THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FEATURES OF STUDYING NATIONAL IDENTITY

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Abstract: *The article examines the theoretical and methodological foundations of studying the phenomenon of national identity and its place within the system of contemporary social and humanitarian sciences. It analyzes the essence and conceptual content of national identity, the factors shaping it, as well as the key approaches employed in its scholarly investigation. Particular attention is given to the significance of constructivism, symbolic interactionism, and social psychology in researching national identity. The study also explores the impact of globalization, migration, and the expansion of the information environment on the dynamics of national identity.*

Keywords: *national identity, theoretical and methodological approaches, constructivism, symbolic interactionism, globalization, cultural identity.*

In the context of globalization, identity politics contributes to the formation of transnational identity. In this process, states, civil society, the media, religious institutions, and business actors operate in an interdependent manner. Identity politics simultaneously performs integrative and differentiating functions. It strengthens social cohesion and the legitimacy of political institutions, while at the same time potentially reinforcing intergroup differences and cultural barriers.

In many cases, identity politics replaces traditional ideological models and forms the civilizational foundation of national-state unity, emerging as an intangible resource for development. Scholarly research demonstrates a correlation between national identity, political stability, and socio-economic growth. However, the excessive politicization of identity increases the risk of societal fragmentation. The substitution of universal civic principles with narrow group interests weakens civic solidarity. Measures of "positive discrimination" and the practice of enforced "political correctness" may at times reinforce cultural divisions and lead to the emergence of segmented societies[5].

Advocates of the civic conception view identity politics as a mechanism for engaging citizens in a shared political space. This process is carried out through horizontal networks, volunteer initiatives, and public activism. Overall, identity politics is a multi-actor and multidimensional phenomenon encompassing state, societal, and cultural

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[5] Тейлор Ч. Источники самости: становление новоевропейской идентичности / пер. с англ. А.Ковалева. – М.: Дело, 2019. – 879 с.; Уолцер М. Сферы справедливости: защита плюрализма и равенства / пер. с англ. А.Казакова. – М.: Московская школа политических исследований, 2000. – 480 с.

levels. Its effectiveness depends not on the artificial homogenization of identities, but on fostering meaningful dialogue among diverse social groups and on the ability of the state and society to maintain a balance between "unity and diversity."

In Arab countries, identity politics is carried out under conditions of competition among national values. Identifying the main factors that threaten collective identity, developing response scenarios, and formulating counteractive strategies help explain the process through which identity politics transforms into an instrument of foreign policy.

National identity politics represents a dynamic component of socio-political processes, manifesting itself in struggles for recognition, aspirations for dominance, and competition over symbolic superiority. Within this arena, various social groups seek to legitimize their values, historical narratives, and cultural codes. In this sense, identity becomes both a political resource and an instrument that shapes actors' strategies, mobilization mechanisms, and the configuration of collective consensus or conflict.

In contemporary socio-political scientific discourse, competition persists among various concepts and interpretations of identity. Theoretical schools ranging from constructivism to post-structuralism offer divergent perspectives on the essence and dynamics of identity. This plurality renders identity analysis inherently interdisciplinary and multivariant. Such a condition becomes particularly evident within the sphere of identity politics. Identity politics is not a static phenomenon; rather, it is a dynamic structure constructed through social interactions, communications, and political practices. From this standpoint, identity is understood not merely as a set of markers of belonging, but as an outcome that is continuously re-produced symbolically and institutionally within the arena of political competition and ideological contestation.

Russian scholars conceptualize identity politics as a deliberate and targeted activity aimed at shaping, supporting, and institutionalizing the diverse collective identities of actors within political processes[6]. In the scholarly discourse, its positive potential is emphasized primarily as an intangible resource that contributes to strengthening social cohesion, enhancing civic integration, and fostering collective symbolic identity.

At the same time, the analysis of identity politics necessitates consideration of the socio-political context in which it is implemented, the characteristics of cultural dynamics, and the historical conditions of a given society. Depending on its objectives, actors, and mechanisms, identity politics can function as an integrative tool promoting social consolidation, or conversely, as a factor of fragmentation that reinforces existing divisions and lines of confrontation. This policy manifests across various domains – including social and educational policy, symbolic and memory politics, as well as

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[6] Косач Г.Г. Арабский Восток и цивилизационная идентичность. // Восток (ORIENS). 2022. №3.; Харитонова О.Г. Политические режимы и идентичность в странах Ближнего Востока. // Вестник МГИМО. 2023. №6.; Tajfel H. (ed.) Social Identity and Intergroup Relations 1982. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

language and cultural policy—institutionally shaping perceptions of "us" versus "them" and legitimizing or marginalizing different forms of identity.

The contemporary era is characterized by the expansion of politicization, whereby spheres previously considered apolitical are increasingly infused with political meaning. In this context, identity ceases to be merely an object of analysis and becomes an instrument of political practice. Amid processes of globalization and deglobalization, state fragmentation and the emergence of new political entities, the development of non-state actors, and the transformation of the global order, identity has emerged as a core element of political mobilization. National, civilizational, and confessional forms of identity have become integral components of the international political discourse and increasingly inform states' strategies for external political positioning.

In the context of changing international relations, characterized by an expansion of actors, the weakening of traditional institutions, and the emergence of new types of conflicts, the significance of identity as a factor has increased markedly. In such conditions, identity manifests as a distinct dimension of self-understanding and self-positioning in both domestic and foreign policy, influencing the patterns of external political behavior of actors. It is shaped through interactions with other international actors whether cooperative, competitive, or confrontational and contributes to the formation of a specific worldview within the actor, where subjective norms and perceptions assume a primary role.

Through national identity, political actors shape a specific system of international relations, including the selection of allies or adversaries. Identity determines how international actors interpret political situations and influences the decision-making process in foreign policy. Political science scholars analyzing the impact of identity on international relations note that, when choosing among various options, political actors tend to adopt the course of action that aligns most closely with their national identity while rejecting alternatives that contradict it. A strong national identity can provide political actors with additional resources to mobilize necessary social support. Moreover, ethno-confessional, religious, or tribal affiliations are also employed by elites and counter-elites as instruments in the formulation and implementation of foreign policy.

Studying the phenomenon of identity at the interpersonal, intergroup, and international levels allows for the elucidation of the specific characteristics of political processes, the behavioral patterns of state and non-state actors, and the cultural-historical reasons behind the selection of particular development models.

The simultaneous presence of past and present, myth and reality, religion and secularism, as well as traditional and modern institutions in Arab states does not signify a distinct civilizational path. As a result of European colonial influence, Western governance models became widespread in Arab countries. In the Arab states of the

Middle East and North Africa, two long-term trends emerged. The first is the consolidation of secular nationalism, which became particularly pronounced after World War II, and the second is the politicization of Islam, which arose in response to the spread of European ideologies. Currently, various models of interaction between secular statehood ideas and traditional forms of identity can be observed in Arab countries. Numerous internal and regional conflicts have contributed to societal fragmentation and the increasing politicization of identity. In many cases, specific confessional, ethnic, or tribal affiliations have become primary sources of protection, security, support, and environmental loyalty for individuals.

In conclusion, it should be noted that identity politics exerts a dual impact. On one hand, it functions as an intangible resource that fosters societal cohesion through symbols, education, and language policies. On the other hand, excessive politicization of differences and the substitution of universal civic values with the interests of narrow groups can weaken social solidarity and contribute to the emergence of internal conflicts. The effectiveness of state strategies depends on the quality of intergroup communication and the ability to maintain a balance between "unity and diversity." Methodologically, comparative, multi-level studies on Arab countries are required, along with the development of precise indicators and cause-and-effect models. Such an approach, which takes into account the formation of identity in interaction with the "Other," allows for a deeper understanding of its influence on external political self-perception and international positioning.

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