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Psychology of Personality: Real and Virtual Context

PSYCHOLOGICAL SECURITY OF INTER-ETHNIC INTERACTION

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Abstract

Living in a multi-ethnic region necessarily entails problems of cross-ethnic tension and security. Clashes of local populations and migrants have become one of the most pressing contemporary challenges that big cities face. The aim of the study was to explore subjective perceptions of threats in the course of inter-ethnic interaction. The techniques used included the J. Berry questionnaire for assessing acculturation (the variable "Perceived security") and the authorial questionnaire "Interethnic Security". The results were processed with the help of Student's t-test and SPSS Statistics 17.0. The sample consisted of two groups: migrants from the former the Commonwealth of the Independents States countries with average period of residence in the Russian Federation from 1 to 30 years (n = 100) and representatives of the host population, the Russian Federation (n = 100). Both samples were equalized by age (18-55) and gender. The study revealed significant differences in these groups' assessments of security perceptions and descriptions of inter-ethnic interactions. The results obtained can contribute to building an efficient social policy and preventing cross-ethnic tension.

Keywords: Inter-ethnic conflicts, inter-ethnic interaction, migration, psychological security.

1. Introduction

It is now clear that 'ethnic factor' has put down deep roots in the scientific and socio-political discourse. Acknowledged by many researchers, the growth of ethnic self-awareness is a kind of a response to the unification and standardization offered by a global world instead of the ethnic and cultural diversity of the conventional society. The relevance of studying ethnic identity is also determined by the intensification of inter-ethnic interactions, the increase in migratory processes, the strengthening of cultural integration and, at the same time, the development of multiple ethnic conflicts, dangerous manifestations of xenophobia, and chauvinism. The inability of the socium to adapt in time to changes in the character of inter-ethnic and cross-cultural interactions can constitute a threat to poly-ethnic and poly-cultural modern states. This is the reason why a renewed emphasis on the problems concerning studies into ethne as psychological and socio-cultural units comprising the population of the globe is required.

Subjective sensations of threats and the need for security can produce a great impact on personal features. As Zinchenko and Zotova (2013) rightly noted "security/insecurity of the surrounding reality facilitates the formation of everyone's own sets of opinions, views and settings" (p. 111).

The following scholars have made considerable contributions to the development of the issue of ethnic conflicts and a search for ways to provide security: Inkeles and Levinson (1969), Lynn (1971), Krisberg (1973), Yinger (1976), Smith (1979; 1986), Hobsbawm (1990), Hobsbawm and Kertzer (1992), Hall (1993) and others.

2. Problem Statement

The problem of inter-ethnic security of personality and social groups has become a priority under globalization. The global growth of migrants stirs an acute interest in this field of research. It should be stated that a major share of research has traditionally been focusing on social and political aspects of ethnic conflicts, or, the issue has been limited to migrants' adaptation in a receiving society. As a result, psychological dynamics and personal traits manifesting themselves in the process of inter-ethnic adaptation have been paid insufficient attention to so far.

3. Research Questions

At the beginning of the program these hypotheses were formulated:

1. There are significant differences in each group of the testees' estimates of threats perceptions and a sense of security.
2. Attitudes of ethnic majority to migrants depends on the country of migrants origin.
3. Migrants' perceptions of security are of a more complex and multi-component character than that of local populations.

4. Purpose of the Study

The aim of our study was to explore subjective perception of security in the course of cross-ethnic interaction between migrants and representatives of host population by the example of the Sverdlovsk and the Moscow region residents.

5. Research Methods

The study involved two groups of the respondents from the Sverdlovsk and the Moscow region and was carried out in 2018 – early 2019. The samples included:

– migrants from the former the Commonwealth of the Independents States countries (n = 100) with average period of residence in Russia from 1 to 30 years;

– ethnic majority nationals, citizens of the Russian Federation (n = 100).

Both samples were equalized by age (18-55) and gender (50 males and 50 females). The results were processed via SPSS Statistics 17.0.

The study methods included: the J. Berry questionnaire for assessing acculturation (the variable "Perceived security") was applied to identify absence/presence of statistically significant differences in the two groups under study. The comparison was made with the help of Student's t-test for determining statistical significance of mean values differences. A key condition for Student's t-test exploitation is normalcy of distribution of the compared variables. Both samples of the respondents are independent. Verification of normalcy of distribution was carried out with the use of skewness values and kurtosis criteria. Skewness values do not exceed 3 and kurtosis – 7 (Byrne, 2009). Thus, distribution of the variables can be regarded as normal, and the Student's t-test application is sound. We also used the authorial questionnaire "Interethnic Security" in our study. The results of verification of distribution normalcy are presented in table 01.

Table 01. The results of verification of distribution normalcy (Perceived security, J. Berry method)

Security	N		Skewness values		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	Stand. error	Statistic	Stand. error	Statistic	Stand. error
Physical security	300	–	.266	.153	.134	.304
Economic security	300	–	.327	.153	-.070	.304
Cultural security	300	–	-.667	.153	1.172	.304
N valid (completely)	300	–	–	–	–	–

We also used the authorial questionnaire "Interethnic Security" in our study in order to collect statistical data relating to subjective perception of inter-ethnic relations and security perceptions of migrants and ethnic majority representatives. The results of this authorial questionnaire were processed with the help of frequency analysis.

6. Findings

The results of this authorial questionnaire on inter-ethnic security are presented below. The main goal of it is to assess security perceptions among migrants and the host population, to identify how each group perceives inter-ethnic contacts.

The first question is "How are relationships between migrants and locals forged in Your region?" (table 02).

Table 02. How are relationships between migrants and locals forged in Your region? (%)

Response options	Locals (%)	Migrants (%)
Not sure	9	2
Badly, regular inter-ethnic conflicts and discrimination	9	14
satisfactorily, frequent conflicts and signs of discrimination	22	62
Well, rare conflicts and discrimination cases	48	19
Excellent, lack of inter-ethnic conflicts and discrimination	12	3

According to the subjects' responses migrants feel cross-ethnic tension more sharply. The local populations may not assess their actions as discriminatory; they are likely to treat them as "defense of their territory, culture, jobs from newcomers", especially if a contact is of a short-term nature (in a shop, on public transport, etc.). Migrants are subjectively involved in a more active cross-ethnic communication; it appears to be more meaningful for them than for representatives of the titular ethnic group, they are more dependent on successful communication with the host population.

In case of low subjective involvement of the Russian Federation citizens in contacts with migrants much depends on mass media and the presentation of information as it is mass media that keeps the majority of population informed about the state of cross-ethnic affairs. They do not only reflect social processes, they actively shape public attitudes to them (Pottie-Sherman & Wilkes, 2014).

The President of the Foundation "Migration 21" V. Postavnin states: "a large part of the population dances to the tune of politicians and mass media" (as cited in Mukhametshina, 2017). Social meaningfulness of the problem concerning inter-ethnic interaction is also determined by the fact that in Russia there are no political forces working for the interests of migrants. To be a politician-"migration-hater" in Russia is much more beneficial and convenient than to admit objectively the significance of migration for the Russian economy. In contrast, in the EU countries there have always been political forces and parties defending the rights of migrants.

Post-questionnaire interviews indicated that migrants from the Ukraine and Belorussia give the highest evaluations of cross-ethnic relationships (similar ethnic cultures) together with those migrants who have been living in Russia for a considerable period of time on a regular basis and have successfully integrated into the Russian society.

Inter-ethnic security in a multi-ethnic region comprises both the relationships between "locals-migrants" and "migrants-migrants". Migrants were asked to give an answer to this question: "How are relationships between migrants of different ethnicities forged in Your region?" (table 03).

Table 03. How are relationships between migrants of different ethnicities forged in Your region ? (%)

Response options	Migrants (%)
Not sure	2
Badly, regular inter-ethnic conflicts and discrimination	52
satisfactorily, frequent conflicts and signs of discrimination	38
Well, rare conflicts and discrimination cases	5
Excellent, lack of inter-ethnic conflicts and discrimination	3

The comparison of tables 02 and 03 demonstrates that the level of the potential for conflicts between the titular ethnic group and migrants is lower than among migrants of different ethnicities. Interviews showed that in case of conflicts between migrants of different ethnicities the very migrants are less prepared to engage with law enforcement authorities due to fears of being deported or other negative consequences. Therefore, migrants are ready to put up with more serious violations of their rights and interests. Accordingly, representatives of other diasporas can openly commit violations and abuses, especially given historically rooted conflict relationships.

Cross-ethnic clashes inside migrants' community have a substantial impact on personality subjective perception of psychological security in big cities and act as a catalyst in the process of grouping by ethnic origin thus enhancing the formation of closed and autonomous national diasporas which are difficult to control and manage by official means. Metropolitan cities are experiencing the segmentation of labor market, the city territory and professional spheres along ethnic lines. Thus, migrants from Tadzhikistan are mostly engaged in the construction sector, people from Kyrgyzstan – in servicing sectors and HoReCa, China nationals are mostly involved in trade operations. The establishment of parallel communities oriented to satisfying migrants' interests is on the way ("our" doctors, lawyers, shops, etc.). A spontaneous emergence of closed ethnic enclaves, on the one hand, facilitates a short-term peace between conflicting diasporas and provides individual security of the group representatives in the short run. On the other hand, it poses a significant threat in the long term as it jeopardizes social integrity of the society and slows down adaptation of the newly arrived in the Russian Federation. Moreover, in some cases religious radicalization within a closed ethnic group is possible.

In earlier articles we were particularly active in developing the concept of double socio-psychological security of migrant's personality according to which in order to successfully integrate into a new receiving culture it is necessary to actively borrow (at least at the behavioral level) prevailing values, traditions, role models of the majority. But these changes can raise criticism and disapproval of the native diaspora, which increases the risk of losing its support. The need to belong to a group and have support and a sense of psychological security push migrants to seek a reasonable tradeoff between loyalty to their own ethnic group and the observation of cultural norms and traditions of a receiving country. Decisions made by people in this situation depend on a multitude of factors: type of migration (temporary or constant), attitude to migrants, inter-ethnic conflicts, legal status of migrants, etc. The model of a double ethnic role acts as an option for a compromise solution: external adoption of dominant culture values but preservation of one's national culture at the level of values and attitudes.

The next part of our questionnaire relates to the assessment of trust level (table 04).

Table 04. The assessment of trust level (%)

Group	Complete trust	Partial trust	Not a lot of trust	Complete distrust
Towards the state (The Russian Federation)				
Locals	14	51	30	5
Migrants	18	63	17	2
Local population				
Locals	8	59	25	8
Migrants	1	18	74	7
Migrants				
Locals	1	22	63	14
Migrants (representatives of the same ethnicity	29	61	10	0
Migrants (representative of different ethnicity)	0	20	75	5
Religious organizations				
Locals	30	20	32	18
Migrants	32	28	31	9
Ministry of Internal Affaires and the Court				
Locals	3	40	49	8
Migrants	0	8	68	24

The responses show that members of the same diaspora enjoy maximum trust. Psychological significance of "ours" is quite high. It is a diaspora' support that provides a sense of psychological security, necessity and protection. So, there exist strata, inter-ethnic interaction within an impersonal (for the local population) community of migrants. One can argue that a better understanding of migratory processes is impossible in isolation from the number of ethnic diaspora members, its integration into a receiving society, relationships within migrants' community. What is referred to by the host population as an abstract category "migrants' ("aliens', new comers", etc.) is, actually, an elaborate structured social system with its own regularities of development and interaction between its elements. Imprudent and politically charged interference in the life of this social organism can have appalling consequences for the region and local people on a whole.

Citizens of the Russian Federation and the state (Russia) are less trusted than migrants' co-nationals. Most migrants perceive Russia as "a great country", and in spite of the fact that their resettlement is coupled with a lower social status it generally has a significant positive impact on their future life. Maximum distrust is demonstrated towards migrants of other ethnicities and law enforcement authorities, which is generally consistent with the previous findings on high inter-ethnic tension between migrants of different origin. It is partially connected with the struggle for economic resources: migrants are traditionally engaged in low-status occupations facing competition with migrants from other ethnic groups.

The titular population exhibits quite predictable assessments with regard to trust level: the state and co-citizens are much-trusted (only migrants demonstrate a higher level of trust towards the state due to, probably, a kind of Russia's idealization); and they traditionally do not trust newly arrived people of different nationalities.

The assessment of locals' attitudes towards migrants from different regions showed the following ranking (table 05).

Table 05. Locals' attitudes towards migrants from different regions

Migrants' regions	Attitudes
Regions are absent (are not selected by the respondents)	Positive
Belorussia	Mostly positive
Moldova, Ukraine	Neutral
Middle Asia, Syria, the EU countries, the Baltic countries, south-Eastern Asia	Mostly negative
The Caucasus, China, Africa, the USA	Negative

Negative attitudes towards migrants prevail among the local population, and the most negative are towards representatives of ethnic groups with most visible differences in appearance (Mostikov, 2015, p. 176). Individuals from the Caucasus are traditionally rejected – many respondents emphasized their "aggressiveness", "violence", threats of "religious extremism". The bitter experience gained from Chechen conflicts and ethnic clashes in the late 1990s still remains in the ethnic memory of the titular population. Some researchers state that negative historic experience appears to be more essential in the formation of inter-ethnic relations than a positive one (Barlow et al., 2012).

The geopolitical situation in the world acts as an important factor of influence on attitudes towards migrants. We associate low acceptance of migrants from the EU and the USA with it. Strong and deep ties with Belorussia facilitate positive attitudes towards migrants from this country.

The next question "How often do you think of you ethnic belonging?" was asked to evaluate the significance and relevance of the respondents' ethnic self-identification (table 06).

Table 06. How often do you think of you ethnic belonging? (%)

Response options	Locals	Migrants
Always	15	83
Occasionally	73	16
Hardly ever	8	1
Nor sure	4	0

The results obtained confirm the importance of ethnic self-identification of migrants; it is linked to both inter-ethnic tension in the society and an opportunity to receive help and support from co-nationals associations. Ethnicity of the local population is less meaningful since its actualization at the level of behavior and values is connected with the process of cross-ethnic interaction with other nationals which is not significant in the minds of the titular ethnos.

The responses to the question "Is migration a benefit or harm?" are given in table 07.

Table 07. Is migration a benefit or harm? (%)

Response options	Locals	Migrants
Benefit	10	89
Mostly benefit	20	7
Mostly harm	29	1
Harm	11	0
Not sure	30	3

The responses are easily envisaged: the local population is rather cautious and tends to see negative aspects of migration. Unfortunately, in Russia there is a lack of programs on migrants' assimilation as well as xenophobia and nationalism prevention. In fact, this problem is left unattended.

A normative level of attitudes to migrants is presented in table 08.

Table 08. Should locals have more rights than migrants? (%)

Response options	Locals
Yes, certainly	7
No, everyone should have equal rights	83
Not sure	10

The results make it evident that at the level of declared values the majority of the respondents maintain ideas of equality and respect for all ethnic groups, although in reality it is not always the case.

Following the call of the 1990s "Russia – for the Russians" we tried to identify the percentage of the respondents sharing the idea of restricting the number of migrants to the Russian Federation and what their motives are. The findings are shown in table 09 (the respondents who gave an affirmative answer to the first part of the question were asked "if to restrict, why?".

Table 09. Should the flow of migrants to the Russian Federation be restricted?" (%)

Response variants	Locals %	if to restrict, why?
Yes	40	37 – competition for labor resources
Mostly yes	47	35 – aggression, insolence, criminality 23 – threat to national culture and traditions of the Russian Federation 4 – poor sanitation, accompanying diseases 1 – other motives
Mostly no	5	–
No	5	–
Not sure	3	–

We note that a set of motives in favor of setting limits to the migratory flows is common in every culture, and our study confirms it together with other scholars: Schneider (2008) wrote about labor resources and cultural threats in perceptions of the local population; Adeyanju and Neverson (2007) mentioned a concept of "a disease" as an attribute of another ethnos' representatives.

The Berry questionnaire for assessing acculturation (the variable "Perceived security") showed the following tendencies presented in table 10 (the higher the value, the higher subjective security).

Table 10. Comparison of migrants and locals by the intensity of security indicators ($p < 0.01$)

Variables	Migrants	Locals	Student's t-test	p-level
Cultural security	12.7	13.5	-3.26	0.001
Physical security	15.1	16.5	4.80	0.002
Economic security	10.3	11.9	4.55	0.000

The results show that migrants feel less secure than locals do. Such factors as 'cultural' and "economic security" present a greater psychological threat according to both groups of the respondents.

7. Conclusion

The forwarded hypotheses have been confirmed. The Russian Federation population is generally cautious and sometimes critical in attitudes to migrants for fear of an increased competition in labor market and cultural expansion. In the majority of cases fears of local people are totally groundless: cheap migrant labor is one of the aspects of productivity as a macroeconomic country indicator. There certainly exist significant cultural differences but dangers emanating from migrants in the minds of the titular populations is over-exaggerated according to the poll conducted by Levada-Center in 2019 (Pipiya, 2019). Accordingly, the number of migrants is also overestimated in the eyes of the Russians. So, Herda (2010) notes: "a substantial proportion of majority group members perceive minority populations as much larger than they are in reality" (p. 674). The titular nation has always dramatized the menace, which sometimes leads to "fighting windmills": migrants deal with low-skilled jobs which locals are not willing to perform. Migrants are an economic and social resource of Russia especially given a demographic recession.

One important point of the study is the revealed inter-ethnic tension within the migrant community between members of different ethnicities. Their fight for limited resources forces them to compete with each other thus shaping a psychologically insecure climate. Despite negative attitudes of some locals to migrants and tendency to accuse newcomers of "everything" the majority of migrants maintain quite high opinions of the country and its population. If extremism happens to emerge in a migrant community it is likely to be of an induced character: when a person is subject to continuing "migrantophobia" on the part of ethnic majority it is difficult for him to respect people.

To emulate positive practices of western countries in dealing with greater migratory flows and in turning cultural differences and cross-ethnic conflicts into peaceful and secure co-existence of various ethnic groups is the best possible solution to the current situation. It is necessary to develop social policies taking into account psychological, cultural and worldview-based peculiarities of every ethnos. Only in this way will it be possible to rethink and transform the image of a migrant from "negative" to objective one, with its strong and weak sides. The realization of these goals is essential in a package of preventive measures to prevent religious and national extremism in a multiethnic region and eventually it will enhance the formation of psychological security of the entire society.

Acknowledgments

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