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ETHNIC AND NATIONAL IDENTITY IN RUSSIAN RESEARCH: A SCOPING REVIEW

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Abstract: This scoping review aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the contemporary studies regarding ethnic and national identities written in the Russian language. The study reveals major contexts and patterns of the operationalization of the concepts. The scoping review is based on the framework outlined by Arksey and O'Malley, with qualitative content analysis as its primary method. Samples from 114 papers were analyzed to find existing approaches to identity studies and conceptualization. Explicit and implicit identity definitions and identity attributes were mapped and coded. The research found that scholars tend to provide original definitions and relate identity to consciousness. Implying the idea of a person's uniqueness, identity is often regarded as rooted in memory, hence the number of mentions of memory studies and memory politics in the reviewed articles. Another finding is that multiple and/or complex identities are widely investigated, and these identity types are given original names, mostly compound. With a great number of identity types, there is still a common understanding of identity as a constructed, dynamic phenomenon. The study concludes that identity is a common value-charged notion for Russian academic discourse, with national and ethnic identities being at the heart of the ongoing studies. The paper concentrates on identities of large groups, which is viewed as a politically sensitive issue, closely intertwined with the view of identity as a factor and resource of the development of society. Main topics are politics, history, representation, dynamics, plurality, communication, cultural factors, and territory. The analysis of the identity studies contributes to professional discourse by illuminating how concepts of ethnic and national identities are operationalized and communicated in the Russian-language academic community, thus enhancing cross-cultural understanding and facilitating more effective professional communication in related fields. Given the limitations, the findings identify the main patterns of concept usage, point to research gaps, and provide a basis for future research.

Keywords: identity studies, national identity, ethnic identity, scoping review, constructivism, conceptualization, identity types.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Identity is not a novel concept; its first use dates back thousands of years, becoming popularized in the 1960s by Erik Erikson. Over the past decades, the concept has been widely explored and utilized across various disciplines (see Brubaker & Cooper, 1999 for an extensive citation of relevant literature), with some considering identity a vital term (Gleason, 1983, p. 910), demonstrating its interdisciplinary nature. Yet, contemporary research still struggles to fully capture the meaning of identity.

Coming up with a unified approach to the subject matter is another burning issue. If identity is a predicate that applies to a person or a group to perform their social categorization, it may take numerous forms, hence the diversity of identities with modifiers (such as “ethnic identity”, “organizational identity”, etc.). This trend has evolved over the years stemming from John Locke (or as well from the Greco-Roman conception of persona) and dramatically evolving in the 20th and 21st centuries. Moving towards an integrative view of the term “identity” means streamlining the existing literature against several dimensions, including constructivism/essentialism, individual/collective, fluid/stable (or identification/identity). Following such thinkers as Stuart Hall, Judith Butler, Michel Foucault, Cornel West, etc., we argue that identity’s conceptualization in a certain discourse has implications on social dynamics, politics, etc. In the vein of a scoping review, this article is based on sources from various academic fields from history and philosophy to linguistics and political studies. Its relevance is determined by the contribution to a better interdisciplinary understanding of social and political actions connected with identity.

Today the concept of identity is value charged and relies on the researcher’s cultural perspective. This study aims to review written in Russian and newly published literature on ethnic and national identity, to investigate how it is operationalized and referred to as applicable and appropriate. For this cause, we set out to outline an overview of the prevailing identity discourse in studies published in Russian and covered in the *elibrary.ru* database using the scoping review approach (Arksey & O’Malley, 2005). To analyze the results of the review we bring together different analytical lenses to clarify operational definitions of identity, presented in the reviewed studies implicitly or explicitly, to understand how identity/identities are conceptualized, thematized, and theorized. Since we work with studies written in Russian, one of the challenges is to translate the meaning and wording of the original articles in an adequate and unbiased manner. We establish and consolidate key working characteristics of the concept and look for gaps in identity studies performed by Russian-speaking authors.

Another line of the study is to consider broader contexts and themes where the identity concept is applicable and examine how the concept finds its realization. Critique, if any, is an integral part of the discourse and is highlighted in this study, be it overuse, misuse, ambiguity, vagueness of the term, or obvious gaps in research. We contribute to the conceptual map of identity in modern Russian literature and lay the ground for further research of global identity studies worldwide.

2. MATERIAL AND METHODS

Following the established methodology of conducting a scoping review (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005; Levac et al., 2010), we started by posing a broad research question: How are the concepts of national and ethnic identity represented in today's Russian academic discourse? To answer the question, we consider only the texts published in the Russian language. It should be noted that in Russian there is a number of similar terms of non-Latin origin that can serve to substitute the one used in the English language, ranging from *тождество*, *тождественность* and *самость*, *самоосознание* to *личность*, however, we only reviewed works that utilized the international term *идентичность*.

We searched the *elibrary.ru* database for the recent Russian language studies on national and ethnic identities to see how these terms are conceptualized and operationalized. The scope of the study was limited to the papers, in which this term was significant enough. Boolean search techniques were utilized. Inclusion criteria were as follows: the keyword in the title of the article (to ensure its weight in the publication), publication year (2020–2023), publication language (Russian) and mentions of “ethnic identity” and “national identity” in the keywords and/or abstracts of the articles. We extracted 455 articles that met the inclusion criteria and used computer software to randomly pick a quarter of the articles for full review. With no thematic restrictions to inclusion, articles in the final sample mostly came from journals on History, Philosophy, Sociology, and Political Science.

The study was conducted by using qualitative content analysis (Titscher et al., 2020). We started the analysis with a full-text reading of each of the articles by two of the researchers. The authors collaborated to organize the study profile of the reported papers and developed a matrix to collect all the relevant information from the extracted full-text articles. A codebook was designed and filled. To ensure intercoder reliability the authors charted the data independently. The key qualitative results were agreed upon through the process of peer review and discussion and included explicit and implicit definitions and keywords, themes, approaches, and descriptive codes. In the vein of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) empirical data were used to identify and review themes. Explicit and implicit definitions were subject to conceptual and semantic analysis.

The strength of this review is that it considers the identity concept as presented in today's research in the field of identity studies and beyond written in Russian where the term identity is explicitly used. This causes a wide variety of research topics and provides a clear vision of the authors' most common ideas of what identity is and how it relates to their field of studies.

3. RESULTS

The sample includes original (authors') explicit definitions of identity or type(s) of identity, ranging from group (“identity is citizenship and living mode” (Nechaeva, 2020, p.157)) to personal (“identity is sociopsychological foundation of a person” (Porshneva, 2020, p. 142)) type. Definitions vary in terms of their consistency with classic works on identity. Some conform to it (“identity is a sociocultural category indicating unity and continuity of goals, motives, and attitudes of a person aware of his/her agency” (Sharkov & Yakushina, 2020, p.401)), others are rather arbitrary (“identity means being able to succeed in sciences despite one's alien background”

(Salmin, 2020, p. 1339)). Being a major research subject in the sampled papers, the notion of identity is included in keywords as a separate term or as a part of a collocation, e.g.: subethnic (*субэтническая*), pan-ethnic (*общеэтническая*), ethnic-cultural (*этнокультурная*), transethnic (*трансетническая*), transnational (*транснациональная*), superstate (*надгосударственная*), national-state (*национально-государственная*), civil-state (*гражданско-государственная*), state-civil (*государственно-гражданская*), civil-political (*гражданско-политическая*), etc. Almost half of the reviewed articles regard identity as a construct. Multiple (double, overlapping, etc.) identities are widely mentioned. Identity as consciousness and self-consciousness (*сознание* and *самосознание/самоосознание*) takes a major part in the current research (found in a third of the articles), with consciousness both listed as a keyword in the papers and/or being a part of identity definitions.

The most common types of identities named in the reviewed articles are national, including subnational and transnational, and ethnic, including transethnic and post-ethnic (mentioned in 40% and 29% of articles respectively). Apart from national and ethnic identities, the most frequently mentioned types of identity included regional and subregional (22%) and social (19%). It is also worth mentioning such types of identity as collective (17%) and group (13%), including community and microgroup, as well as civil (13%), political/macropolitical (11%) and local (8%). Similar results come from the analysis of keywords: the most frequent types of identity in keywords are ethnic, national, regional, political, city, and civil.

Russian identity (*российская*) can refer to either national or civil identity types. This terminological uncertainty is dealt with in one of the articles by Drobizheva (2020) and is touched upon by Batagova (2021) and Victorova et al. (2022) but the usage of the term is not consistent across the reviewed sample. Similar confusion is observed with various territorial identities, such as local, regional, city, northern, etc. Ten varying names for this group of identities were found across the sample. One more confusion comes from compound terms for identities, such as ethnocultural, civic-political, sociocultural, etc.

Another problematic issue detected is inconsistency in the use of the terms “identity” and “identification” (Sidorenkov et al., 2020). Both are used to imply either an incessant process of placing oneself in the societal framework or an interim result of such a process.

The thematic analysis has shown that reviewed papers on ethnic and national identity comprised a number of distinct themes and topics, including politics (state, nation, elites, memory politics, identity construction), history (experience, trauma), representation (image, narrative), dynamics (change, crisis, fluidity, stability, conservation, actualization), plurality (double, multiple, overlapping identities, identity levels, wholesomeness, and fragmentation), communication (international relations, contact, the Other, uniqueness), cultural factors (religion, language, cultural practices), and territories.

The semantic analysis of the papers presented numerous attributive collocations with the word “identity”. Grouped in accordance with closeness in meanings and usage, they make the following major groups: the first group refers to types and subtypes of identity; the second describes particular identity bearers; the third gives attributes to the very notion of identity and includes miscellaneous – oftentimes novel and even counterintuitive – attributes such as (multi)layered, universal, symbolic, artificial, etc.

The spread between the most and least commonly mentioned types of identity points to the fact that more stable and conclusive social identities are the major objects of investigation. Meanwhile, identity crises, the actual transformation of identity, its transition to a new one, and the mechanisms and implications of ongoing change are often overlooked.

The collective type of identity includes both “group identities” and “microgroup identities”. It is important to note that there is a visible asymmetry of the research focus: identity is only viewed as a group-level phenomenon (the micro group being the minimal level), and in the reviewed sample there are no mentions of group identities as perceived by its individual identity bearers.

4. DISCUSSION

We found that the articles in the sample can be divided into two categories: with or without an explicit definition of identity. Those without such a definition use the term intuitively and sometimes quite arbitrarily, relying on a conventional understanding of the word. At the same time, the works in the sample follow the generally accepted identity paradigm of viewing identity as a complex, double, and complementary phenomenon. The reviewed articles see identity as an indication of both distinction from the out-group and belonging to the in-group. This double meaning of identity was first outlined by Morin (1992, p. 201) and developed in further research, see, for example, Filippova (2018, p. 61-70). Identity was operationalized to serve the purposes of the authors.

The majority of articles that refrain from giving it an explicit definition treat identity as a concept that is “manifold, hard to define, and evades many ordinary methods of measurement” (Huntington, 2004, p. 21). Some authors mention various approaches to identity and admit its elusiveness (Petrova, 2021), while many utilize the term in its narrow meaning of self-perception: such reductionism affects the heuristic potential of the very concept of identity (Kuznetsov et al., 2021). However, the analysis of the texts reveals that choosing a simplified definition of identity is an instrumentalization of the term in its application to the study of a different concept or phenomenon, rather than a lack of consistent understanding of identity per se.

Given the vagueness of the identity definition in today’s academic thought, it is of special interest to see what types and contexts make it possible to refer to the concept of identity and see what it commonly implies. Besides national, ethnic, political, and cultural identities, other identities which lacked explicit definitions include ethnocultural, state, Soviet, territorial, and historical, class (*сословие*), and social identities. We observe the usage of “particular” (*особая*) (Fedorov, 2020; Godovanyuk, 2020; Makhmutov & Litvak, 2020) or “own” (*собственная*) (Godovanyuk, 2020; Nechaeva, 2020; Shamionov, 2020) identity collocations presuming that there are identities other than “particular” or “own”, which rather paradoxically contradicts the common understanding of the concept yet falls in line with seeing identity as complex, multifaceted, and diverse with its frontier both opening and closing (Morin, 1992, p. 201).

Notably, a number of papers introduce the concept of branding other than *product* or *brand identity* associated with marketing in business. In these cases, identity is viewed as a brand – an image of the entity constructed and manageable to its advantage (Foster et al., 2011), for group identities – to promote a certain vision of the entity within and outside the community. In the sample, branding is an identification strategy for highlighting, constructing, or concealing certain aspects of the reality or history of a place/territory to increase its attractiveness and make more viable the community built around it. Implementing branding strategies is characteristic of territory-bound identities, such as city or region, especially ethnic minorities that constitute the majority in their region.

Concealing and highlighting certain aspects of identity is an indication of using the notion of identity as a promising tool for promoting oneself rather than an objective self-image. The ultimate goal of promoting and emphasizing one’s identity is to achieve its acknowledgement and acceptance so as to be able to tap into special rights and freedoms a unique entity would have. By accept-

ing and taking on a constructed image an individual or community, whatever big, gets a reference point of what they presumably *are* and *should be* (prospective dimension of identity and collective memories (Szpunar & Szpunar, 2016). This positive image lies at the core of identity politics and the strategies of identity construction and self-identification.

It was found that incorporating a certain idea or image into one's consciousness is key to constructing an identity around it. Two major ways of identity construction in the reviewed articles are forming and instilling an idea of uniqueness – similar to L. S. Vygotsky's sociogenic construction of self (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978) – and/or an idea of one's unique history and past – following E. Erikson's understanding of identity construction comes from previous experiences (1979), as reflected in collective memories (Olick & Robbins, 1998). Memory studies, particularly those devoted to cultural, collective, and mediated memories coupled with the philosophy of history appear to be very close disciplines investigating the formation of identity (Reading, 2011). A third of the reviewed articles consider memory as part of identity and two-thirds of articles deal with historical aspects of identity formation.

Identity strategies are closely related to mythological thinking: mythological views are one of the top identity frames (Kurganskaya et al., 2022). Identity and myth are intended for internal use, even when initiated by elites, they mostly speak about “who we are”, rather than “who we are not” or “who Others are”, indicating self-centeredness. Identity myths are myths in cultural memory (Erll, 2011, p. 34). Making a narrative around powerful facts or personalities, incorporating a special vision of them into the image of the self and the worldview, makes identities flexible and propagable, which explains their fluid and dynamic nature. Identities and myths evolve over time to serve the identity bearer, give comfort, and perspective, and substantiate the need for independence. Narrative or narration is the major form of building a coherent, inherently consistent identity and presenting its image in a reproducible and adaptable form (Chernyavskaya, 2008). Whereas identity myths targeting out-groups are rare and imply stigmatizing, take, for example, the persecution of the Kalmyks that included allegations of cannibalism as part of their tradition (Guchinova, 2020).

Building on the memories of a traumatizing experience, such as loss or discrimination, however distant, is a way to enforce identity and consolidate the community or nation (Kazarinova, 2020). In the majority of cases, it is a violation of rights, privacy, and boundaries that change contact with the Other from an act of communication into a conflict. Identity bearers immediately respond to a threat: they tend to unite and fight the attack by actualizing their identity. Long-term implications may include the menace turning into one of the foundation stones to build and rebuild identity on.

Contact with the Other or reference to the Other is an indispensable part of identity-building (Neumann, 2004, p. 25-70). And it is not necessarily an aggressive opposition of We versus They. Most often this is the way to highlight the demarcation line between in- and out-groups. Those within the boundaries have a claim for sovereignty, freedom, and acknowledgement. Those outside the boundaries are the audience for projected identity and contact with them necessitates a claim for autonomy. Contact is a prerequisite for developing one's identity. It is only through meeting with the Other that one sees what really makes their identity stand out, what distinguishes them from the rest (Silantieva et al., 2020, p.107-108). The difference of potentials within and outside a community as a unifying category makes up tension that brings identity to life. The essence of such difference, the differentiation criterion provides the scaffolds for a powerful narrative, a seed for a viable myth.

Identity boundaries are symbolic and permeable (a person moving to another town might both retain the city identity of his hometown and acquire the city identity of the new dwelling). The fact that whether one can or cannot claim an identity may rest upon as little as one's self-image or stated wish, which leads to the idea that there is no obligatory minimum foundation for a "full-fledged" identity (there is some inconsistency in the reviewed works with identity sometimes viewed as "integral" (*целостная*) (Shindel' et al., 2022), "full" (*полная, полноценная*), "partial" (*частичная*), or "fragmentary" (*фрагментарная*) (Alexandrova et al., 2020)). It brings forth the importance of deliberate and targeted identity politics that treats identity as a project and mostly concentrates on the resources of asserting and promoting the identity rather than on its substantiation.

The constructivist approach to identity is clear in the context of national identity politics, with education (*образование* and *воспитание*) as an integrating strategy. Education is viewed as an invariable instrument of identity politics across times: equally aimed at consolidating or erasing ethnic identity, forming imperial or civil identity a century ago and today. Education in these capacities is widely acknowledged – it is studentship that forms national loyalty (Hoffman, 2016, p. 1–16).

National identity and identity politics as factors of nationalism are widely investigated. It is generally presumed that nationalism is a pinnacle of national identity (Sitnikov, 2023; Telin & Filimonov, 2020), especially when promoted by the media (Aleshkovski & Bocharova, 2020), most powerful when it takes an ethnic dimension and therefore can be seen within one country in the form of regional nationalisms (Nechaeva, 2020). A peculiar feature of the studies revealed within the framework of this review is the concept of "identitet" (*идентитет*) (Lunkin & Filatov, 2020), which is analogous to national identity as consciousness and feeling of belonging to one nation.

"Overlapping", "double", etc. identities exemplify the research paradigm where identity is regarded as inherently multiple. More than a third of the reviewed articles mentioned multiple identities. Identities of different types and levels may coexist, overlap, reinforce, actualize, and compete. Sometimes they can be seen as various roles one must take on and perform simultaneously or in succession, but rather multiple identities are associated with different domains of belonging and self-actualization, which might be attributed to situational identification (Ostroglazova, 2023). Some authors conclude that an integrating identity or macroidentity (Drobizheva, 2020) comes into play when multiple identities are considered and weighed against each other. However, this is not always the case with national and ethnic identities, as well as with national and regional identities: while it is hard to distinguish, for instance, between the national identity of Spanish regions and the national identity of Spain (Kozhanovsky, 2020), identity-bearers make a clear distinction. They opt for a priority identity (Khokholkova, 2020), appropriate it, and promote its name. Similar confusion occurs in authors' theorizing about identity: for example, T. V. Razina (Razina, 2022) argues that Russian (*российская*) identity belongs to a higher level than national and ethnic identities, whereas P. V. Fadeev considers them as competing identities (Fadeev, 2022).

Naming, or linguistic marking, is a key feature of many identities. Two aspects matter: 1) how identity bearers name themselves: ethnonyms are of particular interest since they appear with the formation of conscious group distinction (Kameneva et al., 2022); 2) what names say about identities – such as *urbanomia* when the name does not construct but represents an identitarian background (Razumov & Goryaev, 2020). The more complex and diverse the structure of the population is the more nuanced linguistic markers are needed to identify its parts (Atnagulov, 2021).

Conflicting identities, within one subject or identities of various bearers, breed crises and force the search for a new balance, which usually implies a re-evaluation of one's identity and possibilities of change. The growth of digital technologies has brought about new identities – digital,

virtual, net/web (*сетевая*), etc., which added to the wide variety of identities – and led to several notable consequences: a specific sociocultural space emerging in online communication leads to different representations of ethnic identities online and offline (Urusova & Chotchaev, 2023); the division of identities into real and virtual resulted in hybrids (Volkov, 2022); ethnic identities of migrants were reinforced (Melnikova et al., 2021). The mechanics and implications of identity actualization, or rapid growth of the weight of identity or its part(s), are key to modern research and are topical for almost a fifth of the reviewed articles.

Identity is a very receptive phenomenon that follows suit of global trends (Bauman, 2008) and becomes dynamic to the extent of fluidity. The article about virtual representations of African identity (Khokholkova, 2020) gives an example of today's identity challenges: the need for an umbrella identity to cover the many identities one might associate with. This integrating identity thus should be stable enough to eliminate frequent and/or perpetual identity crises and to serve as an easy showcase for the world to see and acknowledge it. Self-presentation is a key function of identity today. It is most obvious at the grassroots level – where people name themselves with certain names and consciously demonstrate certain qualities (Boichenko et al., 2020) to present themselves under a publicity name and be taken for who they think they are (see: declarational identity (Kozhanovsky, 2020)), receiving all the rights a stand-alone entity would have. The performative nature of identity (Molodychenko, 2020) implies expressing oneself with a set of specific resources, for example, linguistic ones, such as dialects. One gets a positive feedback loop: when the message is received and provokes feedback (acceptance or resistance) it reinforces the identity.

5. CONCLUSION

In this paper, we have conducted a qualitative analysis of 114 papers following the methodology for a scoping review to explore how identity is conceptualized and operationalized in academic literature written in the Russian language. The aim of the study was to get an insight into the way Russian researchers regard the phenomenon of ethnic and national identity and employ the respective terms. Results provide a unique perspective on identity studies and the functioning of the identity concept in the Russian-speaking community. The scope and thoroughness of the review make it a reliable source for further comparative research as well as for the study of the changes that took place in identity research over the years.

We conclude that identity is a widely used term in the Russian academic discourse. As a politically sensitive and debatable concept worldwide, identity is not less so in Russian academic research. There exists a wide array of approaches to the subject with no conclusive definition and usage. We observe that the authors of the sampled papers do not cleave to one definition or a clear set of types of identities, instead, they coin new terms (mostly compound) for types of identity, or at least come up with novel attributes to instrumentalize the term and suit the purposes of their work. This further increases the ambiguity and complexity of the concept.

We identified and described the main themes and types of identities covered in the reviewed papers. Our findings suggest that collective identities are mostly politicized. Identities of big groups that mostly inhabit the same areas, such as national, ethnic, or territorial, prevail in the research. One of the major findings of the review is that liberal, psychological, or politically sensitive identities (gender, minority) are left out and make up a research gap.

With all the main topics and notable ideas outlined, we may propose a general conceptual definition of identity. It is seen as a complex phenomenon of social life. In Russia, the mainstream approach to identity implies that identity is “a resource of societal development” (Semenenko, 2020).

To some extent, all the studies conceptualize identity as a construct, subject to internal and external regulation. It is dynamic, changeable, and easily forms new hybrid types or invariants. Identity mostly exists in groups of people, especially the ones sharing a territory, and thus is heavily politicized. At the same time identities that lie mostly in the personal dimension and refer to individual rights and interests are left out or tend to be ignored. This approach points to the fundamental dissimilarities in the understanding of identity between Western and non-Western scholars, since the former largely focus on individualistic self-concepts (Yin, 2018), though both perspectives view identity as a value-charged political asset. The findings yet again mark the contestability of the identity concept and a noteworthy gap between various worldviews and propose further research by identity specialists, philosophers, and political and cultural scientists.

Conflict of interest

The authors state that there is no conflict of interest.

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