

Educational concept to studying Jewish identity

Concepto educativo para estudiar la identidad judía

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ABSTRACT:

The article makes a comparative analysis of theoretical approaches to studying Jewish identity, and their variety can be due to the phenomenon of cognitive dissonance arising when one tries to define its essence. The research proves that Jewish identity can be defined as a cognitive, mental construct formed under the influence of a set of factors determining the choice of the image of one's 'Self' at a conscious and unconscious levels.

Keywords: education, Jewish identity, identity cognitive concept, primordialism, cognitivism, instrumentalism, identity civilization concept

RESUMEN:

El artículo hace un análisis comparativo de los enfoques teóricos para estudiar la identidad judía, y su variedad puede deberse al fenómeno de la disonancia cognitiva que surge cuando uno trata de definir su esencia. La investigación demuestra que la identidad judía se puede definir como una construcción cognitiva y mental formada bajo la influencia de un conjunto de factores que determinan la elección de la imagen del "Ser" a nivel consciente e inconsciente.

Palabras clave: educación, identidad judía, concepto cognitivo de identidad, primordialismo, cognitivismo, instrumentalismo, concepto de civilización de identidad

1. Introduction

Modern society is shaped by processes associated with increasing globalization and assimilation. These trigger economic and cultural modernization which, in turn, reduces the significance of the values of the traditional society. This process, according to I. Wallerstein's concept, is followed by sociogenesis trends when numerous groups are formed in a society in crisis. These groups seek to find their identity which promotes group unity when fighting for survival against other groups (Wallerstein, 2003). An example of this is the history of Jews whose influence on the development of the world culture is so significant and

ambiguous that the Jewish theme has long been subject of reflection for scholars and philosophers attempting to define Jewish identity (Meyer, 1990).

It is generally believed that identity is an integral part of the individual's "Self-concept", which emerges as one recognizes his own belonging to a certain group, as well as the significance attached to this. This results in the formation of one's identity, which is a phenomenon of a social nature. Also, depending on the preferential orientation, in some societies it can take an ethnic, religious or civilian form. However, when studying Jewish identity, we face a problem mentioned by M. Buber, according to which Jewish identity does not correspond to any of these models. The uniqueness of Jews stems from the fact that they cannot be put into any classification, nor attributed to any scheme. Jews cannot describe themselves as representatives of a certain ethnic group or a state since for a long time they lived within the diaspora, that is, outside the influence of a single ethnic or state concept. Similarly, one cannot apply the criterion of belonging to one religion as since the 19th century the majority of Jews were influenced by the processes of secularization and modernization (Buber, 1963).

This proposition is confirmed by the structure of the global Jewish community which consists of many different groups, such as Israeli Jews, Western Jews and Jews coming from the Soviet Union. All of them differ greatly in terms of culture and ethnic identity; however, despite this or the strong impact of secularization and assimilation among Jews, most of them still perceive Jewish identity still exists and is developing. Thus, the task of determining the factors that influence the formation and transformation of Jewish identity seems to be a pressing one. When solving it, researchers not only need to determine the ontological content of Jewish identity, but also they have to explain the difference in identity among groups such as the Sephardim and Ashkenazi, the "Russian" and the "Moroccan" Jews, as well as the natives of such countries as Iraq, Poland, Yemen, etc. (Horowitz, 1999).

2. Hypothesis of the research

The study proves the thesis that the variety of theoretical approaches to studying Jewish identity is due to the phenomenon of cognitive dissonance arising as one is trying to determine its essence. This results in secular science developing opposite opinions which are based on the formed "biological" and "cognitive" explanations of the nature of Jewish identity. From the author's point of view, the research model of Jewish identity must take into account various objective and subjective, social and intragroup factors of its formation that developed within the existing concepts of identity such as primordialism, constructivism, instrumentalism and the civilizational concept of identity. The integral methodology defines Jewish identity as a cognitive, mental construct formed under the influence of objective and subjective, external and intragroup factors that determine the choice of the image of one's self at conscious and unconscious levels.

3. Goals and objectives of the research

The article aims to identify the patterns in the development of approaches to studying Jewish identity.

4. Literature review

Jewish identity has been considered by researchers, scientists, and philosophers working on identity issues and exploring various factors of its formation. The understanding of this concept was greatly influenced by the cultural-anthropological studies of Z. Bauman (1998), F. Barth (1994), F. Boas (1997), B. E. Wiener (2002), N. Ya. Danilevsky (2011), E. Shils (1972), I. Castells (2000), who proved the inextricable connection between the religious, social, and ethnic consciousness. Socio-psychological influence of religion on the formation of self-consciousness was explored in the works of P. Berger and T. Luckman (1995), M. Wallerstein (2003), A. Schütz (2003), E. Erikson (1996), E. Hobsbawm (1992), T. Horowitz (1999), A. Kardiner (1939), H. Tajfel (1986). In Europe and the USA, the central position was taken by positivist studies whose methodology is based on cognitivism represented by

primordialism, constructivism and instrumentalism. There, Jewish identity was investigated by K. Brubaker (2000), L. Berman (1972), S. Eisenstadt (2000), H. Gans (1979), C. Gitelman (1995), S. Liebman (1997), M. Meyer (1990), R. Wodak (1999), G. de Vos and L. Romanucci-Ross (1982).

5. Materials and methods

Conducting research, we used the scientific concepts of Jewish identity, such as biological, primordial, constructivist, instrumental, and civilizational. The methodological basis of the research included a socio-psychological approach that enabled to identify the patterns of social influence on identity, a subjectivist approach that considers self-consciousness, self-identification, experiences, personality reactions as identity factors, and a structural-functional one used to analyze the influence of religious commitment on identity.

6. Results

Works on Jewish identity contain many interpretations of this concept, but they can be generalized in one theoretical model. The substantive basis of this model is the person's knowledge that he belongs to a certain community meaningful to him which can be a social, ethnic, religious or cultural one. Thus, Jewish identity is basically knowledge, that is, a construct that emerges and transforms during social interaction. However, this is a special mental construct that balances between the real and mental worlds. Regarding this mental side, identity is the result of the impact of a pre-determined social environment that conveys special ethnic, confessional and cultural ideas through the mechanism of socialization. As a mental structure, identity has at least two levels which are the actual mental level with beliefs, perceptions, norms, values and the practical level where religious and social actions dominate, so human life in society is influenced by the level of values. These levels are closely interrelated, and the practical level directly depends on the values of Judaism that belong to ascriptive factors determining the specific content of Jewish identity which the individual constructs independently during his lifetime. In addition to these factors, identity is influenced by variables that require constant efforts to maintain their functionality. These can be represented by professional interests, social status, educational level, etc. The cumulative impact of these factors takes a person along the path of finding and understanding his own identity, which will be social, religious, ethnic, or cultural depending on the influence of which factor prevails.

7. Discussion

Taking all this into consideration, it is clear that views on the nature of Jewish identity differ greatly depending on the region where Jewish groups reside, as well as on belonging of the carriers of this identity to the secular or religious stratum. For example, in Israel, the question of identity is connected with the dichotomy of "Jewish-Israeli" identification. The latter is solved when one links himself with the values of orthodox Judaism and the requirements of observing its postulates (Liebman and Katz, 1997). Most modern Israelis choose between two basic identification models, one of which is similar to the Western model of Jewish identity emphasizing secular values, and the other one is characterized by the domination of ontological religious or biological ideas and is based on the belief in the chosenness of the people of Israel (Galesnik, 2012).

At the same time, Jews living in a diaspora, focus more on other components of Jewish identity. For example, in the US, most Jews perceive themselves as a religious group only (Gitelman, 1995). In the countries of the former Soviet Union, Jews typically see Jewish identity as something related to their bloodline, nationality and feelings, rather than beliefs or religious practices. Thus, a characteristic feature of Jews is great differences between communities living in different cultural and even linguistic conditions; however, they consider themselves to be one nation with common history, culture and religion. But then, what unites these various groups in a single nation, and what factors stand behind this? Answering these questions, researchers face the need to identify the substantive and attributive factors of identity formation, and two methodological approaches can be used in

this regard. First, this is an approach implying fundamental research on the essence of identity, while the second approach focuses on empirical descriptions of factors shaping and transforming identity in modern society (Aleksandrova, 2015).

The supporters of the first approach insist on the great role played by the ontological reasons in the formation of identity. However, this approach is divided into two groups: biologists and cognitivists. The methodological position of the first group rests on the works of biologists who proceed from the belief that identity implies there is an unchangeable in time genetic basis within a changing personal being. In this case, "biological prerequisites" and "common genetic origin" are seen as the leading factors forming the unity. This methodology is used to justify the positions of Zionism. In Jewish science, these tasks are solved in the papers of F. London and B. Hazan, E. Van Den Haag, A. Mourant, S. Mill and E. Kobelinsky, J. Zofar, P. Smith and E. Kaye (1986). However, the conclusions related to studying the essence of Jews within the biological concept of the ethnos are questioned by the concepts emphasizing the cognitive component in the process of identity formation. These authors appeal to ethnic, linguistic, and geographical factors that determine the religious, cultural, and historical unity of communities. However, the identity of a group is not a genetic formula, but a cognitive or mental construct associated with the feeling of belonging its members have.

This approach was substantiated in classical works on cultural and religious anthropology by E. Tylor, J. Fraser, B. Malinovsky, F. Boas (1997). Later these ideas were developed by A.A. Arutyunyan, Yu.V. Bromley, K. Girtz, L.N. Gumilyov, S. Kaltakhchyan, S.V. Lurie, E. Shils (1972), who saw identity as the system of worldview constants, representing a prism through which a person looks at the world. The overwhelming majority of historians that are of Jewish origin, such as S. Ettinger, P. Johnson, D. Fishman, B. Vysotsky, S. M. Pilkington, adhere to this approach (Pilkington, 1999).

This cognitivist approach was called primordialism since it believed that the formation of identity is influenced by a number of stable objective factors, such as geographical location, origin, common language, established traditions of upbringing, and common cultural grounds. These ideas on the socially-determined nature of identity were also confirmed by other representatives of the cognitivist approach. However, in their opinion, the primordial interpretation of identity did not take into account the possibility of transforming identity, thus depriving it of its heuristic significance. Among these scholars there is a radical group of cognitive scientists such as B. Anderson, F. Barth, E. Gellner, and E. Hobsbawm (1992). They are called constructivists and claim that identity is formed only in the process of conscious creation of the image of oneself and the world. Similar ideas were aired by postmodern authors who explore cognitive problems related to interconnection of various components in self-consciousness, in which the "Self" is opposed to "real", "ideal", and "anti-ideal" (Barth, 1994).

Studies on the identity of Jews within constructivist approaches are mainly conducted in America where the concept of multiple modernities of S. Eisenstadt is popular. This researcher promotes the idea that identity is created due to reflectivity which emerges in response to external influence. This enacts traditional values and innovations related to modernity penetrating into culture (Barth, 1994). A similar position is held by S. Glenn and N. Sokoloff, who believe Jewish identity is being reborn as in modern conditions the experience of the individual is complex and different from previous experiences and definitions indicating what a "real Jew" should be like (Glenn and Sokoloff, 2010).

It should be noted that this approach, which according to postmodern views determines the structure of interaction between the group and the surrounding society, emphasizes assimilation. Therefore, if this trend would actually dominate, this would lead to a situation when most modern ethnic groups lose their identity. However, this does not happen, because ethnic groups try to survive in the modern world and apply a consolidation strategy emphasizing affective, value components of the experience of their identity, and this is what was overlooked by postmodernists. This shows that constructivism, as well as primordialism, has methodological limitations. Therefore, we consider justified the position of Z. Bauman (1998), R. Brubaker (2000), and R. Wiener who claim it is necessary to synthesize these

mutually exclusive approaches (Wiener, 2002). Thus one should admit that identity is the result of a conscious mental choice, but the process of identity formation occurs both on a conscious and unconscious levels.

Consideration of Jewish groups' identity within the provisions of primordialism and constructivism should be based on the idea that the development of the Jewish community depends on a complex system of factors determining the formation of self-awareness. The latter occurs along with the interrelation of differentiating features that are independent of human and subjective characteristics. It is important to understand that this definition indicates a complex structure of identity which has an easily constructed level associated with external influence and a substantial level originating from fixed intragroup representations (Wodak et.al., 1999). However, one should note that in this case the factors of group identity are recognized not only as those external circumstances contributing to creating a sense of unity, but also non-rationalized sensations of this unity. The religion of the group is the key factor in this system since it has a significant cognitive potential, which makes it possible to combine moral religious teachings and information capabilities of science, as well as to transform the world in a positive way.

Despite the fact that this methodology is at the initial stage of formation, it is based on numerous studies published in a variety of philosophical and interdisciplinary papers. These see the formation of a person's identity as the result of his interaction with society in specific living conditions. Such theoretical basis can be found in the works of A. Bergson, M. Weber, F. Giddins, E. Durkheim, K. Marx, A. Toynbee, Z. Freud, E. Fromm, T. Parsons, P. Sorokin, K. Levi-Strauss, P. Bourdieu, M. Castells, J. Baudrillard, A. Schütz, E. Erikson, who emphasize the relationship of identity both with social phenomena and with the socio-psychological ideal that dominates within a group (Erikson, 1996).

At the same time, the ideas in favor of synthesizing the provisions of primordialism and constructivism were most clearly stated in the concepts of social adaptation. These ideas were developed within interactionism and social psychology focusing on the analysis of social interaction and influence between members of social groups. In social psychology, these opinions developed by P. Berger and T. Luckman, G. Lubbe, A. Smith, H. Tajfel (1986). These researchers show that the definition of identity depends on the position in the objective world and the subjective assimilation of this world. Here, the factors of identity formation include processes of social interaction that create constants of subjective reality. However, "organismic" factors which include both biological and social phenomena and social structures are of no less importance (Berger and Luckman, 1995).

According to J. Mead, C. Culi, H. Renschmidt, and A. Kardiner, representatives of an ethnic group acquire their identity in the situation of social stability as it is naturally imposed on them by this group by birth. However, later people constantly adapt to life conditions (Kardiner and Linton, 1939). Interactionists emphasize the proposition that identity is formed not only in the "head", but also in the "heart" of the individual. The ideas emphasizing the synthetic nature of identity are supported by the propositions of understanding sociology and phenomenology, for instance, by M.F. Bendl, E. Hoffmann, A. Schütz (2003), who define identity as a mental image associated with self-interpretation driven by the process of social interaction. Representatives of social philosophy such as Sh. Schwartz, Z. Bauman, and M. Castells (2000) agree with these ideas and claim that the transformation of identity is facilitated by external determination leading to integration. They believe that creating an identity involves developing an imagined community, and that people are united by belief in the existence of objective bonds.

The most striking example of an attempt to methodologically synthesize the principles of primordialism and constructivism within the research on ethnic identity is instrumentalism which can be found in the works of J. Mc Kay, J. De Vos and L. Romanucci-Ross, S. Olzak, J. Nagel and others investigating the transformation of the identity of the ethnos (McKay, 1982). For instance, they see the strong point of primordialism in its attention to the affective basis of ethnicity, but they emphasize the need to take into account current group interests. Identity, according to De Vos and L. Romanucci-Ross (1982), is an image of a group that uses it as a subjective, symbolic strategy to differentiate itself from others. H.

Gans points out that in America this image is often used by Jewish emigrants turning to their cultural tradition and the past and which is represented in mythological images (Gans, 1979). Changes in the content of Jewish identity are considered in the work by Z.I. Levin (2001) who developed his own concept of the specifics of Jewish mentality. According to him, Jews are characterized by diaspora consciousness which exists objectively, but changes intensively under the external social influence. Developing this idea, L.K. Berman notes that Jewish identity has changed its parameters from predominantly religious to predominantly ethnic ones (Berman, 1972).

Thus, the methodology of instrumentalists makes the connection between identity and norms, beliefs, values, feeling of unity, emotional attachment, in other words, it is seen as a mental construct. However, the supporters of instrumentalism, which are critical of biology and primordialism, do not fully agree with F. Barth's position (Barth, 1994). The latter noted that relating oneself to Jews should be a sufficient reason for acquiring Jewish identity. The analysis of Jewish identity in terms of instrumentalism explains this complex phenomenon as a unity of the objective and subjective, predetermined by the specifics of the development of the Jewish ethnos. However, the instrumentalist approach has a drawback many authors pointed out, namely – insufficient attention to culture being the most important factor in the formation of identity. This weak point, in our opinion, is dealt with in those concepts that suggest analyzing identity through the prism of the development of a civilization within which it exists. In this regard, the concepts of A. Toynbee, O. Spengler, N.Ya. Danilevsky (2011) consider Jewish identity as a particular local civilization. The civilizational concept of Jewish identity is developed in the works of M.A. Chlenov, A.Yu. Militarev, V. Mochalova, S.A. Arutyunov, A. Kovelman, V. Yakobson (2003), who consider various factors forming it. According to M.A. Chlenov, who sees every Jewish group as a representative of Jewish civilization which has many regional varieties, each of the Jewish groups is independent of other groups and focuses on its own values and ideas related to the understanding of what a true Jew is like (Chlenov, 2002).

According to this definition, identity can be defined as a process that takes place at two structural levels. One of them is unconscious, and it is where mental processes take place within the familiar stereotypes of behavior and socially accepted practices associated with belonging to the community; the other level is where a conscious choice of identity takes place. The identity will be transformed depending on the changing set of markers, so that it can take political, ethnic, or cultural character. This process is accompanied with the formation of religious, political, ethnic, cultural and other values, which fills the reality with meaning.

A.N. Krylov also supports the civilizational approach. He developed a system of external social factors which form it along with other socio-political conditions, processes of urbanization and mobility, and the socio-cultural status of faith which plays a certain role in society's life and the formation of its values. In the works of A.N. Krylov, identity acts as a universal phenomenon, an expression of group and individual self-consciousness, characteristic of all social groups and periods of history. This consciousness is formed by various ways of obtaining new knowledge, with religion being the leading one, which creates existential forms of identity (Krylov, 2014). In our opinion, the opinion proposed by A.N. Krylov, which implies intertwining of various sources of identity around the religious factor, is credible since Jewish identity was born when religion was the leading source of its formation. However, despite various options, religious identity is still the most important one for many peoples, for example, in Israel: a civil court recognized the fact that one cannot simultaneously consider himself a Jew and belong to a different religion, not Judaism.

8. Conclusion

1. Many researchers noted that it is difficult to identify Jewish identity, which can be explained by the multiplicity of the ethnosocial nature of Jews, combination of ethnic, religious, cultural features that lead to the emergence of unverifiable concepts associated with determining what Jewish identity is.

2. Within secular science devoted to studying nations, these issues are covered in the

biological concept of identity which defines Jews as an initially existing race with special genetic characteristics. This idea is criticized in such concepts as primordialism. The latter justifies the existence of the system of objectively existing factors that form stable mental representations within a group. Furthermore, constructivism sees identity only as images created by the efforts of intellectual and political elites. However, these approaches reflect a common understanding of identity as a mental construct and represent various factors that form it. Their combination allows creating a single cognitive model of Jewish identity. Therefore, it seems viable to develop a position which would synthesize these opinions.

3. Consideration of Jewish identity in line with the methodology uniting primordialist and constructivist trends must be based on the proposition that development of this community depends on a complex system of objective factors: the territory of formation, language, origin, and subjective characteristics: mentality, self-awareness, images and stereotypes which have a formative and transformative impact on self-identification. This leads to the formation of a complex identity structure that includes an easily constructed level related to external influence and a substantively formed level originating in fixed intra-group representations.

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