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Concept of Social Responsibility in the Context of the Russia-Ukraine Military Conflict

Abstract: The aim of the article is to study the Ukrainians' understanding of social collective and individual responsibility in the context of the Russia-Ukraine military conflict. Research methods and materials. Discourse analysis was selected as the most suitable method. The research material was publications and comments posted on Facebook in the period from 24.02.2022 to 15.05.2022 by Ukrainian social media users. Results and discussion. Although in the Ukrainian sector of social networks responsibility for military aggression is undoubtedly seen as collective, it is unequally shared among groups. During sharing of collective responsibility Ukrainians distinct two approaches: 1) all citizens of the aggressor country are equally to blame; 2) citizens of the aggressor country may be related to the crime on different scales, so they have different levels of responsibility. In the view of Ukrainians, the main responsibility should be ascribed to those who can be called a "random collection of individuals." After the beginning of the Russia-Ukraine military conflict the concept of personal responsibility has been losing its meaning, and the relationship between an individual, social group and society as a whole is prioritized by collective responsibility. Herewith, it is not the culpable event or action that is emphasized, but the "metaphysical guilt" that is imposed on all citizens of the aggressor country on the basis of membership in a "vicious" community.

Keywords: social responsibility, military aggression, national mentality, Russia-Ukraine military conflict

Introduction

One of the most pressing issues of our time is the crisis of responsibility, which has entailed Russian missile and bomb strikes on Ukrainian cities, numerous civilian casualties, damaged or destroyed social infrastructures, residential buildings, bridges, roads, and even threats to use nuclear weapons. War is the greatest tragedy of humanity, so the processes of its analysis and comprehension remaining as relevant in 2022 as they were before, give rise to heated debates to identify who is responsible for warmongering, to determine guilt and penalties, but in most cases such discussions are characterized by political bias and emotionality that, of course, in no way diminishes considerable interest in the subject (Snyder 2010). The unprecedented in over 80 years unprovoked aggression of the Russian Federation, its grave crime against humanity has forced not only the Ukrainian, but also the world community to reconsider "the traditional ethical categories, to form a new responsibility scale" (Yakovenko 2010). Since nowadays the global threat to humanity turns from an abstract problem into an existential reality of every person, and responsibility as an immanent element of social relations must be present in human relations in the recognition of the causal link between someone's actions and the interests of other persons or social

groups, regardless of whether this responsibility is acknowledged or not by actor (Kolot 2011), there is renewed interest in the scientific and applied aspects of responsibility in general and social responsibility in particular. For a deep and sustainable harmonization of interests between the individual and the community as well as among the various segments of society social responsibility is regarded as a complex hierarchical structure, where the leading role belongs to the personal level of the individual as the main subject of a particular activity (Kolot 2011). But collective or social group responsibility for the inappropriate behavior of an individual is also practicable. There are two necessary conditions of collective responsibility: I must be considered responsible for something I did not do, and I must bear such responsibility by virtue of my membership in the group (collective), which cannot be terminated by my will, that's to say, a membership, which is very unlike the business partnership I can end at any time (Arendt 2009). In the view of Oleksandr Dzoban and Olena Ruban (2019) the nature of this responsibility is always political and the community is considered responsible for what was done on its behalf. It should be noted that "each society has its own unique 'identity' of responsibility" (Dzoban & Ruban 2019) as a peculiar characteristic of a particular historical period. The study of the Ukrainian community's understanding of social responsibility in the period of crisis situation of full-scale Russian aggression may lead to a revision of scale and forms of responsibility to society and to humanity, become a qualitatively new comprehension of the character of Ukrainian society's worldview.

A Review of Recent Research and Publication

In this article a responsibility is considered to be "a socio-historical phenomenon that emerges as a result of formation and development of social relations; a characteristic of the relationship between the individuals, social groups and society as a whole" (Dzoban & Ruban 2019). By virtue of its intrinsic characteristics, social responsibility has not a material but rather spiritual and moral nature, it is based on the inner culture of the person, the values he/she professes (Kolot 2011). Sometimes the attribution of social responsibility is revealed in terms of the attribution of moral guilt (Smiley 2017). Notwithstanding the diversity of current theoretical and methodological approaches to the concept of "responsibility" in the humanities, it should be noted "a gradual growth in the role and importance of collective action and collective commitment" (Salii 2021) in the context of responsibility attribution. Collective responsibility is "responsibility of a collective entity, e.g., a corporation, a nation state, or a club, for harm in the world. Shared responsibility refers to the responsibility of group members for such harm in cases where they acted together to bring the harm about. Collective responsibility is associated with a single, unified, moral agent. Shared responsibility is associated with individual moral agents who contribute to harm as members of a group either directly through their own actions or indirectly through their membership in the group" (Smiley 2017). Generally, at the center of collective responsibility there is a moral responsibility, which is associated with a single moral Self of the individual capable of controlling results. Moral responsibility

is “a person’s responsibility to uphold the moral principles and norms professed by the community to which that person belongs. Moral responsibility is not external but rather internal responsibility of a person towards himself, his attitude that the moral norms and principles of an individual as well as of a community should coincide” (Kolot 2011). However, focus on collective responsibility does not mean that the concept of personal responsibility loses its significance. Formation and development of personal responsibility is conditioned by personal qualities, attitudes, guidelines and ideals of the individual, such as “conscience, dignity, neighborly love, solidarity, justice, integrity, compassion, etc.” (Kolot 2011). Volodymyr Saliy notes that Western ethical theories of the late 20th and early 21st centuries consider the problem of collective moral responsibility “in the context, above all, of modern democratic society, in which individualistic values are dominant and the protection of the rights and freedoms of each individual is guaranteed by the state at the highest political and legal levels” (Saliy 2021). And despite the existing in academic circles criticism of collective moral responsibility, which is based, in particular, on the statement that “collectives do not have moral faults, since they don’t make moral choices, and hence they cannot properly be ascribed moral responsibility, ... for there to be moral responsibility there must be blameworthiness involving a morally faulty decision, and this can only occur at the individual level” (Downie 1969), “there is an obvious point to be recognized and that obvious point is that responsibility is ascribed to collectives, as well as to individual persons” (Cooper 1968). Scientific and research works with the main interest in the problems of responsibility for the military conflicts were essential to writing of this article. Thus, Andriy Pykalo (2020) offers his understanding and interpretation of Jaspers’ ideas on the necessity for the Germans to acknowledge and admit guilt for their crimes in the Second World War and to overcome the totalitarian legacy. The tragedy of World War II and the ethnic genocides committed by the Nazis are viewed as the result of moral problems and a general spiritual crisis of the German nation. The discussion of whether the Germans can legitimately bear collective responsibility for the crimes of the Nazis in World War II develops in the scientific works of Hannah Arendt (2009), Hywel D. Lewis (1948), Sanford V. Levinson (1974), Richard Wasserstrom (1971) etc., who present their arguments on collective responsibility in light of the Nuremberg Trials. Collective responsibility in the context of large-scale offensive operations in South Vietnam conducted by U.S. forces is considered in the works of Peter French (1998), Larry May (1989), Virginia Held (1970). All of these works raise the question of whether responsibility for harm caused by specific group members can be attributed to the entire community or to a substantial part of it in cases where not all group members directly caused the harm.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century the research in the field of social responsibility have resulted in a polemic that is predominantly normative in nature and concerned with the practical implementation of collective responsibility. In some cases, it is a question of common practice of collective responsibility and its implications for our ability to uphold the values of individualism, freedom, and justice. In other cases, it is a question of attributing collective responsibility in specific contexts, such as in the context of war tribunals, reparations for destruction, terrorism, and rape, and whether such attributions are productive and/or fair to those accused (Smiley 2017). Thus, Neta Crawford (2007, 2014) highlights the importance of recognizing that collectives can commit morally

wrong acts, in some cases due to the special type of group that they are and the way they are organized through their members' actions. Crawford argues that "ordinary citizens have a collective moral and political responsibility to participate in decisions about wars that are undertaken by their governments and they have a responsibility to protest unjust wars or immoral conduct during wars" (Crawford 2014). In the opinion of Crawford, collective responsibility can be reduced to changing those aspects of the group that associated with the infliction of harm on people or property. For example, it is sometimes necessary to adopt some measures against certain groups of military personnel to reduce "the likelihood of systematic atrocities and avoidable accidents by reviewing and revising the choice of weapons and rules of engagement ... and apologizing and making amends when systematic atrocity occurs" (Crawford 2007). Critic of the principles and practices of collective responsibility Mark Reiff (2008) acknowledges that holding particular groups accountable for causing harm can further caution those groups against doing harm, help to establish social order, and provide communities with a basis of justice. But, on the other hand, Reiff argues that collective responsibility can also trigger escalation of violence as well as corrosion of moral standards since some of the worst crimes in human history including the Nazi German government's "Final Solution to the Jewish Question" and the genocide in Rwanda were motivated and promoted by a belief in collective responsibility. In the view of Reiff, in the case of holding groups responsible for causing harm over a long period of time, and in circumstances in which each party of the conflict identifies the other one as collectively responsible for historical crimes, we will inevitably encounter endless cycles of revenge, and the consideration of murder as acts of retaliation. This stems from embracing a particular kind of moral righteousness which is based on principles of collective responsibility and the belief that retaliation is an act of supreme justice rather than from the absence of morals and scruples among members of rival groups (Reiff 2008). Reiff argues that the conception of collective responsibility can undermine both the importance of morality and the effectiveness of punishment.

The aim of the article is to study the Ukrainians' understanding of social collective and individual responsibility in the context of the Russia-Ukraine military conflict.

Materials and Methods

The preference of individual for collective or personal model of responsibility is based on the values he/she professes. This sets the overall methodological direction of the study on social and psychological ontology and calls for interdisciplinary and integrative methods, one of which is discourse analysis. Discourse analysis has the most empirically-oriented approach and allows us to focus on broad issues of cognitions, emotions, attitudes, values, prejudices, memory, motives (Khraban 2020). The main interdisciplinary approach consistent with this study is critical discourse analysis (CDA) developed by Teun Van Dijk (2008), who focuses on the abuse of power (dominance and its consequences: social inequality and the ways it is reproduced through discourse). However, the scholar points out that the purpose of the CDA could be broader and include all studies, which aim is to critically analyze what is recognized as wrong, illegal, erroneous or bad according to

specific social values or norms. This approach to CDA is especially relevant when it is aimed to study the characteristics of discourse during military intervention, aggression and occupation in countries and foreign zones. Reflecting on CDA Van Dijk notes that the interaction between discursive and social structures is not simply a correlational or causal interaction but a complex socio-cognitive process involving mental models and other cognitive representations. Another peculiar feature of CDA is a prerequisite for researchers to recognize and express a certain social, political or ideological position when they not only scientifically justify their choice of research topic and priorities, theories, methods and data, but also do so on a sociopolitical basis (Van Dijk 2008). Although the research is critical and socially engaged the CDA is strictly scientific and aims to study the relationship between and discursive and cognitive structures on the one hand, discursive and social on the other, which requires the involvement of interdisciplinary theories and methods (Van Dijk 2008). Such ways of studying discourse structures and strategies as grammatical, syntactic, lexical and semantic analysis; pragmatic analysis of speech and communicative acts; stylistic analysis; semiotic analysis of visual material and other multimodal parameters of discourse are particularly relevant in the context of the study of Internet discourse.

Reflecting the complex and multifaceted nature of Internet discourse, we believe it is necessary to make use of another type of discourse analysis developed in the framework of social constructionism, namely discursive psychology that provides an opportunity to focus on a broad psychological issues (Potter & Wiggins 2007), and whose line of research builds on comprehensive practical reasoning (Edwards 2005). Discursive psychology is the most empirically oriented approach, which considers the subject of research on the social plane, and which is based not so much on direct study of personality as on mediated evidence of certain attitudes and beliefs manifested in speech and writing (Hepburn & Wiggins 2007). So, discursive psychology studies rhetorical practices of language use in social interactions rather than linguistic characteristics. Its main purpose is to assess how effectively people, who are both products and creators of discourses, employ different discourses to exchange views, and what are the social consequences of this employment for creating and changing of socio-cultural context (Hepburn & Potter 2003). One of the priorities of discursive psychology is that its research is based on materials produced in familiar and relaxed atmosphere. In this context, social media is the most suitable environment for the research.

The materials for this study are posts and comments to them, which contain lexical units with semantic component 'responsibility' and which were posted during the period from 24.02.2022 to 15.05.2022 in the Ukrainian sector of the social network Facebook on the pages of the group "Vshivij intelligent"—"Smart up" (<https://www.facebook.com/vshiv.intel>) (161 thousand participants). This is an international group, whose members are both Russians and Ukrainians. Only those posts and comments that were written in Ukrainian and whose authors positioned themselves as citizens of Ukraine (for example, by indicating the place of residence or registration in their accounts) were taken into consideration. This group was selected for the study due to the large-scale online discussions of burning problems concerning human existence and basic ideas about the world in the context of the current Russia-Ukraine military conflict. The policy of the group's administrators is intended to encourage logical reasoning rather than emotional

venting. A total of 1283 posts and comments to them were analyzed. IBM SPSS Statistics 20 software was used for the statistical analyses.

Results and Discussion

Discourse analysis has proved that during the Russia-Ukraine military conflict the concept of personal responsibility is decreasing in importance, and the basis of relations between individual, social group and society as a whole is prioritized by concept of collective responsibility. The idea

People are the source of power. Governor is the mirror of his people. Kind and generous people do not shoot at children and the elderly, do not rape women and young girls!!!!!! And don't shift the blame to their governor (FB)

is evident in 89% of the posts and comments to them (N 1141). Responsibility is ascribed to a group that has a number of characteristics that go beyond the simple aggregation of individual indicators and make that group the proper object of collective responsibility. The identification of the group derives from: 1) the assignment to members of the group of certain attributes inherent in this social group, that is, the recognition of a certain identity that gives this group a certain unity and solidarity: the belief in their cultural uniqueness:

Two decades of acquiescence of millions of people led by the propaganda of the aggressive lower intellectual strata of society, the belief in an absolutely absurd chimera of their own uniqueness and greatness in the absence of any real national idea. It is possible to ask Dostoevsky's time-consuming ultimate question 'Who is to blame?,' to seek justification, and to shout curses. Everything is much simpler: this might not have happened (FB),

foreign policy of self-imposed isolation from the outside world, non-recognition of the sovereignty, territorial integrity or political independence of neighboring countries:

The urge to destroy dates back to the Mongol Horde, and this tradition was, unfortunately, inherited by Moscovia. Its predatory savage aggression toward the outside world has always been the wall that made it closed to external civilizational influences. Over time, this has become its mental trait, national memory, national idea. It is also the cause of all their troubles (FB),

the cult of violence, war, hatred:

the global cult of war, which all countries in the 21st century have abandoned (FB);

2) pointing out the representative states, including motivations and the drivers of human behavior:

We are talking about the painful revenge of the Russians, who believe that the U.S. or the collective West robbed them of their global greatness through collapse of the USSR. They want to take historical revenge, that is to restore "historical justice" as they understand it (FB),

the motivational states and the ability to act due to these states notwithstanding the individual group members' values, beliefs and will:

I have visited many countries with dictatorial regimes. The conclusion is obvious: Russia is the undisputed leader; it has surpassed even North Korea. Two weeks ago a friend of mine was sentenced to 6 years in prison for the fact that he had liked an article on Facebook about the war in Ukraine and its consequences! (FB).

Drawing attention to the fact that responsibility for military aggression is collective, and attributing this responsibility to the Russian Federation as a whole as well as to certain groups of state institutions with decision-making functions Ukrainian social media users emphasize two things that, in their opinion, are necessary for collective responsibility: 1) a series of group actions generated by a certain moral agent such as president of a country, governing board, representative body that can perform a group action (Smiley 2017):

To support and applaud the president who is “out of his mind,” who is killing Ukrainian civilians... Who should we negotiate with? And about what? (FB);

2) a series of decisions made by a group consciously on a rational basis or at least purposefully, and so taking the form of group intentions or group choices (Smiley 2017). Moreover, these intentions are defined as truly collective intentions, not just as a conglomerate of its members’ individual intentions (Giubilini & Levy 2018):

What is going on in Russia right now! A whole nation dances to Putin’s tune, believe in their prosperous life, believe in the fact that there are only enemies around... And why should they dwell on something, rack their brains? Everything was decided for them and done with their tacit consent! (FB).

A tendency of Ukrainian users of social networks to share responsibility among groups confirms the conclusions made by French in 1984 in regard to the existence of purposeful and controlled actions capable of creating the prerequisites for a group to be held collectively responsible for causing harm: “... groups that are so organized to be especially appropriate sites of collective responsibility because of three salient features that they all share. The first is a series of organizational mechanisms through which courses of concerted action can be, though not necessarily are, chosen on a rational basis. The second is a set of enforced standards of conduct for individuals that are more stringent than those usually thought to apply in the larger community of individuals, standards that enable us to talk about both group conduct and group discipline. The third is a configuration of defined roles by which individuals can exercise certain powers” (French 1984). However, although responsibility for the Russia-Ukraine military conflict is undoubtedly seen collectively by Ukrainian social media users, it is not evenly shared among the groups. The bulk of responsibility, according to Ukrainian users of social networks, is necessary to assign to group of people, who Held (1970) calls a “random collection of individuals.” In this group there is no decision-making procedure directly related to collective guilt, and its members show little solidarity. However, members of this disorganized group are identified as being responsible for unwillingness to take measures that could have prevented victims or for not adequately distinguishing themselves from certain group practices. Despite the fact that no one of these individuals can prevent the bloodshed on their own, they could have prevented it if they had acted in organized manner, i.e., cooperated with at least some of the others (Held 1970). In the following examples, every single person on the scale of nation is regarded as responsible for crime of omission. For Ukrainian users of social networks, this seems to be the result of a lack of active civil position (in 79% of posts and comments):

The most dangerous person is the philistine. All guillotines have been invented and operated due to his/her seemingly innocent approval. And if this philistine is a Russian man, then the number of coffins is directly proportional to support of those who do not drink or smoke (FB);

low moral values in the system of perception and attitude toward the world acknowledged in terms of Good and Evil (in 13% of posts and comments):

The war has revealed the true characters of many people. In my opinion, all people have divided into human beings with conscience and civic position, then zombie people with no honor and dignity, and, at last, barbaric men (FB);

the specifics of the national mentality (in 8% of posts and comments): It is not so much genuine religiosity as the need to shift responsibility to someone:

God, Lenin, the Communist Party, Yeltsin, Putin, Biden, Bill Gates, Nazis, secret American bio-laboratories, aliens... Avoidance of responsibility. It is very convenient to hide behind someone and blame him for everything. As a result, it doesn't matter what you do or don't do, whether you do it well or badly, it doesn't matter at all (FB).

Therefore, Ukrainian users of social networks identify the devaluation of moral values and attitudes, the spread of conformism, egoism, and other manifestations of social irresponsibility as the main reasons to impose liability on the group:

You should be aware of what you are covertly taking part in. Every housewife from Saratov or Perm should think about this... Yes, no man is an island, and two or three dozen executors of the will—generals, advisory experts—are nothing compared to the multimillion crowd of those who agree, doubt, keep silent. The blame lies on everyone, even on those who at the very beginning wanted to say something against it, but kept silent (FB).

In order to verify collective responsibility, Ukrainian users of social networks sometime employ a somewhat different strategy when they construct collective intentionality over personal intentions so that we can talk about collective intentions as well as collective actions. In that case, collectives' actions depend on the actions of collective members in such a way that the attributes of particular collectives, such as their mentality, intentions, attitudes, are “embodied in” and “determined by” the perspectives of the properties of individual members or representatives of the collective in question (Tuomela 1989). In this regard, responsibility is ascribed to a group of people with political power in the state, a group influencing the national cultural contexts from which the people derive their meanings (writers, musicians, directors, choreographers, artists, poets), a group responsible for shaping state ideology. Attitudes that are both seriously detrimental to society and require acceptance by many members of society in order to be effective, such as Nazism and anti-Semitism, are usually taken into account here (Giubilini & Levy 2018):

Responsibility must always be shared between the ideologues, the heralds of ideology, and the executors. The processes must be public and the punishments must be such that neither the next generations nor countries with dictatorial regimes will ever think of such ideas again. It's not a long-term fix, as history shows, but still... (FB).

Groups of this kind are seen by Ukrainian social media users as an independent and single agent, rather than an entity formed by a few individuals. For this reason, the responsibility spoken of in social networks can be seen as “as a type of individual responsibility scaled up and attributed to a peculiar type of agent, rather than as a form of genuinely collective responsibility” (Giubilini & Levy 2018).

Conclusions

Turning to the Ukrainian realities of the Russia-Ukraine military conflict, it should be recognized that a tendency has been evolving in the Ukrainian sector of social networks to consider collective responsibility as a vital norm, based on which some members of Ukrainian society ascribe responsibility for the harm caused by individuals to the aggressor country's entire population. Special emphasis is placed not on the event or action itself, the fact of which enables to ascribe responsibility to the group for causing harm but on the "metaphysical guilt" that is imposed on all citizens of the aggressor country on the basis of membership in a "violent" community. When ascribing collective responsibility to all citizens of the aggressor country, Ukrainians consider two cases: 1) all citizens of the aggressor country have the equal responsibility imposed on individuals as those who construct their identity on the basis of conformity to the expectations of other citizens without trying to assert their own moral authority over the community responsible for harm; 2) citizens of the aggressor country are associated with causing harm in different ways, so they have different levels of responsibility.

In the future, the prioritization of collective responsibility over personal responsibility may become a factor that will significantly influence the course of peace talks and the building of good neighborly relations between Ukraine and Russia.

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