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Критическая элитология: методологические основы и актуальные вопросы развития

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Аннотация. *Введение.* В статье рассмотрена критическая элитология представляющая собой раздел большой элитологии, который занимается вопросами верификации элитологического знания, установление достоверности элитности (благодаря которой субъект называется элитой), и экспертизой профессиональной достаточности в профессиональной деятельности элитных сообществ. Сама элитология понимается как комплексная дисциплина о сущности феномена элиты и элитности в их историческом развитии. И как показывает опыт, не всегда суждения об элите отвечают научным нормам. Как известно, критика всегда подразумевает разбор, обсуждение кого - или чего-либо с целью оценить достоинства и выявить недостатки. По отношению к элитологии ее критическая часть выполняет роль внутреннего инквизитора (следователя). Критический подход дисциплинирует и приучает к внимательному и более ответственному отношению к информации. *Цель* работы – проанализировать место и роль критической элитологии в системе элитологического знания. *Материалы и методы.* В статье использованы системный подход, историографический анализ последних элитологических исследований. *Результаты и обсуждение.* Отмечено, что элитологические ценности меняются в зависимости от исторической эпохи и нуждаются в постоянном диалектическом сопровождении. Особое внимание уделено вопросам верификации и разоблачению фальсификации. Рассмотрены некоторые актуальные аспекты практической деятельности критической элитологии. *Заключение* Подчёркнута роль культурной элиты особенно в условиях развития цифровых технологий и искусственного интеллекта последнего времени.

Ключевые слова: элитология; критика; феномен элиты и элитности; методология; верификация; фальсификация; политический карнавал; актуальные проблемы.

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Critical elitology: methodological foundations and current issues of development

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Abstract. *Introduction.* Critical elitology is a branch of large elitology that deals with the verification of elitological knowledge, the establishment of the authenticity of elitism (which makes an individual an elite), and the examination of professional sufficiency in the professional activities of elite communities. Elitology itself is understood as a comprehensive discipline about the essence of the phenomenon of the elite and elitism in their historical development. As experience shows, not all judgments about the elite meet scientific standards. As is well known, criticism always implies an analysis, discussion of someone or something in order to evaluate the merits and identify the shortcomings. In relation to elitology, its critical part performs the role of an internal inquisitor (investigator). A critical approach disciplines and accustoms to a careful and more responsible attitude towards information. The purpose of the work is to analyze the place and role of critical elitology in the system of elitological knowledge. *Materials and methods.* The article uses a systematic approach and a historiographical analysis of recent elitological studies. *Results and discussion.* It is noted that elitological values change depending on the historical era and require constant dialectical support. Special attention is paid to the issues of verification and exposure of falsification. Some relevant aspects of the practical activities of critical elitology are considered. *Conclusion* The role of the cultural elite is emphasized, especially in the context of recent developments in digital technologies and artificial intelligence.

Keywords: elitology; criticism; elite and elitism phenomenon; methodology; verification; falsification; political carnival; current issues

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Introduction.

From the history of science, we know that all classical theories eventually become outdated and conflict with new realities. The world is changing and demands that science keep pace with it, rather than drag it back into the past with its dogmas. The difference between the past and history is that the latter claims scientific truth, while the former claims objectivity. History is scientifically evaluative, while the past can contain both reliable and unreliable information.

Elitology is understood as a comprehensive, specialized science studying the phenomenon of elites and elitism. It is phenomenological in nature, characterized by both extreme generalizations and specific specificities. Critical elitology analyzes and judges the merits and demerits of elites, analyzing and evaluating their moral and professional activities. In relation to elitology itself, its critical component acts as an impartial judge, identifying and identifying errors and contradictions, providing analytical assessments, and verifying the reliability and authenticity of everything related to the phenomenon of elites/elitism. The elitologist is guided by the principle of «trust, but verify,» for "a healthy distrust is the path to productive collaboration."

Criticism means searching for the new within the existing old. And the key here is to adhere to the principle of Occam's razor: «*Non sunt entia multiplicanda praeter necessitatem*» ("One should not multiply things unnecessarily"). Constructive criticism allows for improvements where none are expected. Through it, hidden resources are activated and qualitative advances in scientific knowledge are achieved. This is precisely what critical elitology aims to achieve in its practical work.

Methodological foundations of critical elitology

Elitological notions are not objective and require constant correction by critical elitology. Therefore, the role of critical assessment and self-assessment is always important, especially when analyzing phenomena such as the elite and elitism. The task of critical elitology is to clarify the relevance of classical theories in an ever-changing reality and to reexamine the existing authority of classical theories. The key is to understand the dialectic of elite development, accurately determine the hermeneutic content of the information left by elites, and uncover elite symbolism and cultural-historical codes.

In critical elitology, we can distinguish two vectors of research: 1) *epistemological* — a critical analysis of elitological research; and 2) *ontological* — a critical analysis of the practices of the elites themselves. These directions define the very specificity of the scientific activity of elitological knowledge.

It's especially worth noting that the elite/elite phenomenon is historical, sociocultural, and professional in nature. Each profession has its own elite groups with their own sets of value assessments. This specialization leaves its mark on all elitological studies. Hence, the specific methodological approach required to analyze each professional group.

The methodological foundation of critical elitology is based on research methods such as dialectics, hermeneutics, comparative studies, semiotics, and historicism. This combination of methods ensures its independence, objectivity, and adequacy.

For example, *dialectics* allows us to identify the dynamics of the development of the elite and elitism, to establish the rhythms and characteristics of their development, and to identify existing contradictions between form (elite) and content (elitism). Dialectics refutes the elite's desire for institutionalized stability (staticity) and points to the constant changes occurring within and around it.

Hermeneutics reveals to elitology the hidden aspects of elite existence, the mode and character of their thought, helps to establish the quality of their intellectual potential, and reveal the cultural characteristics of their everyday and professional language. Historical elites (now a thing of the past) exist in the form of the historical texts they left behind. For elitology, it is crucial to objectively assess their quality during their lifetimes. For current elites, hermeneutics can be revealing, as it can reveal not only their obvious strengths but also their hidden flaws. Aiding dialectic, hermeneutics identifies the contradictions that exist within elites, thereby pointing to the dynamics of their development.

Comparative studies also plays a special role. Elites themselves are accustomed to constantly comparing themselves with others (especially with competitors). For them, comparison is an opportunity to showcase their qualities in a more favorable light and portray their enemies in a negative light. For critical elitology, comparative studies allows for the establishment of universal criteria for assessing elite quality, the development of a ranking of elites within the elites themselves, and the identification of distinctive features. As a complement to hermeneutics, the comparative method allows for the identification of similarities and differences between various texts that construct the character of specific elites or individual members.

Semiotics reveals the communicative connections and signs (symbols, images) that elite groups use in their communication. Each historical elite may have its own distinct set of symbols and codes that reflect their uniqueness. The same applies to the specifics of their professional specialization.

The principle of *historicism* seeks to establish certain historical patterns in the development of elites, describing their development through concepts such as elitogenesis, elitocracy, and elitocide. Elitological historicism presupposes an analysis of research objects in relation to the specific historical conditions of their existence. It strives for an adequate and objective disclosure of cultural codes and the establishment of algorithms by which professional elite communities exist and develop.

All this allows us to view the elite/elitism as a phenomenon that exerts a significant influence on history, culture, and social life. While classical elite theories focused primarily on sociopolitical elites, elitology focuses on the activities of professional elite communities and the specific characteristics of their elite qualities. This is precisely why elitology is more in need of critical assessment and increasingly subject to scientific verification procedures.

Critical elitology is not so much a critique ("destruction") of existing theories as it is an opportunity for their subsequent constructive correction and development. It is a rational identification of contradictions existing in both the theory and practice of elites. This is the path of elitological *maieutics*, which intelligently asks questions about the authenticity of elite existence and the qualitative validity of their elitism. To do this, it must critically examine elitism, revealing and proving its substantive component as truly unique and select. And if not for everyone, then at least for many. In short, critical elitology is the midwifery of greater elitology.

The current issues of critical elitology include such problems as: 1) establishing authorship and creating an objective portrait of a historical figure (personalism); 2) clarifying theoretical positions and relevance; 3) verifying falsification; 4) qualifying professional expertise (identifying the real professional level of an elite subject); 5) analyzing intra-elite discourse, recording disagreements in elitological research and the diversity of elitological experience; 6) identifying the causes of ethical violations in academic science and in professional elite practice (axiological analysis), etc. Let us now consider these problems in more detail.

Current issues in the development of critical elitology

Critical elitology focuses on refining classical theories of elites, adding to and correcting existing inaccuracies, discrepancies, and misconceptions. In this regard, critical elitology has always existed spontaneously, in the form of in-person and remote discussions on current elitological topics. In this paper, we merely summarize what already exists, attempting to identify some of its patterns.

Critical elitological personalism. To conduct a hermeneutic examination, it is necessary to initially understand the personality traits of the author of a text/speech. Establishing authorship and creating an objective portrait of a historical figure becomes a priority for critical elitology. World literature has seen instances of a work being authorless. For unknown reasons, an anonymous author may wish to remain anonymous. Such cases are not uncommon and can be explained by many factors. However, for hermeneutics, the absence of an author is an extremely undesirable situation, as it creates a shadow zone in the text being studied. Personalistic elitology pays particular attention to the motives of such historical figures. [3] It is precisely these motives that most often hold the answer to the question of why a subjective description of reality does not correspond to its objective reality.

Vague anonymity also arises when politicians publish texts written for them by their aides. Anonymity on the one hand (the public often doesn't know who actually writes politicians' official speeches) and hidden plagiarism on the other (the politician publicly presents someone else's work as their own) further confuse the situation.

Clarification of theoretical propositions and relevance. As noted above, classical theories tend to become outdated, which deepens their disconnect with reality. Critical elitology represents a necessary "mechanism" for the constant refinement and correction of existing theories, testing their relevance and validity.

Classical elite theories (G. Mosca, V. Pareto, R. Michels) were developed in the early 20th century, amidst the conditions of developed imperialism (colonialism), mass political

movements (the so-called "revolt of the masses"), world war, and so on. They reflected the cultural codes of their time and expressed the values and ideals that existed at the time. The realities of the 21st century are different. Both the changes that have occurred in the world and the transformations taking place today force us to reassess and understand classical theories. The most significant change was the emergence, in the late 20th century, of a comprehensive science (elitology), which no longer studies individual elite groups but rather comprehensively explores the phenomenon of elites/elitism.

Verification of falsification. Control over information has always been and remains the most important professional attribute of the elite. Elites always claim to possess the truth, but they either distribute it sparingly to the masses or conceal it entirely from the public. Elites (especially political ones) always strive to appear better in history than they actually were. It is for this reason that political falsifications proliferate throughout history and give rise to various myths and legends. Critical elitology engages in various political exposés. It exposes both the false praise of the supposed virtues of supposedly "great politicians" and the crises that arise from the erroneous actions of unpopular politicians. Political history shows that elites have a pathological fear of the truth. Crimes stemming from these crimes fill the political history of such elites. They envy those who are better than them. *The elite sit as the best of the best.* But not all who enter the elite achieve this state.

Professional qualification assessment. Determining the true professional level of an elite subject is a crucial step in establishing elite identity. It is a kind of "litmus test" that reveals whether this subject or elite group is a genuine or a sham elite. In the elite/elite phenomenon, there is always a split between the genuine and the sham elite. The quasi-elite is a dark shadow that constantly looms over the genuine elite. And quite often, the public perceives something as elite that is not actually one.

It is well known from world history that political elites constantly require confirmation of the effectiveness of their public administration. [8] The personnel composition of political elites, in particular, is constantly changing. "Entry and exit" from elite groups is often accompanied by serious political crises. And professional quality is not always the determining factor in selection. If, in practice, elites prove incapable of determining the true quality of candidates for leadership positions, then critical elitology becomes the last "fortress" that can tell the truth about this personnel manipulation. Closely related to this topic is another problem – the problem of elite selection.

The problem of adequate elite selection. Critical elitology is concerned with expert assessment of the professional competence of elite subjects, and the extent to which they act professionally. A low level of competence always raises suspicions that the subject is in the wrong place (their personal merits do not correspond to their high status). The main source of elite selection is the University and higher professional elite education. [12]

Elite education plays a significant role in addressing this issue, as the fundamental mechanism for selecting the very best personal qualities and creating a truly elite persona. At the same time, the problems of negative elite selection are clearly manifested and analyzed within the framework of carnival political culture. Political carnival is the ultimate manifestation of elite decadence, their systemic decline, and moral corruption. For carnival elites, the institution of reputation is dead, and they no longer need it. For such elites, selection itself is unimportant, and the very fact of being among the elite is paradoxical.

The problem of negative elite selection brings elitology research directly to the topic of political carnival and carnival political culture. [6] Political carnival is understood as a kind of elite deviation, a collection of anecdotal incidents, a provocation, and a scandal. [See: 9; 18] It is a world of special (spoiled) relationships, which by their very nature demonstrate to everyone what elites should never be. Political carnival is a denial of the very existence of the elite, since it is entirely based on fakes, imitation, and pseudo-reality. It is a quasi-world, a pseudo-reality in

which false elites and their false political leaders exist. But for critical elitology, a negative example is also of particular importance, since it demonstrates the antithesis of the elite.

Intra-elite discourse. The analysis of intra-elite discourse involves documenting emerging disagreements in elitological research, as well as analyzing the diversity of elitological experience, which constantly emerges from objective reality. As historiographical experience shows, there is not always unity in the academic community in assessing the qualities of elites. This largely reflects the diversity existing within the elites themselves. Unity of opinion is a sign of ideological dogmatism, not scientific objectivity. The point here is to prevent extreme opinions, assessments, and conclusions from leading to the destruction of the very foundations of elitology. A dialectical approach, on the contrary, welcomes the presence of contradictions and their constructive resolution.

Axiological Analysis. Critical elitology faces the task of promptly identifying the causes of ethical violations in academic science and in professional elite practice. All this points to the need for a prompt axiological analysis of the existing professional practices of elites and their leaders. Elites (especially political ones) too often cross the ethical threshold and find themselves on the other side of good and evil. It is precisely these kinds of cases that should become a special subject of study for critical elitology. The topic of ethics is one of the central themes for greater elitology. It is always relevant for all professional elite communities. In addition, critical elitology faces the task of exposing *the political pathology* of ruling elites. As is well known, pathology studies disease processes and conditions in a living organism. Pathology is a deviation that causes suffering both to the elites themselves and to those they govern. The extreme form of this elitist pathology is "rabies," manifested in various types of phobias, especially photophobia. At the root of all this lies envy, which becomes the basis for all the crimes of such elites. The image of "political rage" perfectly fits the carnival-like political elites. [See: 6; 9]

Combating the "witch hunt." Critical elitology also combats the elitist prejudices that influence the opinions of elitologists and introduce distortions into the corresponding scientific picture of the world. These include the demonization of political enemies, various phobias (such as the Russophobia of modern Western elites), the personality cult of the leader, class egocentrism (which asserts the select culture of some and the insignificance of others), and so on. In the practices of political elites, the idealization of some (their own) and the demonization of others (theirs) is the norm in the struggle for power. In the context of digitalization, this struggle acquires new features and new characteristics. [13] And critical elitology must promptly propose new techniques that could mitigate these new threats of distortion (falsification) of political reality.

General questions. Critical elitology calls for avoiding extremes in judging elites, i.e., one cannot blindly and unconditionally trust elites, just as one cannot deny everything that comes from them. An extreme position insists that elites (especially political ones!) should never be trusted at all. This essentially nihilistic position, somewhat tantamount to conspiracy theory, does not stand up to elitological criticism, since it denies elites the right to speak the truth. Such extremes should be avoided.

Critical elitology also points to vulnerabilities in the development of scholarship on the phenomenon of the elite/elite. Using historiography, it reveals areas of theoretical development where gaps exist or where the greatest number of questions and unresolved issues accumulate. One such problematic area is the interaction between political and cultural elitology. The role of the cultural elite manifests itself in the development of not only art and science, but also in the construction of the foundations of empires. [2] And it is precisely this issue that has not received its due theoretical development. Another such "weakness" is personalistic elitology.

The topic of personality is one of the central themes in humanitarian elitology. This is particularly true for questions related to the analysis of such categories as "perfection," "ideal," "cultural elitism," and "creativity." [See: 10-11] It is through these theories that elitology reveals the characteristics of elite culture and the activities of elite cultural individuals. [See: 16-17] Cultural elitology explores the world of the creatively active and elite-productive individual.

This is precisely why it requires methods such as hermeneutics and semiotics, since without them, the personalistic aspect of the elite/elite phenomenon will simply be closed to this type of research. [See: 4] The motives for the behavior of such individuals will be unclear without a detailed examination of their individual characteristics.

There is a danger that artificial intelligence could give rise to a similarly artificial elite. The very word "artificial" suggests a counterfeit (surrogate) for the real (genuine). [1] The topic of falsification does not arise in this context by chance, but is a logical continuation. In the future, elites will increasingly face the problem of falsification. In the context of accelerated processes, this will lead to a shortage of time for verification. The latter will limit the critical verification of information, which automatically generates a wave of errors and new fakes. [15] Politicians will become increasingly dependent on PR strategies based on the use of AI, which could give rise to a new kind of "enslavement." [14]

In the digital age, the question of the elite's new professional identity [5] and changes in the quality of their professional training are becoming increasingly pressing, as are transformations in their worldview and thinking. [7] Digital society is developing a new system of relationships (demands) for its new digital elites. And these demands increasingly conform to the criteria of meritocracy. Therefore, when faced with the moral choice between oligarchy and meritocracy, elitology will always favor the latter.

Conclusion

The methodological foundations and key current issues of critical elitology we have examined allow us to draw some preliminary conclusions. First, we note that critical elitology performs a crucial verification function related to establishing the truth about the elite and its phenomenological qualities (elitism). For the academic community, it is crucially important whether it is dealing with an elite or a counterfeit version of it. The answer to this fundamental question largely determines the credibility of subsequent answers to other (clarifying) questions.

Secondly, critical elitology exposes ethical violations in the professional activities of elite communities. It is precisely ethics that most often falls outside the purview of academic elitology. Elitologists (especially political ones) are extremely reluctant to address this topic, which is in fact fundamental to the elite. But there is so much speculation and manipulation surrounding all this that any elitological study always risks escalating into a political scandal with highly uncertain consequences.

Finally, critical elitology engages in a comprehensive study of political pathology, as defined by the deviant behavior of ruling elite groups. This experience allows not only to critically expose the negative aspects of ruling elites but also to prevent such elements from coming to power. Thus, critical elitology precedes elitological engineering, which is concerned with the creation of new breeding models. The future will largely depend on such projects to establish solid foundations for meritocratic elites and relegate oligarchic structures to the distant past.

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