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**CONFLICT POTENTIAL OF NORTH CAUCASUS AREAS:
BACKGROUND AND ORIGINS OF MODERN SOCIALITY**

Kuchukov Magomed Musaevich (a) *, Kyarova Madina Alievna (b), Kuchukova Zheneta
Magometovna (c)

*Corresponding author

- (a) Kabardino-Balkaria State Agrarian University. V.M. Kokova Ave. Lenin, 1B, Nalchik,
(b) Kabardino-Balkaria State Agrarian University. V.M. Kokova Ave. Lenin, 1B, Nalchik, mad-.
(c) Kabardino-Balkaria State Agrarian University. V.M. Kokova Ave. Lenin, 1B, Nalchik,

Abstract

Mountainous areas are traditionally regarded as the places of generating armed conflicts and wars. The North Caucasus, inhabited by many ethnic groups, is a mountainous region with special forms of life, methods and mechanisms of existence. After the collapse of the USSR, the mountainous areas of the North Caucasus entered the period of deconstruction and separation, conflicts and wars. The region is still in the state of unresolved crisis. At present the North Caucasus is in a more or less stable situation after two decades of open conflicts, war and terrorist acts. And there arises an acute and vital question “What is next: the process of stabilization or another round of tensions, contradictions and conflicts escalation?”

The given paper provides the analysis of the society conflict potential. This methodological technique has enabled to reveal the presence of a destructive potential capable of transferring a conflict from the category of possibility into the category of reality. The study of society conflict has allowed the determination of the prerequisites, factors and conditions for the generation and growth of tensions and contradictions in the region. The problem of genesis and the state of society conflict potential in the period of fundamental transformations of sociality has been considered, the areas of social tension and the regional features of conflict potential have been identified.

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Keywords: Mountainous areas, conflict, conflict potential, ethnicity, social tension, cohesiveness.



1. Introduction

In the late XX and early XXI century, the North Caucasus experienced two interrelated lines of development. Firstly, these are the events and processes determined by collisions that have come to the surface of public life and are associated with numerous contradictions and conflicts, and a terrorist war. These processes have brought the North Caucasus to the rank of the most difficult, turbulent and conflict territory of modern Russia. Secondly, this is the time of transmitting society into a new state on the basis of the fundamental reforms concerning the whole system of public life. The processes of social transformation have led to the generation of new forms of economic activity, social groups, their relationships and hierarchy, the formation of a different system of state-political structure. All these phenomena instantaneously enter everyday life, the relations between people and their participation in political life. With all the shortcomings, incompleteness and adverse effects of the reforms, the mountainous areas are going through the phase of shifting from one system of social life to another. At the same time, no new form of sociotatality being the system of values and norms that ensure the integration, cohesiveness and functionality of society, the ability of self-regulation and self-existence, has arisen in the region. This is precisely the reason for the development of conflict potential being the ability to generate contradictions, form the conditions and prerequisites for generating various types of oppositions. Thus, there is the necessity for qualitative assessment of the social life in the North Caucasus including the degree of conflict potential.

A quite extensive bibliography on conflictology has been created. For the most part, the existing ways of interpreting the problem are implemented on the basis of abstract models of concrete events based on the materials of other countries and civilizations. The works developed in terms of the popular paradigm of inter-civilization contradictions and conflicts being the main content of the coming century are widespread. Many works, which are rather interesting in general, are characterized by unilateralism due to the professional specialization of this or that author, i.e. they have the mark of disciplinarity. At present, it is relevant to analyze the conflict potential of a society rather than the conflicts investigated either during the deployment period or on the basis of their results. With this approach, it is possible to take into account both the general characteristics and the ethno-regional specificity of the “conflict potential”. The latter consists of a complex of regional contradictions of economic and ethno-territorial, historical and political, social and ethno-cultural properties, which under certain conditions can be realized in the form of a conflict with the use of violence.

2. Problem Statement

The concept of “society conflict potential” defines a cross-section of social life, where the processes of accumulating social tension and destructiveness that can cause confrontations, conflicts and wars are taking place. Social conflict potential exists as a phenomenon of discontent and dissatisfaction with the quality of life and tensions in social relations (Aleinikov, 2013; Libishevskaya & Bachler, 1999). These tensions can generate open clashes and wars under certain conditions. Conflict potential is the presence of conflict as the possibility existing at the level of social tensions. The study of conflict potential of a social community enables to give qualitative characteristics of the unity of society as the ability for self-development and self-determination. The conflict potential of a society is generated both by objective and

subjective factors arising in the targeted actions of social subjects. As a rule, the origins of the conflict potential of the North Caucasus region are found in its multi-ethnic character. The factor of poly-ethnicity is considered as an objective basis for the emergence of contradictions and wars. The attention is drawn to the fact that every nation has its own system of social institutions, customary law, values and traditions, and such a difference primarily determines the emergence of conflict. It also refers to the events of the 90s when all the peoples of the region declared state sovereignty, thus, having created the situation of acute conflict. But at the same time the fact that the mentioned events occurred on the rebound of the existing state collapse is being overlooked. Under such events bound to self-determination (primarily, territorial determination), the growth of national self-consciousness, clash of national interests and the opposition of peoples are inevitable.

In the first case, the potential for conflict exists in a latent form but it has repeatedly manifested itself in different periods of the country's history. In the North Caucasus, these were the contradictions created in the process of the forced redrawing the territorial settlement of peoples and ethnic groups. The contradictions and conflicts of a similar nature exist among mountain ethnic groups and they are historically rooted in the people's consciousness. The period of "the past" in this aspect of social life starts from the time when the region joined Russia, when many peoples lost their territories, were forced out by migrants from Russia and had to move. In the future, voluntaristic change of the boundaries of the settlement of ethnic groups continued in the Soviet period of history. The deportation of peoples from the territory of North Caucasus during the Great Patriotic War, the subsequent rehabilitation with the unfinished territorial rehabilitation created numerous territorial contradictions. The emerging social tensions inevitably came to the surface of public life often accompanied by gaining an ethnic connotation being a form of inter-ethnic confrontation, which often led to the most tragic consequences (Nikovskaya, 2006).

The conflict potential of mountain ethnic groups is also caused by the historically arisen contradiction between ethnic groups and their territories, which is unable to ensure the reproduction of the population. There are environmental optimum conditions providing the population with territory and arable land. These norms are historical to a certain extent. Thus, an average ecological balance at present is up to 2 hectares, and as for arable land, every person needs 0.6 hectares as the basis for ensuring the viability. Simple calculations show that there is no territory of the mountain ethnic groups of the North Caucasus able to meet these standards. Shortage of land has become a permanent issue for the mountain ethnic groups. This problem first manifested itself in the late 19th century. The land shortage of almost all the mountain ethnic groups of the North Caucasus is noted in the documents of the tsarist administration. This contradiction was further developed in the Soviet period of history. At the same time it did not manifest itself in the form of contradictions and conflicts over territories due to the peculiarities of the economic and socio-political system. The rigid centralized and dominant monopoly production structure (collective and state farms) existed in rural regions. Collective farms supported total occupation of the entire population and were the only way to participate in the production process for the rural population. The process of population reproduction and younger generation socialization was provided by the household and family. At the same time, social tensions arise and grow in the North Caucasus. The core of these tensions was based on demographic processes. Mountain ethnic groups faced the phenomenon of excessive population and the crisis of the life system in general. Seasonal work was the way out of this situation during these

years. Seasonal work was characterized by the fact that people lived in an unusual environment unregulated by their habitual norms and customs. A significant part of the population experienced the processes of marginalization. These processes occurring in the life of several generations have created social tensions and the background for conflict potential.

There are other historically arisen factors that influenced the conflict potential of society. Often this role is played by the ideas rooted in ethnic consciousness about “historical enemies”. They can be represented by the values of ethno-historical memory, where images of heroes and ideas about events regarded as fateful are fixed. The attempts to ignore or destroy this stratum of ethnic identity lead to conflict generation.

The destruction of the Soviet system exposed the contradictions accumulated during the period of socialism and communism building. The collapse of the old economic system, the destruction of statehood, confusion and inconsistency in approving new forms of ownership, the general systemic crisis in the country led to another surge in conflict. In the next round, there appeared all those contradictions which were primarily related to territorial problems and which already existed in the period of transformation of the Russian social system as a result of the October Revolution in 1917. Generation of social conflict potential in the North Caucasus in the decades of privatization and creation of oligarchic capitalism occurred due to the transformation of the fundamental basis of social life. These social prerequisites were as follows: the violation of customary norms and measures of social justice and equality being the principles of social life organization, the emerged state of the level and quality of life of the population inhabiting this mountain area, contradictions between the interests and needs of the population of highlands and the state policy implemented with the objective to develop the economic activity in the region.

The phenomenon of justice accompanies the man during the story. It exists as a higher value, a guide to a certain life activity and is characterized by penetration to the essence of human sociality further determining the degree of acceptability concerning certain decisions in social life organization. A new sociality developed on the basis of a wide use of the concepts of democracy, civil society, the rule of law, freedom and equality, human rights and appeared in reality as a system where the principles of justice and equality were violated, the quality of life deteriorated, marginal social groups and lumpens appeared. The ideas about the violation of social justice principles were formed among the inhabitants of the region on the basis of land reform manipulation. In October 1993, a presidential decree “On the regulation of land relations and the development of agrarian reform in Russia” was issued. It proclaimed the right of peasants to leave the collective farm with obtaining land allotments. However, in the republics of the North Caucasus, land reform was either not carried out at all or implemented in the forms unacceptable for the majority of the population. These manipulations with land reform became the basis for substantial social tensions. Under various pretexts, the main means of production that were supposed to be privately owned by the villagers was alienated and appeared to get into the hands of the nouveau riches and the clans associated with power. The injustice of power inevitably causes discontent and holds promise to turn into a socio-political conflict under certain conditions. One of the features of conflict potential formation and the deployment of the conflicts in the national republics is the acquisition by any problems of an economic or political nature of ethnic coloring. The events in Kabardino-Balkaria related to inter-settlement territories can be considered to be classic in this regard.

In (Turovsky, 2003), the concept “inter-settlement territories” was introduced into the legislation covering the territorial organization of local self-government in Russia. Inter-settlement territories could have been created in territories with a low density of rural population and in the territories of abolished settlements. A list of such entities was approved. However, in 2005 inter-settlement territories were also created in regions with a high population density including Kabardino-Balkaria (Polyakov, 2014). As a result, the boundaries of the highland villages populated by Balkars were changed. According to this law, they lost a significant part of their territories, which were turned into “inter-settlements”. Subsequently, according to the decision of the Constitutional Court of Russia, the inter-settlement territories in the republic were canceled. Meanwhile, the status of the municipalities was taken away from the largest settlements where Balkars lived (Khasanya and Belaya Rechka) due to the violation of the procedure for making such decisions, and they were attached to the city of Nalchik along with the extensive land around it. As a result, it generated acute tensions in the republic, the cause of which was the violation of existing laws. Although, the public consciousness of the Balkar part of the population being one of the subjects of the republic is subjected to the ideas of unfair treatment, ignoring and infringing on the interests of Balkars by the Kabardian authorities, i.e. Kabardians. Such collisions in the multinational regions of the federation inevitably assume the character of interethnic contradictions. The same logic determines the ideas about the violation of the social life norms which ensure equality developed. The basis of social inequality was the progressive stratification of the population on the basis of income. The policy pursued by the state led to a significant decrease in the standard of population living. This happened against the background of excessive measure and without historical precedents for the growth in prosperity of a small group of appointed oligarchs and corrupt bureaucrats (Yakimets, 2005). The consequence of this state of society was the formation of the phenomenon “political poverty”, which manifests itself as the inability of some part of society to participate in political processes effectively (Krasin, 2007). The phenomenon of political poverty is most pronounced among the population of mountainous areas. It is characterized by massive disappointment and the indifference of a large part of the population to politics and political activities. At the same time, political poverty becomes a catalyst for discontent, protest sentiment. These phenomena are aggravated by the monopolization of power by groups, the leader of which was given a warrant ensuring absolute power (and, in fact, the removal of citizens from this power) by federal agencies. These processes create the prerequisites for the formation of various destructive forces. The exclusion of the majority of the population from the political process has become a characteristic feature of mountainous areas. The composition of such an “unpolitical” population includes not only unskilled workers, marginal layers and lumpens, but also intellectuals, small and medium-sized entrepreneurs, today’s workers and peasants. The political poverty resulted in undermining the ideas about the possibility of creating a society with equal opportunities. According to some estimates between 3 and 5% of the population received property and economic power in Russia. The collapse of the economy greatly characterizes the growth of poverty in the country. According to Joseph Stiglitz, 2% of the population in Russia was below the poverty level in 1989, and by the end of 1998 there were already 23.8% of them. Thus, the level of inequality in Russia is comparable to the highest one in the world. This level belongs to those Latin American societies which were based on semi-feudal inheritance (Stiglitz, 2004). Social inequality has become the basis for the social exclusion of large social groups. The resulting social inequality took the most acute forms in the period of

existence of different possibilities for access to the main means of production, i.e. to the land allotments. The conflict potential of the mountainous areas is also due to the established level and quality of life. The main criteria for the state of the living standard are as follows: incomes of the population, working and rest conditions, social guarantees, health, housing conditions and the cultural level of the population. The quality of life majorly depends on the availability or unavailability of work, accommodation, features of labor, education. The incompatibility of these vital factors with the standards adopted by society is, generally, a prerequisite for generating conflict potential in society. This section of public life is characterized by a formidable crisis in the North Caucasus. And this is determined by the presence of large social groups that do not have the opportunity to engage in labor activity.

The crisis of the economic system in the North Caucasus began with the collapse of the industrial sector of the economy. The republics lost industrial production overnight and the working class which was praised during the Soviet era, turned to be out of work. About half of the population of the national republics, associated with industrial production, was unclaimed. People lost their jobs, stable incomes, and their habitual way of life. Both the level and the quality of life of this part of the population created the conditions for its marginalization. Russian population of the republics was mostly effected in this regard. In 1989, Russians made up 57% of all those employees engaged in the industrial production of these republics (Denisova & Radovel, 2000). The Russian population, mainly engaged in the system of industrial production, began to move outside the republics. However, these were the people whose age, professional qualifications, and property status enabled them to settle in a new place. The level of unemployment is significantly higher in the republics of the North Caucasus. Even according to official statistics, it is more than three times higher in comparison to the national level. In reality, the situation in rural areas (inhabited by at least half of the population of these republics) is characterized by the fact that only those people who are associated with rural administration, education, and medicine are employed. More than 90% of the population do not have stable wages and jobs. The distinguishing characteristics of labor activity, the degree of work security, the level of professionalism and conditions of training are the major components of sociality. The absence of industrial labor being the basis of this person's existence and achievement of life goals has a determining effect on the basic elements of individual being. All these people are united by the fact that they have no work as the leading form of activity, and they all represent a social stratum that has no visible future. The result is transformation of people into lumpens, who are completely dependent on chance, the instantaneous situation, the actions of the authorities, demagogues, extremists and adventurers.

The level of poverty is of great importance in determining the level and quality of life. According to official statistics, the population with incomes below the subsistence line in the republics of the North Caucasus in 2012 was as follows: in Ingushetia – 18.5%, Kabardino-Balkaria – 15.3%, Karachay-Cherkessia – 18.8%, North Ossetia-Alania – 12.6%. The researchers note that these data indicate the economic underdevelopment and instability of the region” (Beksultanova, 2016).

The conditions of young people socialization, the degree of job security are crucial in assessing the conditions of the conflict potential generation. In 2002, the employment rate of young people (15–24 year olds) in the Russian Federation was 34.1%, and in Ingushetia it made only 5.8%, Dagestan – 13.1% and Chechnya – 15% (Youth of the North Caucasus, 2006). In general, the percentage of young people (inhabiting North Caucasus) who are not working and not studying exceeded the national average by two

to seven times (Khaikin & Popov 2012). The phenomenon of sociality of mountainous areas is the formation of a large social group of lumpen youth. The lumpen youth is a social group of people aged 16-30 who have been deprived of the prospects to earn a decent life from the moment of becoming independent, self-determining, forming a worldview and self-consciousness. This social group consists of people with an excess energy which has no chance be applied. On this basis, the negative phenomena associated with bullying, alcohol and drug use are spreading. It is the category of population which can generate conflict.

One of the sources of generating social tensions in the North Caucasus is economic processes stimulated by regional and federal structures. For more than twenty years, real steps have been taken in agriculture only in stimulating the development of large latifundia aimed at creating modern high-tech industries. Such production as a whole as well as the owners of these industries is in the interests of the country. However, in case of villagers, this means the final deprivation of land, the ability to conduct economic activity. The meaning of this judgment is revealed by concrete examples. A cattle-breeding complex was created in the suburbs of Nalchik. About 10 thousand hectares of land are required to provide this complex with food supply. And this is possible to achieve by taking 10 thousand hectares of land from the residents of four nearby villages. 2000 collective farmers worked on these lands and together with family members they fed about 12,000 people. Now, the use of new technologies has changed the situation and only 200 people work at these facilities. The remaining 1,800 workers are left without work and without property. The same situation is with widely advertised intensive gardens. A garden of 10 hectares requires one manager being a fruit grower, one machine operator and two permanent workers, and temporary workers from the local population to be involved in the period of harvesting. The residents of many villages worked and gathered the harvest on these lands under the conditions of modern intensive gardens. The gardens being worked with the application of drip irrigation and chemicals will solve the problem of import substitution. The owners of these gardens receive 251 thousand rubles per hectare at the moment the gardens are laid and 21 thousand rubles for the further cultivating from the federal and republican budgets. And in the future they will receive profits. And the rural population, actually left without means of subsistence, experiencing the processes of marginalization, thus, turned into lumpens. The analysis of the existing sociality, which arose as a result of cardinal transformations of all spheres of public life, indicates the presence of zones of social tensions capable of generating conflicts of different content and forms.

3. Research Questions

However, the conflict potential in the region also exists on a stable footing of society and the state. It arises on the basis of the existing socio-economic and political problems of society development. The sociality formed in the mountainous areas creates the prerequisites for generating conflict potential. When analyzing the state of conflict potential in mountain areas, it is necessary to keep in mind its two variations: a) as being accumulated in the process of the historical existence of ethnic groups, “the past in the present”; b) as being introduced into social life in the process of transformation and the development of a new post-Soviet sociality.

4. Purpose of the Study

The conducted study is aimed at determining the content of the phenomenon of conflict potential basing on the materials of the history and current state of the mountainous areas (peoples of the North Caucasus). The study is aimed at identifying the prerequisites, factors and conditions for the generation and growth of tensions and contradictions, at determining the mechanisms of conflict formation in the life of a specific polyethnic region. The ratio of the general characteristics and the ethno-regional specificity of the “conflict potential” are also of interest.

5. Research Methods

The study was carried out on the basis of applying the methodology of an interdisciplinary approach, allowing the integration of various systems of disciplinary knowledge. The basis of the interdisciplinary approach is system synthesis, which enables to present the phenomenon under investigation in the form of actual and historical integrity. In the process of research, general scientific methods being analysis, comparison and synthesis, a systematic approach were applied.

6. Findings

The conducted analysis of the historical conditions of formation, as well as the prevailing sociality, which arose as a result of radical transformations of all spheres of social life, indicates the presence of zones of social tensions capable of generating conflicts having different content and forms. This characteristic can be given to any region of modern Russia. Mountain areas possessing these common characteristics of conflict have the following significant features: 1. The multi-ethnicity of the region is the basis for the ethnization of virtually any problems and contradictions. The acquisition of ethnic characteristics makes conflicts intractable and they become constant companions in the life activity of mountain ethnic groups. 2. Territorial problems have become the most acute for the region and its peoples. A number of generations are going through the processes of struggle for certain territories and, in fact, these contradictions have become insoluble. 3. The peculiarity of social tension stimulating and affecting the conflict situation is the state national policy (or rather its absence) implemented by the third decade.

7. Conclusion

The decisive condition for neutralizing and overcoming conflicts is the existence of a state national policy, overcoming the unspoken ban on discussion and the removal of problems in the coexistence of ethnic groups. The events of the 90s in the domain of ethnicity revealed all the hot buttons and an inventory and classification of the points of interethnic tension and their overcoming based on the creation of consensus procedures for each were necessary under the conditions of consistent national policy. Most conflicts were based on territorial disputes. In this case, the role of the state should be in determining a certain point of no return, the point which is fair for the majority of peoples in solving territorial problems. Self-removal of public authorities concerning the function of arbitrators in the event of such contradictions, disputes, as a rule, deepens them and a full-fledged conflict grows out of the current tensions. It must be born in mind that the achievement of equality between unequal nations is possible with an unequal attitude towards them in solving their problems.

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