IDENTITY AND ETHNOCENTRISM

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Motivation

The fall of the socialist system in Central Europe was an event having a strong impact on social scientists. There are a number of strategies for describing what has happened and what is, in fact, happening. There are many ways which can be used to compare the new descriptive data with the existing theories of social psychology; it is possible to study interpretations and explanations of social motions *ex post*, and it is possible to predict future development in various time horizons. This is on the one hand.

On the other hand, with regard to new space available for expressing one's own group problems and needs, one is faced with a number of questions and problems whose solution rests on the whole society. These problems will have to be solved en route without any reliable instructions or experience in solving similar problems. Thus, it is natural that social scientists feel their responsibility and they want to participate in the solving of social problem. Their participation could be of special importance if they offered new information to the discussion, as well as a more consistent and complex explanation of various social problems.

National Identity or Nationalism?

The contemporary social scene in our country, as well as in the USSR and Yugoslavia, is characterized by the growth of national awareness. It is not surprising then that it is accompanied by manifestations of national intolerance, chauvinism and aggression. The relationship between national awareness, national identity and independence, on the one hand, and national conflicts, on the other hand, has specific political impact. Is it possible to distinguish between awareness of one's national identity and nationalism? What correlations can be identified between the type of social system (democratic vs. authoritarian), ethnic tolerance and plural cultural orientation, on the one hand, and nationalism and ethnocentrism, on the other hand? What sorts of social thinking (social

representations) are concealed in national identity in contrast to nationalism at an individual level?

Self-concept and National Identity

Does national identity represent a component of human identity? If it does, then what role does it play within the structure of other personality and social identities? How can it be distinguished from the personality's ethnocentric orientation?

National identity in relation to national culture and its language, history, outstanding persons, traditions and customs is considered one of the fundamental identities of the cultural man. It is a natural habit which is not always realized by man. The realization comes in confrontation with a different culture or way of thinking. When explicitly manifest, it is usually specifically, most often politically motivated (e.g. nonviolent movement for independence in India under Ghandi's leadership).

National identity can represent a component of two broader attitudes toward other cultures: ethnocentric and polycultural.

The concept "ethnocentrism" was used by Sumner (1906) to denote provincialism and cultural narrow-mindedness and for describing a tendency to accept everything belonging to the same culture and to deny everything differing from it. The concept "ethnic" has been used subsequently for denotation of culture treated as a system of social habits, institutions, traditions and language, etc.

Ethnocentrism as a way of individual thinking, as an ideological system concerning groups and group relations became the subject of wider empirical research after World War II, which was carried out by T. W. Adorno and his co-workers within their study of authoritarian personality. It resulted in a detailed description of ethnocentric thinking at the individual level.

Ethnocentrically oriented individuals are limited in their thinking to the concepts of "we and they, internal and external groups". They overemphasize the homogeneity of both these groups (i.e. their own group, which they are identified with, and the external one which they differ from). While the external groups are subjected to negative opinions and hostile attitudes, their own group is uncritically admired. Differences between their own group and external one are understood as unchangeable and a genetically coded phenomenon which serves as the rationalization of various methods of discrimination.

Hostility and intolerance in the ethnocentric way of thinking is not directed exclusively toward a group or minority but it is manifested in attitudes toward all other groups. In the empirical studies of ethnocentric thinking a number of its irrational elements were revealed as well. Irrational thinking is manifested, e.g. in different evaluation of identical characteristics in one's own group as

compared to some other group. Similarly, responsibility for any ethnic or inter-group tension is ascribed exclusively to the external group. It is only the external group which should change or adapt itself in order to be acceptable and to decrease tension. Any critical reflection of their own attitudes, errors or drawbacks is missing. Temporary weakness of their own group is explained by the special conspiratorial capabilities of the hostile external group. Irrationality in this explanation is evident, particularly when a minority of negligible number and power is concerned. Interestingly the feeling of persecution does not result, either in sympathy with others who are persecuted, or in efforts to eliminate persecution, but on the contrary, it results in the persuasion that justice be available in the world only if the whole power is concentrated in the hands of their own group.

Consequently, ethnocentrism implies confrontational and hostile attitudes toward other groups, the search for culprits, creation of enemies and unwillingness to reflect critically. It represents a dependent and immature type of thinking. It reminds one of a child's egocentric thinking seeing only its own needs and being unable to consider others' needs or way of thinking.

Although ethnocentric people refer to democracy and to the common average people, average people do not represent an overwhelming category, on the contrary, it is a group excluding a great part of the population. This thinking is undemocratic because instead of distribution and control of power, its proponents attempt to concentrate power within their own group. It is undemocratic also, because it creates closed circles excluding other groups of people by distinguishing between themselves and others.

In contrast to the ethnocentric orientation, polycultural orientation is characterized by its openness toward other ethnic groups, its attempt to understand and know different cultures and different ways of thinking, by respecting other's traditions and with willingness to see problems also from others' cultural perspective. Ethnocentrism leads toward an attempt to adapt others to their own image, while polycultural orientation is connected with tolerance and awareness of the meaning and value of the cultural specificities of any other ethnic group. Polyculturally oriented personalities do not consider their own culture to be the only possible or the best one, on the contrary, they esteem cultural diversity by trying to understand, not to condemn.

Different points of view, which are conditioned by different basic orientations, can be illustrated with an example of a discussion concerning the interpretation of social programmes aimed at the improvement of education possibilities for minority language speaking children in the USA (see W. G. Secada, 1990).

Ethnocentrically oriented specialists support full and fast assimilation of bilingual children, i.e. the transformation to monolingualism being made as

quickly as possible. They believe in the advantage of quick assimilation of minority language children with the abandonment of their native language and culture. For this reason they give allowances for special programmes in English.

On the contrary, polyculturally oriented specialists take the view that children of immigrant families should be educated in their native language as well as in the majority language, and they should be encouraged to understand their own native culture as well as the culture of the majority nation. They propose bilingual schools. They consider the denial of bilingual education and double cultural orientation to be a senseless and unnecessary wasting of human potentials, and similarly, they acknowledge the inhumanity inherent in the demand for one to abandon their own native language and culture.

Ethnocentrism and Nationalism

Within international relationship ethnocentric thinking is transformed into pseudopatriotic nationalism (T. W. Adorno, 1950). One's own nation is considered the best one and for this reason it should be defended from external influence (isolationism). The nation may take economic advantages based on international contacts and business, however, it should preserve its full sovereignty.

Nationalism as a belief in the superiority of one's own race has been rooted in our consciousness in connection with racism and Nazism. The concept of nationalism is associated also with the strong and culturally dominant nations. However, we should not overlook the nationalism of oppressed nations which tend to compensate for all the former injustices by blaming another nation. Any incorrectness, hostility and aggressiveness toward members of the "oppressing" nation can be very easily excused by the feeling of injustice. Membership in the oppressed nation or nationality does not guarantee the absence of ethnically motivated hostility. The ideology of a harmed nation, which must radically fight for its rights, or otherwise it will not progress, is closely connected with the ideology of socialism (nationalism of non-Russian nations in the USSR, non-Serbian nations in Yugoslavia or Slovak nationalism...).

All types of nationalism obviously differ in many aspects, while having, at the same time, many identical characteristics and ways of thinking (confrontational thinking using the concepts "we" and "they", exaggeration of the homogeneity of one's own national interests and the interests of other nations, rigid attribution of the negative characteristics and reasons for problems in other nations, stereotypical and submissive attitudes toward one's own nation, authoritarian, hierarchical and cynical attitudes toward group interactions, considering the values of non-violence, tolerance, honesty and equal opportunities to be an illusion).

It is no doubt that ethnocentrically thinking individuals are more open to national propaganda and more manipulatable as far as their chauvinistic attitudes and conflicts are concerned.

Group and Individual Identity

Nationalism can be interpreted as a blind tie to certain national values, with uncritical conformity to the prevailing group opinions, attitudes and ways of thinking. The majority of social scientists consider national and ethnical identity to be collective, irrational, mythical, dangerous and inexpressible (difficult to grasp) (see e.g. E. Fromm, C. Jung). According to them, collective identity represents a substitution for personal identity, a crutch for dependent people who are unable to think critically and act autonomously. Thus they put collective identity in contradiction to personal identity, and to nonconformist and independent thinking. Personal identity is understood as a sufficiently coherent framework of one's own experience and activity, resulting from the maturity of one's personality and not as an inevitable product of socialization. Both personal identity and independent, unbiased and critical thinking are being attained particularly in the process of differentiation from the group identity and group thinking.

For instance, A. Hurtado and P. Gurin (1987) interpret the ethnic identity of Americans — Spanish speaking immigrants — in the following way: the successful individuals, those who have successfully overcome disadvantages determined by their different ethnicity, in contrast to their unsuccessful compatriots, do not identify themselves with their own group. The unsuccessful ones do identify with their ethnic group in order to excuse their failure for the injustice and discrimination of the above group of citizens.

Group identity is undoubtedly more deeply rooted. It represents one of the most ancient human strategies of overcoming critical periods. When facing any situation of distress, a group can act more effectively and purposefully than an individual, and moreover, it can provide at least the biological survival of its species. The group is also important for an individual from the psychological point of view. Membership within a group decreases the feeling of anxiety and uncertainty simply through the realization of the fact that others are endangered in the same way. The tendency to group when endangered and thus defend oneself more effectively has been presumably genetically programmed. In normal situation a group is held together by the feeling of knowing each other and the feeling of confidence, as well as common habits, norms, rituals and language.

The phylogenetic significance of group and ethnic identity was shown in the work by I. Eibl-Eibesfeld (1989). Besides allowing to foresee others' behaviour,

the group norms create order in the community, thus helping its members to increase the feeling of security. The feeling of security is so important, that in order to save it people would abandon a part of their individual freedom, independence and individuality. Thus, it becomes clear that there exists a strong disposition in man to adopt the opinion of the majority and to deny everything differing from it or anything special and striking from (affecting) group norms. On the one hand, these defensive group attitudes have considerably contributed to the birth and survival of various cultures, while on the other hand the background of intolerance and hostility toward other ethnic groups and their cultures. Presumably, intolerance is phylogenetically rooted in man. According to I. Eibl-Eibesfeld (idem) ethnic identity can be considered a positive mechanism of cultural nourishment if it does not escalate to ethnocentric dominance and intolerance of other groups. Obviously, there exists a considerable danger of such escalation.

Studies dealing with intolerance in various ethnic communities (e.g. I. Eibl-Eibesfeld, 1989) confirm the universality of the tendency toward the intolerance of anything different. Aggressiveness can be seen in little children in any culture, which does not require any specific training.

On the contrary, tolerance is attained as a result of purposeful suppression of group hostility, a result of education and the impact of pluralistic culture. If we admit that in the prehistoric era the group conformity functioned adaptively, then at present, in a modern pluralistic society, which guarantees free exchange of thought and values, the insistence of ones' own group norms and the aggressiveness against other norms might lead to destruction. Outsiders, artists and scientists are part of those who make a considerable contribution to social development.

In an open society the phylogenetic heredity of ethnic and group hostility is compensated by the values of the civilization, individual human and civil rights. From the vantage point of civilization it is very important to distinguish between individual and group identity and to respect ethnic and national differences.

Similarly, O. Grünwald, who considers identity a significant identification of contemporary man and one of his anchorages in the constantly changing world, answers the question whether nationalism/ethnicity, which is so extremely manifested in the Yugoslavian political scene, may be positively adapted as a force for the democratization, liberalization and humanization of sociopolitical systems, while he points out that such metamorphosis requires: (1) a developed political culture of pluralism of ideas and values based on the principle of tolerance, (2) respect for basic human rights, freedoms attached to each individual, regardless of sex, race, colour, religion and ethnic or national origin.

It is no doubt that national awareness represents a strong social power, which

is inevitable for the application of any radical social change. However, it depends on the type of value scale into which this national identity is placed. If it occupies the highest rank, it becomes a power which manifests hostility to any other nation or nationality. If it respects the subordination of national values to the universally accepted human values (truth, justice, tolerance) and to individual civil rights, it proves the validity of the above values also with respect to one's own nation. "...love of the native country which does not involve love of mankind is not love but idolatry." (E. Fromm, *The ways from insane society*).

National Identity and Separatism

Ralf Dahrendorf, considering the politics of freedom (1988) shares a similar opinion, although he reflects the fact that the majority of British people, having been enthusiastic about racial and ethnic heterogeneity in their society in 1960s, do not wish anymore to live in a multiracial and polycultural society and slightly isolate themselves from other ethnic groups. Minorities take up the same attitude. They require their own separate place, even their area or country. The pressure exerted by the majority of citizens makes any attempt to create a civilized society, where human and civil rights would be superior to cultural differences, impossible. R. Dahrendorf supposes that respect for ethnic identity puts forward the process of civilization, yet when transformed into fanaticism it becomes a weapon against its own substance, against human and civil rights. When considered superior to human and civil rights, ethnic identity threatens the civilization's sources of citizenship, either on behalf of the minority rights, or of the cultural, religious and ethnic autonomy. The rights of minorities represent the first misunderstanding. Outspoken minorities use their rights to the detriment of the calm majority.

In the history of civilized society separatism represents a great setback. Much effort should be made to make people understand that civil rights for everyone does not mean that people must be alike. Citizenship does not mean only the process of assimilation, nor standardization. The right to differ from others should become one of the basic rights of any society. Separatists, fundamentalists and romanticists strive for homogeneity/uniformity, while liberals need heterogeneity as it is the only possible way toward universal citizenship and toward a civilized society.

Relationships between Nations and Nationalities in CSFR

In what direction will the relations between nations and nationalities develop in CSFR? Which information and data are relevant for a sufficient answer of the above question? Is the description of ethnic prejudice, misunderstanding, his-

torical memory of a nation and the content of myths efficient, or rather shall we study the degree of polycultural orientation in our society, its tolerance and respect for difference and diversity and its willingness to grant basic human rights to all citizens regardless of their ethnic or national origin.

Relationships between Czech and Slovak Nations

This is one of the most topical and discussed issues in our daily press. On the one hand, it was evoked by the striving of Slovaks to attain equality with the Czech nation within the federation, which has been formerly governed in accordance with Prague centralism, and on the other hand, it was evoked by the reaction of a paternalistically oriented Czech public. However, there also exists a minority tendency to establish an independent Slovak republic (state), which is motivated by a denial of "Czechoslovakism", by myths about injustice caused by the Czech nation and economic prosperity of the former Slovak state, which started to exist after the establishment of the Nazi Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia.

Many of these myths are still alive, as the historians are not unbiased and convincing in their elucidation of controversial chapters in the history of our coexistence (the establishment and the first years of the 1st Republic, fate of Štefánik, national and economic politics in the period of the 1st Republic).

Many of these questions have not been answered yet, e.g. the question of national identity of Czechs and Slovaks. How are these identities manifested and what are their roots (collective memory, affinity with certain values, habits and traditions), and in which aspects do they differ? What makes communication between these nations which are so alike difficult, and in what context or background are these misunderstandings based?

The controversy between Czechs and Slovaks concerns the power of the republics, trifling quarrels about symbols, respect for independence and equality of Slovaks and the implementation of economic reform. As the social and economic reform gets worse, the differences between the Czech and Slovak Republics become deeper, and the controversies will presumably become even more acute. With the succession of economic prosperity, they should become less emotional, and consequently pragmatism will prevail in mutual relations, as well as the belief in better opportunities for both nations living in a common state.

The relations of both majority nations toward other nationalities and ethnic groups living in their territory are even more dramatic. Anti-Gipsy tendencies took the form of violence, anti-Semitism was materialized in inscriptions on walls and slanders, while hatred for foreigners was manifested in the dismissal of Vietnamese citizens (working in our country in accordance with the contracts

made by the former government) and in protests against the help offered to refugees from Rumania, Albania and Kurds.

Our fellow citizens are often indifferent to the assaults on the Vietnamese workers which are organized by armed men, skinheads and punks. Many of them do not realize that therefore they accept racism. They do not see any danger in the slogans "Bohemia to Czechs" and "Slovakia to Slovaks". Let us introduce an example of the thinking of a man who believes that he is not a racist: "It is clear, everybody knows that we are not going to expel Americans, French or Germans from our country. We do not want just Gipsies, Vietnamese and other bastards like them to expand here..."

Anti-Semitism

This is undoubtedly a mysterious problem, since Jews have definitely lost their own identity and have fully assimilated with the local culture. Moreover, they are not characterized by any different traits and do not want to differ from other citizens (they denied a proposed status of ethnic minority). Jews do not use their native language, do not demand any rights and the majority of them have diverted from their religion in order to escape persecution (the security police required a list of persons taking part in their divine worships). Many Jewish children are not aware of their different origin because their parents did not have the courage to speak with them about anti-Semitism. Regardless of their full assimilation, from time to time there appear slogans telling Jews to leave, which can be heard at the public meetings and the secret lists of Jewish people occupying high ranks circulate among people, or Jewish children are pestered by their schoolmates.

The problem of anti-Semitism does not enjoy special publicity. However, our public became annoyed about the installation of memorial tablet in honour to J. Tiso, the president of the former Slovak State, who was personally responsible for the deportation of 58,000 Jews from Slovakia. In the Slovak State the persecution and deportation of Jews was legalized by legislative institutions. In other countries this was practised on the basis of German's orders and realized directly by the German deportation commissioners (L. Mňačko, 1990). Moreover, the government of the Slovak State paid to Hitler 500 crowns for each Slovak Jew sent to the Oświęcim hell.

Some Slovak citizens acknowledge the Slovak State by pointing at its economic prosperity, while neglecting its racist laws and behaviour.

Is then the Slovak nation endowed by a special aversion to all other nations and nationalities living with or next to it, or on the contrary, is the truth found in a statement by V. Havel, namely, that our nations have traditions in com-

mon: protests against violence, understanding and the ability to forgive, to appeal for democratic order along with the ability to behave in a democratic way, deep respect for human rights, the ability of logical thinking, and thus avoiding fanaticism, and civic culture?

What is the meaning of this question? Do any facts exist to prove or argue against the above viewpoints, and if they do, which of them seem to be the most relevant ones? While studying the problem of coping with the Communist system during the post-war period and the attitude of different political cultures toward the totalitarian system, Jacques Rupnik arrived at the following conclusion: some pure democratic cultures (e.g. Czech social-democratism and Masarykism) have conformed to the authoritarian system, while the less democratic cultures, like Polish nationalism and Catholicism have resisted. J. Rupnik tried to explain the fact that Stalinism and Communism in Czecho-Slovakia has got the most persistent and the worst form as compared to any other Central European country. (It lasted after the destabilization in Poland and Hungary in 1956, and after 1968 it survived for a long period.) According to Rupnik it cannot be explained by external factors, but there must have existed some internal reasons. What do then the inland roots of totalitarianism consist in? What causes the liability of a democratic and developed society to a totalitarian system?

Let us make an attempt to identify the roots of the totalitarian thinking:

(1) Belief in the inevitability of the control and regulatory role of the central power. The alternative belief in impersonal regulation (market), civic society and self-government represents the belief of minority only. A citizen, thinking independently and freely, who is not afraid to express his opinions and notions, who participates in public affairs of his own will and who is not afraid of the risk of failure and criticism, is just being born with great difficulties.

(2) Belief in radical final solutions and in ideological solutions which are out of civil control. One ideology is replaced by another one, and the new ideology turns upside down the so far accepted hierarchy of values.

(3) Underestimation of liberal individual values (individual freedom, individual ownership) and overestimation of collective values and authorities, as well as strong tendency toward egalitarianism.

(4) Belief in only one truth, denying plurality of opinions.

(5) Identification of state with nation and the belief in national principle of state.

(6) Interpretation of the history of both Czech and Slovak nations, labelling the Slovak nation as a suffering and oppressed nation by others.

(7) Underestimation of pragmatism of the social life (the problem of power regulation and restriction). Overestimation and idealization of the power of leading personalities.

(8) Explanations of actual social situation using the concepts like culprit, hostile secret forces and the lack of critical reflection.

Summary

The individual, who became involved in national movements, realizes his national identity as the most important thing. We should ask then, why he considers this identity the most important of all other identities (me as human being, citizen, parent, friend, neighbour, professional, specialist, member of the family, town, or state). It is necessary to distinguish also between two types of orientation in one's thinking, i.e. between ethnocentric and polycultural orientations. Ethnocentric orientation in individuals' thinking is manifested in a tendency, which they do not always realize, to evaluate events from the point of their nation, to place their culture before the culture of other nations, and it is manifested also in their unwillingness to see positive features of different cultures and to deal with other than the problems of their own nation. Presumably, the ethnocentric thinking will prepare a fertile ground for nationalistic ideology, especially if it is connected with dependent and uncritical thinking and with the contempt for others rights. If an individual accepts the demagogic arguments that his own nation is chosen and superior to other nations, he will be easily manipulated in chauvinistic conflicts. This type of identity allows to ascribe all the bad to another nation and to avoid responsibility.

Nationalism following the belief in the superiority of one's own race has been anchored in our consciousness with regard to the concept of fascism. However, one should not underestimate national identity.

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