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The Role of Social Memory in Reconstruction of the Historical Past. Social Memory and Historical Past

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Abstract. *The purpose of the study is to consider the role of social memory in the reconstruction of the historical past. The article uses the method of comparison and concretization. The article considers different approaches to understanding the term "historical memory" and the meaning of historical memory in the modern Russian society. A review of the main factors influencing the process of forming historical memory is presented. Among them it is necessary to single out school and university history education, government policy. Alongside this the author defines the notions "social memory" and "the culture of memory" thus, aiming primarily at analyzing and generalizing facts of violent destruction of the people's memory as one of the basics of the Russian state. The article is structures basing on the principle of comparing post-revolutionary and modern Russia which makes the study quite consistent, and complete with generalized conclusions drawn by the author. In the end the main ways to solve the current situation are suggested. The results of the research can be used to prepare students for the discipline "Philosophy" and in the development of elective courses.*

Keywords: social memory, revolution, Bolsheviks, army, USSR, the Russian Empire, concept.

Introduction

The historical science occupies a special place among social humanitarian disciplines. This is due to the fact that history alongside philosophy is a system-forming discipline of humanitarian knowledge. The knowledge of the past provides a transfer of moral and ideological values, as well as orientation in historical time and social space. This constitutes the significance of historical consciousness which is a powerful regulator of public life. In the modern period of the development of the Russian society when its moral crisis is evident, historical experience is in demand in the social practice of forming the value priorities of the society especially among the younger generation.¹

In this connection, we face the task of examining one of the social functions of history – the function of social memory which is the main way of identification and orientation of the society and an individual.²

Materials and methods

¹ N. Bunnin, & E. Tsui-James (eds.), *The Blackwell Companion to Philosophy*, New York, John Wiley & Sons, 2008, p. 23.

² A. Vasilyev, „Memorialization and Oblivion as Mechanisms for the Production of Cultural Unity and Diversity,” in D. L. Spivak (ed.), *Cultural Heritage: from the Past to the Future*, vol. 6, Moscow, Eidos, 2009, p. 56–68.

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Presently there is no unambiguous definition of the given term. On the other hand, there are a lot of definitions that often interchange each other such as "social memory", "historical memory", "cultural memory", "collective memory", "individual memory", etc. According to D.G. Davletshina, "Social memory has many manifestations; these are historical, moral and supra-individual memory that are connected with the problem of preserving intellectual resources of humanity".³ The link that connects social and historical memory is humanity in general as the bearer of historical, moral and social memory.⁴

What is really meant by historical memory? The interpretation of the term of historical memory has many variations but on the whole, historical memory can be defined as the ability of social actors to preserve and transmit from generation to generation knowledge about historical events, historical figures of past epochs, national heroes and apostates, traditions and collective experience of mastering social and natural world, about the stages that one or another ethnos, nation, people passed in their development.⁵ It is important that historical memory is the basis of cultural continuity of generations and national-civic identity.

The process of forming historical memory is rather complicated. G.B. Mogilnitsky revealing the essence of social memory function notes that it "changes its content at different stages of the development of historical science not only due to selective character of the approach to the past phenomena but also due to their assessment to a lesser extent... The same phenomena of the past are often assessed completely opposite in different systems of historical perceptions; it determines unequal sounding in the memory of various social classes".⁶ In Russian conditions with its multinational population when each ethnos has its own value attitudes, traditions, religious beliefs and culture forming historical memory becomes a more difficult process. Among other factors influencing the formation of historical memory the following should be noted: socio-economic conditions for the development of the Russian society; ideological attitudes; level of school and higher education; attitude to history and historical science in general; activity of mass media, etc.⁷

All mentioned factors affect the process of forming historical awareness of modern youth. However, the formation of historical memory on the scientific basis occurs in the process of systematic studying history. In this regard, first of all, it is necessary to note the role of the school and the impact of knowledge gained at his-

³ E. V. Andreeva, *Cultural heritage as a core of cultural memory and its role in preserving the spiritual integrity of the Russian civilization: dissertation... candidate of philosophy*, Rostov-on-Don, 2007, p. 134.

⁴ E. V. Andreeva, *Cultural heritage as a core of cultural memory and its role in preserving the spiritual integrity of the Russian civilization: dissertation... candidate of philosophy*, p. 136.

⁵ J. Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization: Writing, Remembrance, and Political Imagination*, Moscow, LRC Publishers, 2004, p. 298; G. Akmadiyeva, G. Mussabalina, A. Zhumanova, K. Kabylshayev, & S. Stambulov, "History and Source Studies: are Diplomatic Documents Historical Sources?," *Astra Salvensis*, VI (2018), no. 11, p. 343–356.

⁶ D. A. Anikin, *The Topology of Modern Memory: Methodological Basics and Representation Strategies*, Saratov, Publishing House of Saratov University, 2014, p. 152. Mihaela Tălpaș, "Interpreting Gains Momentum. Words – the New Weapon of the 21st Century," in *Astra Salvensis*, VI ("016), no. 8, p. 217.

⁷ N. Bunnin, & E. Tsui-James (eds.), *The Blackwell Companion to Philosophy*, p. 62.

tory lessons. After all, school history education is the basis for the formation and development of ethnic self-awareness and historical memory of the younger generation.

But there is a problem of reliability and objectivity of knowledge, which in turn depend on the content of school textbooks and on the position of teachers. As for the content of school textbooks, it constitutes a separate problem but it is obvious that the primary task of the creators of a unified history textbook is that the material presented in the textbook should form the pupils' value orientations aimed at fostering patriotism, citizenship and interethnic tolerance. One of the main tasks of the school history course is to distinguish the formation of a civic All-Russian identity. At the same time, it is necessary to increase the emphasis on the multi-ethnic and multi-confessional composition of the country's population as the most important feature of Russian history.⁸

For 100 years Russian has been collecting its torn memory, pieces of memory scattered around the hard labour camps and prisons, memory covered with scarlet flag with the smell of ash and blood.⁹

It has been more than eighty years since the beginning of the “terrible trial”, but to this day the spirit of the Joint State Political Directorate (JSPD) “haunts the survived”. There are a lot of opinions, facts, stories, notes, books but as if with each uncovered story a new branch of the mystery breaks in forcing to “dig” as deeply as possible. But what awaits the researchers at the end of the journey?

Literature review

To understand the complex nature of the conflict of the concept of “memory” it should be considered in context with such concepts as “commemoration”, “politics of memory”, and “historical politics”. The notion of “cultural of memory” which is much broader than the “politics of memory”, it can include not only official actions of the authorities but also informal, spontaneous, unplanned human use of a particular object or ritual, that is, politics of memory can be official expressed in the cultural policy of the state, and informal expressed in cultural practices on the initiative “from below” (for example, the unofficial practice of commemorating victims of catastrophes, terrorist attacks at the embassy of a country). The politics of memory is closely connected with the historical policy pursued by the state. The politics of memory pursued by the Russian state also manifests itself in the “memorial laws” adopted recently, for example, the Decree of the President of the Russian Federation of May 15, 2009.¹⁰

Revolution is one of the factors of partial or complete erasing social memory leading to social amnesia; during revolutions the old customs and traditions are being destroyed in a violent way. In our study we will try to analyze the

⁸ N. Bunnin, & E. Tsui-James (eds.), *The Blackwell Companion to Philosophy*, p. 67.

⁹ P. A. Angeles, *The Harper Collins Dictionary of Philosophy*, New York, Harper Perennial, 2012, p. 255.

¹⁰ E. V. Andreeva, *Cultural heritage as a core of cultural memory and its role in preserving the spiritual integrity of the Russian civilization: dissertation... candidate of philosophy*, p. 139.

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most vivid methods of erasing the social memory of generations by the example of
the February Revolution of 1917.¹¹

1. "We have to fight against religion. This is the basics of all materialism
and, consequently, of Marxism. But Marxism is not materialism which has stopped
on basics. Marxism goes further. It says: we must be able to fight against religion,
and for this we must materialistically explain the source of faith and religion among
the masses", wrote V.I. Lenin.¹²

Religion was a powerful support to the Russian state; to destroy faith meant
to deprive the meaning and "support" of almost 80% of the population, and with it
a huge layer of knowledge concluded in churches from liturgical books to icono-
graphy that had been developing for many centuries and its peak fell on the end of
the XIX century.¹³ Atheism as a worldview was recognized tacitly and proclaimed
as one of the foundations of the ideology of the Soviet state. On March 22, 1922
V.I. Lenin wrote classifying it as top secret: "It is now and only now when in places
facing starvation people eat people and where there are hundreds and thousands of
dead bodies on the roads we can (and, thus, we must) confiscate church valuables
with the most frenzied and ruthless energy and without stopping to suppress any
resistance. It is now and only now that the vast majority of the peasant masses will
either support us, or, in any case, will not be in a position to support in any decisive
way the handful of the Black-Hundred clergy and reactionary urban philistinism
that can and want to experience the policy of violent resistance to the Soviet de-
cree. At all costs, it is necessary for us to carry out the seizure of church values in
the most decisive and quickest manner than we can secure a fund of several hun-
dred million gold rubles (remember the gigantic wealth of some monasteries and
laurels). Without this fund any state work in general, any economic construction in
particular, and any defense of its position in Genoa in particular, is completely in-
conceivable... The more representatives of the reactionary clergy and the reaction-
ary bourgeoisie will be shot due to this, the better. It is necessary now to teach this
"audience" such a lesson so that for several decades they will not even dare to
think about any resistance..."¹⁴

Mass destruction and desecration of church property began. The temples
were converted into storage facilities, as if they metaphorically tried to replace the
huge layer with "new" grain, write their history with blood, and pour it all the walls
adhering to the expression: "out of sight, out of mind". Almost immediately after
the revolution the new government launched a campaign to replace religious holi-
days with Soviet ones, not only names but also rituals were mocked in every possi-
ble way. "The so-called red christenings, red Easter, red carnivals (those where effi-
gies are burnt) were introduced, which were supposed to distract the people from
traditions, to have a form and ideological content understandable to them", says

¹¹ P. A. Angeles, *The Harper Collins Dictionary of Philosophy*, p. 356.

¹² „The Great Patriotic War in the Space of Social Memory,” in *Proceedings of the International Scientific Conference dedicated to 70-th anniversary of the Great Victory*; 2015, p. 210.

¹³ A. Vasilyev, „Memorialization and Oblivion as Mechanisms for the Production of Cultural Unity and Diversity,” p. 73–75.

¹⁴ B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, Moscow, Kuchkovo Pole, 2001, p. 126.

the religious scholar Viktor Yelensky, “They relied on Lenin's words that the church is replacing the theatre for people: give them performances, and they will accept Bolshevik ideas.”

2. The transition of private property to the state influenced significantly the loss of “White Guard” values and, unfortunately, led to the loss of architectural legacy we can still observe. A lot of ancient buildings, cultural monuments were transferred to the municipality that remorselessly covered the facades with political banners, slogans and neon giants. In provincial cities family mansions were given to the state institutions.

Historical memory intersects with individual memory of a person even after several generations. For instance, in the town of Novouzensk, the Saratov region in the family estate of the author of the article there is the District Department of Internal Affairs (DDIA); this fact vividly illustrates the erasure of social memory by the example of a family: the loss of the house led to the loss of contact with the relatives, region and family history.¹⁵ Only after 100 years, we, the descendants of the family managed to collect bit by bit and restore the history of the house and family. We didn't manage to reestablish the right to the house as it was impossible to restore the documentation lost during the revolutionary actions. The author of the article was lucky to find distant relatives, thanks to the Internet network, thereby adding other facts to the history.

The Winter Palace is a striking example for many people. After the February Revolution of 1917 the Provisional Government worked in the Winter Palace. In the post-revolutionary years in the building of the Winter Palace there were various departments and institutions. In 1922 a part of the building was transferred to the Hermitage Museum.¹⁶

After 100 years there is a generation in Russia that lost touch with its bloodline. Internet sources are actively trying to develop web dedicated to the creation of genealogical trees with a specific description of ancestors, up to the seventh generation which is next to impossible due to the “top secret” status of many documents and the unreliability of the Internet. Unfortunately, is also extremely problematic to work independently in the city archives without the relevant permission. The main “failures” in the memory of individual families is related to the 1930-1940's. The developers of the websites “Memorial” and “Memory of the People” attempted to restore a great number of “lost” ancestors; these websites contain the military archives of Russia and the near abroad. However, unfortunately, these sources cannot restore the whole picture but they undoubtedly opened the veil of secrecy for a lot of families desperately looking for the missing soldiers.¹⁷

¹⁵ J. Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization: Writing, Remembrance, and Political Imagination*, p. 276.

¹⁶ E. V. Safronova, & V. E. Loba, „Dangerous Condition of Person as a Criminal Term,” in *Criminology Journal of Baikal National University of Economics and Law*, 3 (2014), p. 11–13.

¹⁷ S. Huang, *Essentials of Neo-Confucianism: Eight Major Philosophers of the Song and Ming Periods*, Westport, Greenwood Press, 1999.

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The situation with political prisoners is much more complicated and problematic. Despite the fact that the period of secrecy of many cases has expired, the archives do not give access to political "caches".¹⁸ In the Internet there are lists of the acquitted people due to the lack of evidence but they are so small compared to the total number of arrests in Russia that they do not give a complete picture.

The policy of our state is aimed at reviving the values of the family and the state creating huge social projects that seek to maintain the spiritual and moral level of development of the modern youth. The strengthening of the great power is based on the strengthening of faith and the memory of ancestors which is unshakable for citizens of the Russian Federation. The main tasks that every young person must pursue for the revival of memory of the people are:

1. Memory of the exploits of one's ancestors.
2. Creation and/or revival of the family tree.
3. Work in the archives of one's village/city/region to obtain a more complete picture of the life of one's family and ancestors.
4. Creation of an interactive archive for the systematization of knowledge and facts about one's family.

Conclusion

Based on the conclusions of philosophers of the 20th century, it can be concluded that increasing social sensitivity is accompanied by paradigmatic changes in historical politics. Earlier, at the end of the war, the opposing parties were ordered to consign to oblivion designed to neutralize memories that are dangerous for the peaceful coexistence of winners and losers. But oblivion does not have the healing power for historical traumas related to the oppression of people, the mass destruction of innocent and defenseless victims, and, therefore, there is no instance or authority that could forgive these crimes. Such "crimes against humanity" cannot be dealt with through oblivion; to cope with them they must remain in the joint memory of victims and criminals.

¹⁸ P. Edwards, *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, New York, Macmillan & Free Press, 1967.