ETHNO-CONFESSIONAL CONFLICT AS A DESTRUCTIVE WAY TO RESOLVE CONTRADICTIONS IN SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUS RELATIONS

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Abstract

The purpose of the study is to analytically describe the features and components of ethno-confessional conflicts and prove their destructive power in 'resolving contradictions' in social and religious relations. The focus of the paper is the phenomenon of ethno-confessional conflict as a destructive way to 'settle the arguments' in social and religious relations and the analysis of the conflict-related ethno-confessional situation in the Republic of Kazakhstan. The authors identified the groups of conflict factors and their corresponding lines of inter-confessional and intra-confessional confrontation. According to the results of the study, it is possible to conclude that religion and ethnos are social phenomena. They are in a very complex relationship with each other and are essential for a wide range of social aspects. The nature of the relationship depends on the specific historical conditions and plays a pivotal role in the social organism. The relationship can be a factor of both integration and, conversely, the disintegration of an ethnos. At the same time, religions (including the major world ones), despite the interethnic or supranational content of many of them, have always been subordinated to the ethnic process. The reason for this lies in the fact that religions could only manifest themselves in ethnic forms that corresponded to ethnic identity.

Keywords: religion, ethnos, confessions, relations, conflict

1. Introduction

There is much evidence that nowadays instead of ideological division there is a new type of breaking that forms the distinction among modern societies in economic, ethnic, and confessional spheres [1-5]. Back in 1983, B.R.

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Anderson, in his work 'Imagined Communities' [1], argued that communist countries that are close in ideology can fight each other, calling nationalism, ethnic factor the cause of the conflict. The prevailing view of nationalism as a social construct and the cause of conflicts is also considered in the works by E. Gellner [2], E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger [3], etc.

In our opinion, the concept of nationalism as a construct and conflict factor is incomplete, since it does not consider the confessional factor that has aggravated the destructive tendencies of modern global society in recent years due to the increase in the scale of religious extremism. Special attention should be paid to the clash of civilizations model of S. Huntington [4] (which we support), according to which if the 20th century was a century of the conflict of ideologies, then the 21st century will be the century of the conflict of civilizations or religions. The historical milestone that divides the world with a predominance of national contradictions and the world characterized by a clash of civilizations Huntington calls the end of the Cold War. Thus, ethno-confessional problems are the key issues among the main challenges to humanity in the 21st century. There are many evident examples of how interfaith conflicts acquire a pronounced ethnic connotation [5].

As Richard Beck expertly points out [6], religions perform certain general social functions in the system of socio-political relations, one of which, particularly meaningful in the context of our research, is the integrative-disintegrative function. This function, on the one hand, supports a confessional or ethnic community, strengthens the foundations of statehood, however, on the other hand, there is evidence that the consolidation of people based on faith in a multi-ethnic society can lead to the disintegration of society. Consequently, society will be divided into communities of adherents of different religions.

In the history of modern global society, it is possible to predict an increase in the number of ethnic and confessional conflict in the countries of Western Europe emerging from the dynamic changes in the ethnic and confessional map of the region, as well as, the massive influx of migrants from Asia and Africa. 'The ultra-right renaissance' of recent years is a prime example of this process, as well as the fact that ultra-right political bodies themselves are becoming increasingly desirable parties in the parliaments of Europe. A notable example is 'the Alternative for Germany', a party which received 12.6% of the vote in the German Bundestag and became the third political force after the CDU/CSU and the SPD. The Netherlands Freedom Party in the parliamentary elections of 2017 took the second place with 13.1% of the vote and received 20 seats in the House of Representatives of the States-General. Since 2010, the ultra-right nationalist party 'Yobik' has been represented in the national parliament of Hungary.

As far as value-ideological conflicts are concerned, it is important to note that, according to M. Besançon, a certain subject (person, organization) may use existing conditions or create new contradictions in one's own interests, i.e. to transform existing contradictions which will lead to a conflict in the society. In the case of conflicts arising from the struggle for distribution or control over material and financial resources, they may be relatively cleverly resolved

through the early mobilization of main stakeholders. However, it is very difficult to neutralize value-ideological conflicts through the negotiation process. Although religious and ethnic conflicts eventually turn into 'low-intensity conflicts', they frequently acquire the geopolitical character of vital importance [7]. To prevent or resolve such conflicts, in our opinion, it may be necessary for the 'third party' to intervene through the introduction of a peacekeeping military contingent.

According to the authors of the analytical report 'The Regulation of Ethnopolitical Conflict and Maintenance of Civil Harmony in Conditions of Cultural Diversity: Models, Approaches, Practices' [8], there are several types of reasons behind ethno-confessional conflicts caused by different sets of causal variables. The socio-economic causes of ethno-confessional conflicts primarily relate to the uneven economic development of the territories with various ethnic groups and religions, and, consequently, the life level in these regions. The historical reasons for ethno-confessional conflicts stem from the ethnos's self-assessment of its place and the role in the world order. The phenomenon of historical memory links them with national traditions, images of their historical enemies, reflections on the colonial past, the existence or lack of experience of its own state architecture, etc. Ethnocultural, religious and socio-psychological reasons primarily stem from the feelings of humiliation, the lack of national cultural autonomy, restrictions, or the inability to fully implement the political, economic, and human rights of people on racial, national, ethnic, and religious grounds. The ethno-demographic reasons of conflicts relate mainly to the violations of the established relationships between the numerical and qualitative composition of ethnic groups. This situation stems from the difference in birth rates, assimilation, uncontrolled migration, the displacement of non-indigenous people.

In order to determine the conflictual potential of inter-confessional relations, it is necessary to consider the specific political, economic, cultural and historical conditions in which a specific ethno-confessional community was formed.

According to the Iranian researcher H. Mohammadzadeh [9], the specific features of ethno-confessional conflicts are as follows:

1. The extremely rapid emergence of an open form of conflict and its transition to a phase of a military clash. The rapid escalation, resulting in the unlimited use of force and means in the total mobilization of all opportunities and resources, ensued. The extreme cruelty of fighting, the use of prohibited means in the practice of wars, including genocide, ethnic cleansing, the use of mass destruction methods, hostage taking, mass robbery, cruel treatment of prisoners (the Bosnian War, the war in the Serbian Krajina, [10], the Sri Lankan Civil War between the Buddhist Sinhalese and Hindu Tamils [11]).

2. The involvement of ethnic diasporas, or co-religionists, as well as, the world community. Therefore, the conflict becomes internationalized, its

escalation is outward (the Kosovo war and the bombing of Yugoslavia [12]).

3. Undoubtedly, there is one common feature describing all these conflicts, irrelevant of their uniqueness, i.e., their destructiveness and an ability to build in the historical memory of peoples and ethnicities who took part in them (the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh [13]).

Naturally, not all regional conflicts have a religious dimension. Conflict causes can be exclusively inter-ethnic conflicts (Georgian-Ossetian and Georgian-Abkhaz conflicts), ideological contradictions (conflict in Transnistria, including as a result of Moldova's adoption of the Law on the State Language), etc. However, within the framework of this article, we will limit ourselves to the analysis of ethno-confessional conflicts.

Our study sets out that a characteristic feature of ethno-confessional conflicts is that once they arise, they never disappear. These conflicts have no practical solution that would satisfy all interested parties. The problem, obviously, is that ethnically-religious features affect all spheres of human activity, e.g. culture, politics, economics, etc. But what is more important is that they affect the spiritual and religious inner world of the participants.

2. Methodology

The purpose of the study is to analyse the conflict ethno-confessional situation in Kazakhstan. Traditionally, ethno-confessional situations are assessed with the use of several tools and techniques.

The main research method of our study is the analysis of the state of the religious sphere in the Republic of Kazakhstan with the help of a special questionnaire, the analysis of the research literature, the content data analysis, as well as, the survey of experts in this field of research.

To achieve our goal, we formed a cohort of experts from the fields of theology and religious studies (23 people). The expert cohort included theologians, representatives of the Spiritual Body of the Muslims (10 persons); the representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church (5 persons); employees of universities specializing in religious studies (8 persons). The selection of experts stemmed from the desire to represent all participants of the process of interfaith relations, i.e., the two most influential religions of Kazakhstan, as well as the scientific community. We are convinced that this choice of experts can help to highlight the problematic issues of the conflict-related ethno-confessional situation in Kazakhstan.

When conducting the expert survey, each participant in the expert group was asked a number of questions, implying the possibility of choosing several statements regarding conflict-related groups of factors and their corresponding lines of confrontation. During a certain period, the experts identified the most significant groups of potentially conflicting factors, as well as ideas and comments that arose in connection with this problem. Further, we systematized

the obtained materials, after which the expert group held a discussion of the final material.

3. Results

In general, according to the experts, nowadays the ethno-confessional situation in the Republic of Kazakhstan can be characterized as stable. Inter-confessional relations do not display any significant contradictions (intra-confessional, inter-confessional, between the state and religious unions), threatening with the destabilization of society at the national level.

Nevertheless, experts identified four groups of potentially conflict-related factors (Table 1).

Table 1. The analysis of the conflict potential of the ethno-confessional situation in Kazakhstan.

The groups of conflict factors	Adversarial position	The percentage of mentioning
1. The intra-confessional contradictions in the main confession of Kazakhstan	the representatives of the Islamic clergy of different ethnicity	52%
	the representatives of the Islamic clergy of Kazakh nationality of different regional affiliation	35%
	the representatives of the Islamic clergy depending on the place of receiving theological education	30%
2. The exacerbation of inter-confessional competition	the main traditional confessions and non-traditional religious associations	26%
	certain non-traditional religious associations	22%
3. The contradictions between the state and religious associations	dealings with destructive religious associations	74%
4. External influence on the religious situation	the strengthening of the Islamic factor due to the activity of missionaries from Islamic states	61%
	the spread of non-traditional religions because of the strengthening of the Western economic and political presence	17%

According to the experts, the intra-confessional contradictions among the representatives of the Islamic clergy of different ethnic backgrounds and local individual conflict manifestations emerge from the lack of institutional traditions in the Muslim community of Kazakhstan. For the past three hundred years, Kazakhstan has had no independent Islamic High Council and ethnically local Muslim communities and their imams were Tatar, Uzbek, Tajik and people of

other nationalities. Therefore, Kazakhstan nationalities were in subordination to the Spiritual Body of the Muslims outside of Kazakhstan.

Because of the establishment of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Kazakhstan within the framework of the Islamic High Council by Ratbekhadji Nysanbayev, ethnic Kazakhs got the positions of imams. Consequently, in those areas where the population of the Uzbek and Uighur ethnic groups was high, ethnic Kazakh imams were perceived as an infringement on the rights of non-Kazakhs believers. Nowadays such practices are widely spread but still preserve a potential reason for local ethno-confessional conflicts within Muslim communities.

The intra-confessional contradictions among imams of Kazakh nationality, but of different regional affiliation, according to the experts' opinion, arise from the differences in attitudes towards religion in different regions of the republic. In the west of Kazakhstan, where mainly the Kazakh population resides, Islam, according to the experts, has a more symbolic significance, and despite the general increase in the interest in religion, its presence is barely felt even in everyday life. In the south, on the contrary, Islam has a more regulating influence and is largely present in the ordinary life of Muslims.

Intra-contradictions among representatives of the higher clergy, depending on the place of acquisition of theological education, according to the experts, lies in the fact that many Muslims of independent Kazakhstan had the possibility of getting theological education abroad, as a rule, in the Arab countries, as well as in Turkey and Pakistan. Upon their return to their homeland, most of them became the vehicles of Sunni Islam not so much in its classical understanding as in the radical one. That led to an increase in disputes against the local features of Islam, including Sufi beliefs which are quite common in Kazakhstan.

These contradictions have led initially to counter the official clergy of Kazakhstan. The situation was exacerbated by the successive elections of 3 Supreme Muftis of Kazakhstan who had graduated from foreign universities (Absattar Derbisali in 2000, Yerzhan Malgazhuly Mayamerov in 2013, Serikbaykazy Orazin in 2017). These Muftis actively promoted the eradication of folk traditions which contradicted classical Islam. According to the experts, this is a dangerous trend that opposes classical Islam and leads directly to Wahhabism. As one of the experts noted, "the Kazakhs have never been religious fanatics, they are traditionally tolerant, that is why the eradication of the traditions that run counter to Islam is the wrong way".

Therefore, in the opinion of the experts, intra-confessional contradictions in Kazakhstan can become quite a serious factor, which can exacerbate the religious situation in the country.

Regarding the contentious factors associated with interfaith competition, according to the experts, the activities of foreign missionaries and non-traditional religious organizations (organizations that have gone beyond the traditional national and world religions, but use their ideas, symbols and rituals) receive a negative reaction from the large part of the population of Kazakhstan.

These organizations include such religious communities as 'Jehovah's Witnesses', the church 'New Life', the Seventh-Day Adventists, New Apostolic Church, Bahai Community, and many others. According to one of the experts, "the majority of citizens have a negative attitude to non-traditional religions, because they destroy families, break social ties of a person".

Undoubtedly, it is natural that the betrayal of Islam in the public consciousness appears as a break with one's own ethnos. The Russian Orthodox Church duly represented by its metropolitan district in the Republic of Kazakhstan also actively opposes the activities of foreign missionaries.

At the same time, the potential for the conflict among the various branches of non-traditional religions is growing, many of which, according to the experts, openly show evil intentions and aggressiveness against their competitors.

Regarding the factors associated with the contradictions between the state and religious associations, the experts noted that the problem arises, as a rule, with non-traditional religions. Their activities have a destructive impact on the spiritual and moral development of Kazakhstan society because they urge their followers to abandon the conventional spiritual, moral, and cultural values, make their members oppose the law. Therefore, the activities of such denominations objectively lead to an adequate response from the state authorities. The measures often introduce the element of potential conflict in interfaith relations.

Speaking about conflict factors related to the external influence, the experts note that all the previous groups of factors also largely arise from them. Consequently, the reinforcement of the Islamic factor is a result of the active agency intensification of the missionaries from Islamic states, representing mainly international Muslim centres, some of which profess fundamentalist Islam.

In general, these conflict factors indicate the need to improve the effectiveness of state policy in the sphere of inter-confessional relations.

4. Discussion

The analysis of the conflict-related ethno-confessional situation makes it possible to provide the following findings.

In general, the processes associated with religious revival are objective flows, which in some way affect the spiritual and moral values of various ethnic groups in Kazakhstan.

The activation of the processes associated with the attempts to politicize religion may result in a dangerous form of religious and political extremism. This is evident from the spread of religious ideology of the Salafi confession, which is characterized by the denial of freedom of religious opinions, the fanatical obeying to the ritual Sharia law, and serves as the basis for the spread of the radical ideas of Islamic fundamentalism, e.g. Wahhabism, on the territory of Kazakhstan.

When describing the state and level of conflict in inter-confessional relations in multi-ethnic societies in general, one should keep in mind that conflict sensitivity largely depends on the ethnic stratigraphy of the society. The stratigraphy is contingent on whether we are dealing with several equal-sized ethnic groups or the dominant ethnic group and national minorities and the level of development of ethnic antagonism among these ethnic groups. Therefore, since ancient times the intolerant attitude towards people of other faiths has existed and resulted in bad relations among tribes. The situation with tribes' intolerance is of great importance because it describes the times when the formation of religious beliefs was just emerging.

There is much evidence that contradictory relations between individual human communities could not but find their reflection in religious beliefs. It should be borne in mind that, as noted by F. Stewart, "intolerant support of one religion is the result of conflicting relations among the nations, which profess these religions, and not vice versa, as it sometimes seems at first glance. Religious consciousness does not produce hostility among people of different ethnic backgrounds. It rather reflects it. Therefore, dominant position with respect to others stems from those religions whose ethnic formations claim the only truth and superiority over other ethnicities." [14]

Undoubtedly, confessional diversity can negatively affect the process of consolidating a multi-ethnic society. However, it is also obvious that this becomes possible when one or another confessional affiliation, this or that religious choice of people is assessed as a sign of their political loyalty or disloyalty, patriotism, or anti-patriotism. In this connection, the development of the spiritual life and culture of the people of Kazakhstan is possible only under the conditions of constant and free mutual enrichment with the spiritual achievements of various nationalities living on its territory. The guarantee of non-admission of open conflicts in the Kazakh society should include not only bans but also a high internal culture of the people of Kazakhstan, deep and conscious assimilation of genuine spiritual values, including those that are borne by religion.

Evidence suggests that besides the reconciliation and consolidation of Kazakh society among representatives of traditional religions of Kazakhstan, these processes are important for the development of institutional interests of Kazakh people. The representatives of Kazakhstan traditional religions are concerned about the preservation of traditional religions as an influential guarantee of the national and cultural identity of the peoples who profess them. All of them, to a greater or lesser degree, are under pressure from non-religious missionaries and preachers of new cults. All of them, one way or another, are characterized by the orientation toward state power, the desire to count on its support to solve their problems.

Religious revival in Kazakhstan occurs against the backdrop of the disintegration of the social identities of the Soviet period, the loss of cultural and historical identity. Until now, a complex and lengthy process of transforming public consciousness has continued. It is related to the search for a new

collective identity, and, therefore, the question of the relationship between religion and ethnicity is acute in Kazakh society.

The division of India in 1946-1947 may be a prime example for Kazakhstan, showing the need for cautious treatment of religious problems. It this case, the British government and the Indian administration, under the influence of Pakistani leader M. Jinna, agreed to consider Pakistan a nation and completely ignored the fact that the partition of India was purely religious, not ethnic. It is important to note that religious unity did not prevent the further separation of Bangladesh from Pakistan (as well as the failure of plans to unite Egypt and Syria). Currently, in India more than 80% of the population are Hindus, but in some states, most of the population profess other religions. So, in Punjab much of the population are Sikhs, more than half of Nagaland residents are Christians, and almost two-thirds of the population of Jammu and Kashmir are Muslims. In connection with this, Pakistan is putting forward territorial claims to India over the adherence of the states with the Islamic population. Jammu and Kashmir have several separatist Islamic organizations aimed at secession from India (for example, the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front).

Evidence suggests that world religions, on the one hand, insist on the universalism of their own teachings, rituals, and morals, but on the other hand, major religions are somewhat tolerant of local beliefs, a diversity of local features. For example, the Catholic Church in Poland is somewhat different from the Spanish Catholic Church. Differences also emerge in different regions of the same country. And in such a situation, the tolerance of the Catholic religion to local manifestations of different communities makes it possible to identify their relationship. A similar role is played by Orthodoxy in Russia, Anglicanism in Britain, Presbyterianism in Scotland. According to R. Marchisio, M. Pisati, D.S. Walker, such rituals express "belonging without faith" ("belonging without believing") [15, 16], i.e., a national rather than religious affiliation. In this aspect, the tolerance of representatives and preachers of traditional Islam to its national peculiarities, inherent in Kazakhstan, is very important.

We are convinced that in the process of conflict, a religion transforms into a political concept, it can act as an instrument of political mobilization. Even though religion is one of the driving forces of ethno-confessional conflicts, history offers cases when religious movements were based exclusively on non-violent actions (Gandhi in India, Martin Luther King in America). Religion, being a powerful generator of ethno-confessional conflicts, is also a factor that to a certain extent limits its devastating consequences. To a large extent, that is facilitated by the peacekeeping activities of the leaders of most Churches.

A notable example is Kyrgyzstan, where back in 1990, thanks to the peacekeeping activity of religious organizations, it was possible to stop ethnic confrontation in the Osh region of Kyrgyzstan. In this connection, the representatives of the Islamic clergy of Kazakhstan should pay more attention to the problems of ethnic conflicts in the regions of Kazakhstan, populated mainly by representatives of a non-titular ethnos (Uygur district of the Almaty region, Sayram, and Turkestan districts of the South Kazakhstan region, etc.).

Several reports have shown that the peculiarity of ethno-confessional conflicts stems also from the fact that they can arise in economically developed countries (regions). Representatives of well-off social groups can act as their conductors. In addition to Asian and African countries, the post-Soviet area, in Europe inter-ethnic and inter-confessional conflicts tend to spread in relatively stable regions, e.g. Belgium (Valona), Spain (Basques), Canada (Quebec), not to mention Northern Ireland. Even in the United States, tensions are growing on the confessional ground between the white and the black people.

There are indications that nowadays it is Islam in the United States of America that is the most dynamic religion, which is gaining followers faster than many other confessions. At the same time, according to the American Imam Mohammad Bashar Arafat, the growth in the number of Muslims does not stem from African Americans, who make up about 30% of those who converted to Islam, but mostly from white people. Interestingly, a particular widespread 'Islamic appeal' occurs in American prisons, where over a short period of time more than 135,000 of US citizens have become Muslims. Moreover, this transition has not religious but purely political nature, primarily as a protest of the 'poor' against the 'rich' [*Neizvestnyiislam v SSHA ('Unknown' Islam in the USA)*, retrieved July 24, 2018, ummamag.kg/ru/articles/interview/1279_ neizvestnyi_islam_v_ssha].

This study has shown that ethnic and inter-confessional conflicts interpenetrate, and grow from one to another. Explosions of religious intolerance and radicalization of sentiments often take place against the backdrop of stratification of ethnopolitical contradictions. Religion as a component of nationalism may be one of the conflict sources.

5. Conclusions

Summarizing the analysis of the characteristics and components of the ethno-confessional conflict as a destructive way of resolving contradictions in social and religious relations, one has to admit that in order to generally determine the conflict potential of inter-confessional, inter-Church, and state-Church relations in a multi-ethnic society, it is necessary to consider the specific political, economic, and cultural-historical conditions in which a specific ethno-confessional community was formed. Therefore, religious factors play an important role in mobilizing and consolidating a multi-ethnic society and at the same time can act as a powerful conflict factor. The results of the study indicate that when traditional societies undergo a modernization stage (Kazakhstan is a prime example), confessional mobilization is incorporated into ethno-national and social mobilization. At the same time, there is an inevitable combination of politics (in its general sense) and religion, which, in turn, leads to the preservation of tension in ethno-confessional relations.

The preservation of conflict is intrinsically inherent in any poly-confessional and poly-ethnic society. Evidently, this situation emerges from the dynamic change in the interests of various social strata and groups, and,

consequently, their ethno-confessional self-identification. To a certain extent, this also applies to the people of Kazakhstan. Therefore, there is a set of challenging political tasks which are as follows: the development of methods and culture of tolerant dialogue with the state, the people of Kazakhstan and the subjects of politics and various confessions; the development of democratic political and legal forms and mechanisms for reconciliation and the resolution of inherently existing contradictions in social and religious relations.

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