

## The Impact of the "Trauma of The past" Phenomenon on the Practices of the Reception of Historical Experience in the Context of National Security

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### Abstract

*The article presents an analysis of the trauma phenomenon in the context of the past historical experience reception problematics. The author shows how the trauma of the past, which is a collective phenomenon, condition experienced by a group, community, or society as a result of devastating events socio-culturally interpreted as the injury is a consequence of the experience of unsuccessful public consciousness, or even a humiliating or tragic experience of the past, may have an impact on the mass consciousness, disintegrate the society, prevent its consolidation, promote an increase in sociocultural conflicts and social tensions, protests, and even aggressive behavior. The problems of the past reception are closely linked to ensuring national security, as through the understanding of its historical past and the association of events and phenomena in our historical past with meanings and value the process of self-consciousness of the people and its unity takes place. The trauma of the past in the practice of the historical experience reception turns out to be placed in the space of intercultural interaction of the past and present, when through the reception by means of sociocultural practices, the past enters the present, but due to the contradictory perception and ambiguous interpretations by political elites and various social groups of events, situations, and images of the past, "memory gaps" occur, and unordered (unstable) social memory is formed, which hinders ensuring national security.*

**Keywords:** *trauma of the past, historical experience, reception of historical experience, social amnesia, national security.*

### 1. Introduction

A trauma of the past is the cultural and psychological perception of experience of the past, unsuccessful for the public consciousness, or even humiliating or tragic. The trauma of the past itself (the traumatic past) as a cultural trauma is a collective phenomenon, a condition experienced by a group, community, or society as a result of the devastating events, socio-culturally interpreted as traumatizing.

In sociology, a "cultural trauma" is a cognitive construct expressing an identity crisis, at the center of which a certain myth-like discourse is, which emphasizes "ours" and "alien," and sharpens their opposition (Aarelaid-Tart, 2004).

The concept of the trauma of the past occurs when: a) people of different ages talk about significant and constrained change in the system of values that covers the same historical period (war, occupation, revolution, and so on); b) violence events and associated changes in mentality contain many similarities (mass deportations, social shock, ideological oppression, etc.); c) symbolic interpretation of events that caused a collective "trauma" contains a similar evaluation of different respondents ("nation-wide disaster," "collective shame," "national disaster," and so forth.); d) individual biographies reflect collective strategies of coping "traumas."

The trauma of the past and the overall specificity of the perception of historical experience in the mass

consciousness has a direct impact on the national security, since today's Russia is home to a huge number of people, communities, each of which in the course of the rich and controversial history of the country faced numerous upheavals and historical challenges. This is especially true for the South of Russia, which is a region with the heaviest contradictions and tragic fates of peoples that are still in the memory of the population.

## 2. Literature Review

When analyzing the phenomenon of social memory in the social and humanitarian science, we must first of all turn to the ideas of Durkheim who paid much attention to the study of collective representations as a particular body of knowledge, opinions and behaviors, which are the products of social evolution (Durkheim, 1997). The ideas of Douglas (1986) and Connerton (2009) also seem valuable, as they wrote about the relationship of memory and social community. In addition, we should pay attention to the study of Assmann (2000) who analyzed the social characteristics of the individual and social memory.

For Ushakin, a trauma is experienced as a kind of discursive and epistemological paralysis, as the inability to put together three critical experiences: the experience of the bygone, the experience of the expressed, and the experience of the comprehended. The experience of trauma, that is, the experience of loss, breaking, turns into a narrative matrix that provides logic of a coherent plot to fragmented facts of individual or collective biography. For him, a trauma serves both as a one-time *event* that has dramatically changed the life, and as a *process* that continues to affect people's attitude towards their past and on their perception of their present and future. With this approach, trauma becomes not so much the point of departure, as an ellipsis, path, chain of events and experiences (Ushakin, 2009).

The French thinker Groppo comes from the fact that societies, like individuals, can survive a traumatic experience that leaves rather deep scars and that is not so easy to overcome. The traumatic past is the past, which has led to the emergence of heavy wounds on the social body, and if it is not treated, it can bleed again and, as before, start to cause suffering. The society must try to analyze the past, to establish the truth about the crimes committed, to condemn those people responsible for it, otherwise it will be impossible to overcome the traumatic past (Groppo, 2005).

In the opinion of Astashov, the society lives between nostalgia and social amnesia. Both of these trends are anomalous, and at the same time, they are a part of the effective mechanism for creating social and political projects, i.e. construction of the future. This "future", however, may be affected by plagues of the past and constantly pull back. This is particularly due to the negative past experience, which either hinders or distorts the project of the future. It is most of all connected with the trauma, i.e. a psychic experience of a failure, and sometimes a humiliating experience of the past (Astashov, 2011).

## 3. Methodology

Social memory is a complex phenomenon, which requires a transdisciplinary and multiparadigm approach. For example, the phenomenon of social memory requires the use of instruments of historical science, in which we study the regularities of conservation of past events in the historical memory, and the different aspects of appealing to them by the political power and society. Social psychology analyzes social memory through the lens of the psychological characteristics of reflection in the individual memory of socially important events. Sociologists refer to social memory in terms of applied research, usually identifying the place of various events or historical figures in the social memory.

The main message of the methodological approach of the author is such a principle of social philosophy as transdisciplinarity that allows philosophical generalization of the results of various private studies, and to apply such scientific methods of cognition as analysis, synthesis, induction, deduction, abstraction, and typification. The author draws on classical and postnonclassical paradigm of scientific knowledge.

The author's methodology is based on three major theoretical and methodological approaches:

- a) the constructivist approach to the analysis of social amnesia, which involves the study of the problems of "invention" of memories, rituals, and traditions as a means of social control and legitimation of power, maintaining identities, and politicization of memory and "policies of memory"; the dependence of images of the past on the current interests of the ruling elite;
- b) the concept of "social memory";
- c) the theory of sociology of culture and the concept of the increasingly complex dynamics of social meanings developed in line with neo-functionalism.

#### 4. Results and Discussion

The concept of trauma was in demand in the analysis of the impact that the surrounding socio-cultural environment, which is in a state of rapid, radical, unpredictable, and accelerated changes, has on a person. This paradigm involves consideration of such events as revolutions and radical reforms, economic crises, cases of mass deportations, genocide, and ethnic cleansing, terrorism, assassination and overthrow of political leaders, opening of once closed information from secret archives, revision of the heroic version of national history, military defeats, collapse of a state, and so on. All these rather disparate phenomena of social life are interrelated by the "paradigm of trauma" from a new perspective. To be potentially traumatic, a social change should be quick and sudden, shocking, radical, deep, exogenous in origin, coming from the outside, and making us the victims of "what has happened to us." A cultural trauma is the result of the "decision" of social actors to perceive certain events as causing irreparable damage to their self-identification and a sense of being rooted in history. This interpretation is made by interested groups having the "authority of legitimate nomination," respective intellectual, material, and organizational resources, and then transferred to the wider society. Depending on the quantity and quality of the cultural capital, social groups have different degrees of sensitivity to cultural trauma and the ability to make their perception generally recognized and universally valid (Vasiliev, 2009).

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The trauma of the past in the practice of the historical experience reception turns out to be placed in the space of intercultural interaction of the past and present, when through the reception by means of sociocultural practices, the past enters the present, but due to the contradictory perception and ambiguous interpretations by political elites and various social groups of events, situations, and images of the past, "memory gaps" occur, and unordered (unstable) social memory is formed.

The main thing in the reception of the past, as well as in understanding the historical reality as the past, is the meaning. But in the space of disorganized social memory, sense-forming practices, while distorting reproduction of historical experience, cannot contribute to the streamlining of memories of the past and the formation of adequate images of the historical past.

Researchers, however, draw attention to the fact that there is a problem of definition of the nature of the trauma and its impact on the future. How to separate a historical trauma from the stratified collective memory, or the representations of the past imposed on it by the political system and mass media? Russia has peculiar features of perception and statement of historical traumas. Images of the future in the views of the past generations are bright, and images of the past in today's generation are often grim. A trauma can be represented as a trauma of the historical memory of the entire population, the prevailing consciousness in it, and, perhaps, as a trauma of particular bearers of the historical experience, for which it is merely a statement of bad experience. It is necessary to take into account the lack of identity of the modern Russian society, and its overall susceptibility to traumatism. Any failure frustrates it: whether reports of the loss of Russia's positions in the international arena, failures in the economic field, or even a banal defeat in a football match of the national team, and especially a defeat at the Olympics, which is perceived as collective panic. On the other hand, the society tends to forget the traumatic periods and exaggerate the periods of pride (Astashov, 2011).

This raises the question about the mechanism of historical memory formation in the contemporary Russian society, in which process the state dominates in its educational and ideological policy. Depending on the political situation, the past changes, and in general it tends to be unpredictable. This past, however, does not have the attributes of reliability, verifiability, authenticity, relevance, and is such only as the constructs of social and political projects, which are in fact formed by them. However, in the history of Russia, there have been periods when a cultural trauma manifested itself directly, it guided the general public, giving ground for the perception of social and political projects, which were generally in line with the idea of both the trauma and the future, and which even were derived from this trauma (Astashov, 2011).

The subject of the trauma of the past in the practice of reception of historical experience turns out to be closely related to the politicization and problematization of the attitude to the past.

Actualization of the relationship to the past becomes the hallmark of election campaigns, when parties and movements are calling to "remember the past," to varying degrees focusing on the meanings presented in this slogan. *Remember* means occasionally recollect, confirm the status of a decent person, memory, or event—this sense was actualized by calls for participation in ritualized actions, commemoration ceremonies (rallies, marches and other forms of honoring heroes and victims). Finally, remembering one's *past* means making the right choice among the true and false heroes of the past (Soroka, 2009).

Researchers rightly point out that at the turning points of history, there is a need for a critical revision of the past. Therefore, one of the underlying purposes of the political discourse is to "approve or destroy existing stereotypes, create

or expose social and political myths, critically comprehend and interpret the past with the projection into the present" (Shegal, 2000).

Herewith, the attention is rightfully drawn to certain functions of metaphors, that relate to the image of the past: a) describing the most acute problems of the modern times, politicians look back to the past to bring a meaning to the present; b) the use of historical metaphors as a means of persuasion by means of drawing parallels between the present and the past; c) historical metaphors are included in the new ways of understanding the world, linking the events of the bygone years with the present (Solopova, 2006).

The mental experience of the past is reflected in the political rhetoric. Here are some examples of such rhetoric.

- The "Left" have led to the collapse of the Soviet Union, and then Russia was taken by the "right", which has ended with an economic collapse. Why is that? Both were guided by the radical ideologies that are not related to the reality (The United Russia Party).
- "Changes in government institutions and mechanisms have led to a drastic reduction of the state's responsibility for solving social problems. Practiced methods of privatization, the existing in the country system of economic relations have determined the concentration of social wealth in the hands of a small group of owners. Corruption, crime, and violence have become a daily occurrence. There is a rift between the society and the state, and social contradictions within the society itself have begun to grow" (The Party of Social Justice) (Solopova, 2006).

The means of power legitimizing is the creation of collective identities, including the national and historic ones, able to combine the existing political regime and the events of the past existing in the collective memory of people. The vision of the past that the state "imposes" on its citizens, should be expressed in such a way as to be acceptable for the largest possible groups of the society. In this respect, the rhetoric of political leaders acts as an important part of the reception of the historical past.

Sereda, while considering the historical discourse in the speeches of V. Putin, notices that he seeks to introduce the old Soviet historical myths and practices of honoring the past in the new model of representation of the Russian history. The absolute majority (two-thirds) of historical events articulated in the statements of Putin fall on the Soviet period, and the rest are equally divided between the pre-Soviet and modern Russian history. President also makes extensive use of references to various historical events and facts in his public statements for the interpretation of any legitimization of a wide range of phenomena in the Russian domestic and foreign policy (Sereda, 2007).

The historical discourse used by Russian President has two modalities—international and domestic. Speaking at numerous international meetings, Putin uses a fairly wide repertoire of personalities and events. In this speeches, the number of historical personalities mostly includes famous Russian and foreign scientists and artists (A. Solzhenitsyn, L. Gumilev, A. Tolstoy, the Roerichs, F. Dostoevskii, A. Chekhov, A. Pushkin, I. Kant, I. Goethe, T. Shevchenko, A. Kunanbayev, A. Mickiewicz) and prominent political figures (Peter I, Catherine the Great, Alexander II, P. Stolypin, A. Lincoln, Napoleon Bonaparte, Ch. de Gaulle). By resorting to such emblematic personalities, he designs the image of Russia as a country that has an organic relationship with the European community. Putin uses the historical past to legitimize the European nature of Russia, demonstrating its membership in the common European space. Herewith, in the process of discursive structuring of the space of the nation, there is appropriation or "nationalization" of a historical event by assigning different meanings to it within the framework of the official discourse, and celebration and recollections of the Great Patriotic War in Putin's speeches are the key celebrations, around which two discourses—national and Soviet—are structured and combined (Sereda, 2007).

According to Zarifyan, V. Putin acts in mass media according to the laws of his main occupation, i.e. on the principle of mimicry with the surrounding information environment. The interesting fact is that not only Putin and his aides and speechwriters are involved, but also numerous media, which write about Putin, mention him in various contexts. There is sort of a group of authors under the name "Putin." He has achieved it not only by taking the control of TV, but also by fitting into the mass media rhetoric, by merging with the information field. The symbolic umbrella of the new Russian propaganda is based on the concepts that emerged and strengthened in the post-Soviet Russian media. These notions were complemented with national archetypes (of the Soviet and pre-revolutionary times), and an extremely cynic system has been developed. The umbrella began with renaming the situation in Chechnya (the "counter-terrorist operation" instead of the "armed conflict") and restoring the old Soviet anthem in a 'democratic' edition. He was deployed in a series of double symbols designed to erase the semantic difference and introduce uncertainty of concepts (Zarifyan).

But in the end, V. Putin has found himself a hostage to his own propaganda—all expectations are directed at him. How is he expecting to meet these expectations and maintain stability? Democracy in propaganda is a metaphor. It exists neither in reality, nor as a concept. The principle of the dual symbolism promotes the multiplication of metaphors. It leads to an infinity of interpretations, to the chaos that could trigger violent methods. The chaos that threatens to Putin is the

result of his information policy. The information policy of Putin has canceled all previous achievements, such as publicity, independence of powers, ceased the dialogue with the regions and business, replaced the exchange of views with mass media propaganda, and transferred FAPSI to FSB closing civilian control over power and elections.

Such political rhetoric increasingly merges with the policy of memorization. For example, in the traumatic experience of the past, experience of military events initially starts as authentic memories of direct participants – contemporaries of those years. Then, there is a new phase that changes the perspective of perception of historical events—medialization through novels, films, and exhibitions. Finally, the third phase is related to politicization—revision of the sense, devaluation of former political values, a shift of geopolitical emphases, change of generations with new tasks of political socialization, etc. The result is the increasingly different recollection itself and the memory of it. Here, we are not referring to the effects of natural population decline, speaking the demographic language, or the drama of an outgoing nature. We assume (and therefore describe) the complex problems of identity that have befallen the generation, which sympathized, learned the language of the story, told others, and then did not recognize themselves in that discourse, which either prevailed or lost its meaning in the changing social history.

Pluralization of societies will demand different memories—and obviously represents a highly conflicting public sphere, in which there is no place for peaceful coexistence, there is a temptation to manipulate, mock the recollections to cause politically engaged *memories*. The policy of opening archives for a brief period, the glasnost era, manipulation with special depositories, collective events occasioned with anniversaries, rolling waves of description in memoirs of the bygone events—all these stories say that the collective memory of the society is pulsating in a rhythm regulated by the political objective. Paradoxically, it could lead to the extinction of memories themselves, when the politicized version of history prevails, which is instrumentally related to memory and wipes out other aspects and versions, which ultimately results in the experience's necrosis (Rozhdestvenskaia, 2006).

Groppo also draws attention to the fact that it is impossible to displace the traumatic past indefinitely. Someday, it will again be at the center of controversy and discussion. A society that wants to see itself democratic cannot exist normally while ignoring the victims of the traumatic period in its history and refusing to pay tribute to their memory. If mass crimes were committed long ago, and it is late now to bring to justice those directly involved, there must be public recognition of the memory of repressions, its preservation, and broadcast through public appearances, monuments, and archives. Russia still does not have it. The society seems to close from the victims of Stalinism. Meanwhile, the establishment of real democracy in Russia will inevitably require payment of this moral duty (Groppo, 2005).

At one of the scientific conferences, the organizers offered participants to look at the Soviet past through the prism of the traumatic conflict of the present, based on the fact that the modern Russian culture is caught between the unstable historical narrative of emergence of a new nation from the ruins of the Soviet Union and the Soviet cultural heritage, whose models, either revolutionary or Stalinist, no longer work. The ensuing instability of the symbolic structuration creates a significant traumatic gap in the foundation of culture, a gap that the culture bearers try to fill with their inconsistent, emotional, and ideologically laden interventions.

Opening the conference, historian Shcherbenok drew attention to the fact that Russia's relations with the Soviet past have several peculiar features: this past is often perceived as a single entity; in the culture as a whole and in its individual texts in particular; there is no consensus on the nature of the past, which leads to radical contradiction of numerous and obsessive attempts of its symbolic structuration. Finally, the attitude to the Soviet past has a strong affective charge. The source of this passion, however, lies not in the Soviet past (although it is often explicitly localized just in it), but in the post-Soviet present, for which the past is the object of projections, displacements, and symbolizations—i.e. a not localizable traumatic object described by the psychoanalytic theory of trauma (Shcherbenok, 2011).

The structure of the past reality (past experience) is determined by the structure of the present and its objectives. In particular, the tasks of development, changes, and awareness of the current changes step up the look back to the past, both in the form of specialized knowledge (history), and in the form of massive knowledge about the past: everyday and professional (philosophical, religious, ideological, and sociological). Attention is paid in this case to the images of the past and specific sources about the past reality, as opposed to that part of the past, which is a part of the present. For events and characters, to be a part of the past and to have the status of "the past" (not, for example, the old, outdated) means to be socially perceived in correlation with the image of the past, in terms of the past. Thus, the acquisition of this status of an event or character does not depend on the number of years that separate them from the actual present, but on the availability of an engineered and legitimate image of the event, the character, and the meanings, recognized important in terms of the past. This vision places the focus on the socio-cultural integrity's *symbolic work* on creating and organizing the past, maintaining and reproducing its actual picture or its reformation, reformulation. In other words, the "work of memory" (in words of Ricoeur), the revision of the past (in terms of Adorno), as well as the processes of

historical consciousness and social memory are the "work" on symbols and meanings. It is a work of culture where interpretation of a certain sign is determined in relation to the basic values of culture, and the will of groups, individuals, and institutions of power are only aspects of this process. The way a symbol, into which past events and characters have turned, obtains interpretation and symbolic place in the image of the past, is a struggle of interpretations, a struggle for interpretations, the prospects of which are connected with the interests and social power of interpreting agents, or one of the aspects of the symbolic struggle (Soroka, 2009).

The trauma of the past practice in the reception of historical experience merges with the trends of the political construction of reality. In this regard, Shcherbinina draws attention to the fact that the political construction of reality is performed at the expense of symbolic forms, and a political myth that preserves archaic meanings has the greatest constructivist potential. Using a political myth, archetypes burst into policy in general and in the postmodern policy, in particular. And the most politically influential archetype is a Hero who becomes a form of representation for the political leadership and authority in all culture and at all times.

But the heroic myth is of particular importance for Russia in its turning eras. At every moment of symbolic rupture, it was a heroic political myth that provided semiotic modeling of new Russia, i.e., signifying it as a construct nation and preparing the Russian identity. Therefore, the mental phenomenon of heroism in the Russian political culture prevails in the form of a special cognitive style, constituting the fantastic world of "true" power, and the scheme of the heroic myth acts as the matrix of political discourse about this better order (Scherbakov, 2008).

## 5. Summary

A trauma of the past is cultural and psychological perception of an unsuccessful for the public consciousness, or even humiliating or tragic experience of the past. The trauma of the past itself, as a cultural trauma, is a collective phenomenon, a condition experienced by a group, community, or society as a result of devastating events.

The concept of trauma was in demand in the analysis of the impact that the surrounding socio-cultural environment, which is in a state of rapid, radical, unpredictable, and accelerated changes, has on a person. This paradigm involves consideration of such events as revolutions and radical reforms, economic crises, cases of mass deportations, genocide, and ethnic cleansing, terrorism, assassination and overthrow of political leaders, opening of once closed information from secret archives, revision of the heroic version of national history, military defeats, collapse of a state, and so on.

The trauma of the past in the practice of reception of historical experience can be explained by the fact that the society cannot do without the past. Herewith, the trauma of the past in the practice of the historical experience reception turns out to be placed in the space of intercultural interaction of the past and present, when through the reception by means of sociocultural practices, the past enters the present, but due to the contradictory perception and ambiguous interpretations by political elites and various social groups of events, situations, and images of the past, "memory gaps" occur, and unordered (unstable) social memory is formed.

The subject of trauma of the past in the practice of reception of historical experience is closely related to the politicization and problematization of the attitude towards the past, as well as to the consolidation of peoples of Russia and ensuring the national security. The structure of the past reality (past experience) is determined by the structure of the present and its objectives. In particular, these are the tasks of development, change, and comprehension of the current changes, as well as ensuring stability and overcoming and counteracting threats to the national security. In this view, looking back to the past steps up, both in the form of specialized knowledge (history), and in the form of massive knowledge about the past: everyday and professional (philosophical, religious, ideological, and sociological). Attention is paid in this case to the images of the past and specific sources about the past reality, as opposed to that part of the past, which is a part of the present.

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