CONCEPTUALIZATION OF NATIONAL IDENTITY IN INTERNATIONAL MEDIA: CASE-STUDY OF *THE ECONOMIST* PUBLICATIONS

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Abstract. National identity, an ever-important concept, today is arguably more verbalized and publicized than at any other time in history. Its media representation both reveals people's understanding of the idea and serves as a medium of shaping the identity itself, being a powerful tool in the hands of political elites. At the same time in a quest of providing the target audience with a balanced and acceptable view of the reality, global media seek to express their own distinguishable stance. *The Economist,* a British based global media outlet, is an example of these processes. Value of the events covered lies both in their newsworthiness, and the outer sentiment of journalists that is conveyed to readers. Overall, discourse analysis of media texts may reveal a lot about conceptualization of certain phenomena. And this research of empirical data has identified main conceptual fields and blocks that make up our understanding of what it takes to identify oneself as one nation. Looking into discursive construction of national identity means distinguishing national identity from similar and related concepts and evaluating its role in the processes that take place in the world today. National identity is a complex phenomenon that lies at the core of collective and personal identity alike. For groups of people, nations, it represents an in-group that is — counterintuitively — artificial and illusionary and comes from a natural human desire for the sense of belonging. However, the resulting national identity functions on its own as a symbol of a state. Thus territory, location of a state on the world map, is one of the key features of national identity. Contested national borders and challenged sovereignty made up a majority of national identity issues covered in the analyzed materials of *The Economist*. There are multiple factors that influence national identity, politics being one of its major drivers. Research shows that it works mostly at the level of national politics and occurs mostly in the context of elections and partisanship. Another significant factor that brings national identity into the spotlight of media is transformation or retention of the status quo. Identity is neither innate nor permanent, and constant fluctuations, push and pull of arising, re-established and defended identities attracts readers attention and provide a venue for manipulating public opinion. Bearing in mind the limitations of this research we describe and suggest an interpretation for the main conceptual fields and contexts national identity is present in the media.

Исследовательская статья

КОНЦЕПТУАЛИЗАЦИЯ НАЦИОНАЛЬНОЙ ИДЕНТИЧНОСТИ В МЕЖДУНАРОДНЫХ МЕДИА: ИЗУЧЕНИЕ ПУБЛИКАЦИЙ "THE ECONOMIST"

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Аннотация. Национальная идентичность — ключевая в серии социокультурных коллективных идентичностей. На становление национальной идентичности влияют многие факторы, среди которых особое место занимают СМИ: все больше электронные и доступные, они увеличивают свое влияние, предлагают готовые паттерны-ориентиры, манипулируют общественным настроением, атакуют или отстаивают существующие представления о якобы целостных группах, как правило привязанных к одной территории и отличных от сугубо этнических и политических объединений. Исследования показывают, что идентичность — не является внутренне необходимой, хотя интериоризация объединяющих ценностей зачастую вызвана подсознательным стремлением к причастности чему-то большему и более устойчивому, чем отдельный человек. Однако идентичность, как и границы государств, может менять и именно трансформационные процессы или сопротивление им создает информационные поводы и, как показало настоящее исследование, наиболее широкое концептуальное поле. Способность СМИ транслировать коллективные представления об идентичности тесно связана с механизмом ее становления, чем пользуются политические элиты. Политика – один из широчайших контекстов, в которых возникает потребность обратиться к феномену идентичности: возможность получения и удержания власти, например через процедуру выборов, зависит от того, насколько избиратели готовы примкнуть к той или иной политической силе. Набирает силу политика идентичности, в том числе на национальном и международном уровне, где национальная идентичность выступает одним из проявлений национального суверенитета. Анализ дискурсивного функционирования концепта национальной идентичности в медиа на примере публикаций международного издания "The Economist" выявил несколько отдельных, но пересекающихся концептуальных полей (территория, политика, изменения). В статье предлагается возможная интерпретация полученных результатов.

Ключевые слова: национальная идентичность, медиа репрезентация, концептуализация, The Economist, дискурс-анализ, национальные интересы, самоидентификация, политика идентичности, манипулирование

National identity is one of the lines along which the world is unevenly stratified [Gill, 2007: 7], it lies behind a lot of newsworthy events and thus enjoys wide media coverage. Raising awareness of the issue contributes to national identity building [Müller, 2013: 734] and therefore media outlets' reporting strategies generate considerable interest.

Common understanding of national *identity* (etymologically identity meaning sameness) holds that it is a complex term that implies identifying, i.e., recognizing oneself as a part of a certain political or cultural community[1]. It is not a quality, but a relation that develops in the course of human interactions and the assimilation of collective social experience, its acceptance [Полякова, 2016: 26] and interiorization. Factors defining unity get fused and intertangled, thus changing their "proportion" in the resulting identity. Oxford Dictionary of Media and Communication gives the following definition of national identity: it is "the public image of an imagined community, projecting an illusion of unity, reflected symbolically, and culturally represented in discourse, narratively constructed and transmitted by social institutions, in particular the educational system and the mass media"[2].

There are various viewpoints on the powers responsible for blending people into a single nation. The author tends to agree with Oswald Spengler who stated that it is the combined work of ideal and objective factors that unite people into a nation. It is the aim of this paper to investigate how attempts to influence and construct natural identity are represented in global analytical media and look for the social contexts in which the concept is embedded.

To begin with, it is absolutely necessary to draw a line between national and ethnic identity. Multinational states show a natural division between these types of identity, whereas in nation states the separation is quite subtle since a close-knit ethnic group coincides with the civil society [Буайе, 2019: 53]. Yet one's civil status does not impose any national identity. Self-centeredness and common recognition of the group is not natural, and it is the mythic conscience that demands classifying oneself as a member of a community [Ортега и Гассет, 1991: 239]. Coalitional intuition (P. Boyer) is based on cognitive mechanisms mobilizing mutual support network. At the macro level the *in-group* includes compatriots, fellow citizens, bearing the same politonym comes from mutual interests, shared super values and social experience. It is not a matter of the legal implications of the individual's legal status.

In world politics national identity is of fundamental importance to the state's status of a solid, independent actor. Moreover, a nation and even a state need individuals' identification with its symbols in order to exist [McCrone, Bechhofer, 2015: 10]. National identity develops when people voluntary accept the suggested idea of unity, thereafter, producing a strategy and formulating political goals. It can be seen that identity politics and foreign politics are not isolated and create a complex hierarchical social, political and psychological phenomenon of both external and internal origin.

The fracture lines of national identity commonly perceived as resembling geographical state boundaries always have a political dimension. National ideology, visible or implied, is unconsciously recognized by the people and offers them "typing patterns" (P. Berger, T. Luckmann) so as to determine the pragma of everyday lives. It should be noted that as a manipulative tool mass media equals the school both in the scope and effectiveness of instilling a certain ideology[3].

Today the topic of identity receives increased attention due to globalization with its economic, political and cultural integration, as well as the shift in the discourse. There have appeared a lot of the so-called "identities with

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[1] Степин В.С. Новая философская энциклопедия: в 4 т. Т. 2. — 2010. — С. 79.
[2] Oxford Dictionary of Media and Communication. — Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2011. — URL: https://u.to/JJMmGw (Accessed: 03.03.2021).
[3] Van Dijk T.A. Ideology and Discourse. A Multidisciplinary Introduction. — 2000. — P. 34. — URL: http://www.discourses.org/UnpublishedArticles/Ideology%20and%20discourse.pdf (Accessed: 03.03.2021).

adjectives" as the concept expanded into various spheres of life, it is context-dependent and dynamic [Wodak, Unger, Hirsch…, 2009: 3]. And yet, national identity remains a key subtype of identity.

Despite postnational and supranational trends, national identity is a crucial anchor mapping an individual in the world. Hybrid identity culture (sometimes referred to as 'globalized difference' [Vico, 2020: 61]) emerging in the wake of globalization and regionalization implies coexistence of groups with different cultural self-identification, but it is not analogous to the culture of universal equality. Global identity overlapping the national sentiment is only one among many other examples of hybrid identities [Силантьева, 2019: 113]. National conscience however subtle tolerates no pressure. Benedict Anderson calls being a nation essentially the most universal legitimate value in the political life today [Андерсон, 2001: 27].

Identity is inseparable from the cultural experience[4] and as of today, it has acquired new dimensions such as media representation [Saha, 2020: 2360], both domestically and globally, and requires further multidisciplinary research. Media representation means a certain coding of reality that is translated to the audience and thus "the mosaic of the press manages to effect a complex many-leveled function of group-awareness and participation" thus creating a unified outlook "on a centralized pattern" [McLuhan, 2003: 289, 343],

or providing us, as Manuel Castells put it, with "customized cottages globally produced and locally distributed" [Castells, 1996: 341].

Although this study focuses on one media outlet, its insights are not restricted to it. The discursive construction of values has been in the spotlight of academic research for decades. It is clear that distributed content – what is reported and how - is conditional, there are a lot of important considerations and factors at play [Caple, 2015: 439], however an overarching media logic is largely invariant [Magin, 2015: 433].

The analysis of the articles published in the international weekly newspaper *The Economist* in January 2019 – June 2020 (77 editions) revealed that thematization of national identity takes place in three major contexts: regional agenda (in particular China and the European Union); alteration of the status quo (various transformations and conflicts); and identity politics (national, religious and other minorities, migration, nationalism and multiculturalism). Among the articles referring to national identity around 40% were devoted to secessionist sentiment and intra-state tensions in China and the United Kingdom, exposed to particularly strong challenges. The scope of publications on China concerns the identity of Taiwan, Hong Kong and Tibet as opposed to the single mold of mainland China. Similar conflict is observed in the United Kingdom when it comes to the identities of the Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, as well as self-identification of UK subjects over Brexit.

Pic. 1 Most frequent words in the analyzed texts (stopwords ignored).

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4   Степанов Ю.С. Константы : Словарь русской культуры. — Москва : Академический Проект, 2004. — С. 43.

An inseparable feature of all the texts that draw upon national identity issues is territory (most frequent words being country, *state, region, province, city, border, frontier*). As long as territory defines the extent of political power its political borders tend to be seen as stable and sacrosanct [Herb, Kaplan, 1999: 13], however they never cease to be disputed and shifted that points to their artificiality. The researcher of political ethics Herbert Kelman writes that idealogization stems from the cultural foundations of the formation of nations and they should not be accidental [Kelman, 1997: 170]. The territory on which a national identity is formed is its 'action field' (*pole deistviya* — the term suggested by Svetlana Lourie) [Лурье, 2002], and people involved are its 'social actors' [Leeuwen, 2008: 23].

The second most frequent theme is politics, especially political partisanship and elections, observed through numerous words referring to power: *government, party, elections, minister* etc. The will of voters appears to be the key factor affecting the formation of an identity agenda by political elites, and the policy itself is concentrated on a targeted influence on public opinion. In the article under the heading "All politics is identity politics" (*The Economist,* November 2018) politics is depicted as a power struggle won through elections and thus determined by voters' identities. This statement is consistently traced throughout the texts of *The Economist* and should be viewed as the editorial stance on the matter.

It had been established that there is little presence of cultural, i.e., relating to enlightenment and the humanities, and even less so of economic factors in the national identity discourse. Moreover, though economic factors are known to partly shape people's sense of identity, economy in general is removed from the conceptual sphere of identity, and even contrasted as a separate domain of competing political interests — and *nation* is the subject of the struggle for rights and freedoms[5].

In general, *new / changing* and *challenged* are the key conceptual aspects of national identity in the media discourse. A premise for this conceptualization is the liquid nature of the modernity (Z. Bauman), today fast-paced world where freedom means a never-ending fluctuation from belonging to being lost and vice versa [Ваттимо, 2003: 18] and Erik Erikson's original theory suggesting continuity of identity gives place to subjective fragmented, atomic intentions that can be voluntarily changed [Полякова, 2016: 38]. Notably youngsters make up a separate party in identity wars: multiple polls show that the young increasingly challenge traditional understanding of national identity imposed through state institution and seek to coin their own definition (exemplified through such words as d*eny, define, shape* etc.).

Together with the trend to innovation and transformation, there appears to be a counter drive. The research found out an abundance of words starting with re- or otherwise acknowledging getting back on track (*restore, revitalize, rebuild, resurface, reunify, redraw, reinvent, reappropriate, reinvent* etc.), though very often accompanied by words, idioms and metaphors highlighting impossibility of such hopes. Despite the quest for an unbiased or at least balanced reflection of reality, the language itself provides us with a particular discourse (M. Foucault) complicated by political leanings of the media outlet [Neary, Ringrow, 2018: 9]. In The Economist emotional connotations ('mediated' or discursively constructed through media texts [Wahl-Jorgensen, 2019: 8]) are unmistakably negative when it comes to nationalism and direct manipulations.

The findings point out that conceptualization of national identity as represented in the analyzed media outlet over the period 2019-2020 develops around the following blocks: territories (countries, states, regions, cities), voting (elections, polls, referendums), ideology, subjects of self-identification and influencers (individuals, multiple social groups, state institutions and their representatives).

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[5] Краснухина Е.К. Национализм нации и национализм национальности // Нева. — 2019. — №3. — С. 190.
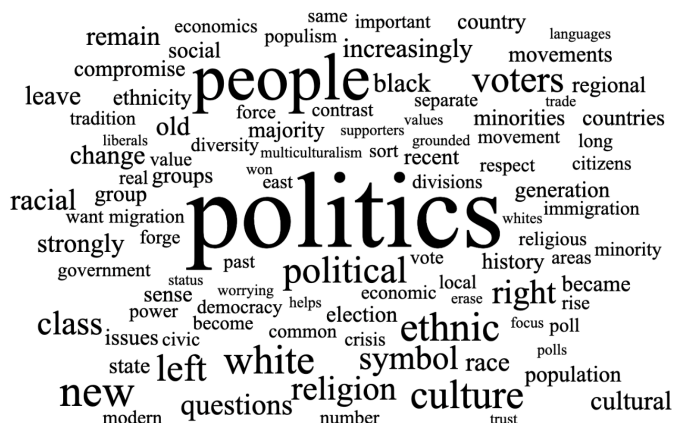
Pic. 2. Words in the near proximity of national identity.

The researched media-discourse has three main conceptual fields:

TERRITORY refers to geographical entities and people who are presumably united by common values of maintaining the land they live in. In the texts it locates the issue on the world map and is usually stated as the pretext for further discussion;

CHANGE — indicates both national identity's susceptibility to external factors and an intense interest of the public to the subject. In the texts serves as the reason behind covering the issue, the focus point, and is mostly expressed through verbs;

POLITICS — reveals a constructivist, and rather cynical, approach to the origins of national identity formed largely through state institutions because of the concern of political elites with retaining their power and ensuring the outcomes of elections through influencing people's self-identification. In the texts is very explicit through a number of politics-related terms, indicates the driver and the main actor of developments around national identity.

The theoretical findings derive from a detailed analysis of the empirical data. The conclusions of the research need to be viewed with its limitations in mind (a single source and a limited timespan). However, The Economist being a high-profile and influential weekly world media and the number issues included in the study the findings do nevertheless validate the common notion of national identity as presented in the media, highlight most covered topics involving national identity and reinforce its topicality and importance of the further research.

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