

THE MEMORY MANAGEMENT ISSUE

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The article considers the fundamental works that exist in the Western anthropological and sociological literature, concerning the most referred to and discussed political uses of the past in the theory of collective memory. According to some authors, the past is mutable; it is made and remade for present use and based upon the requirements of the present. Another school of thought believes that collective memory experiences the changes that have occurred in the society, and what is even more, the past itself alters our notions and comprehension, and not vice versa. The third, relatively small group of memory experts argues that the same present can bear different memories and different realia may carry the same memory. Thus collective memory is a dynamic and continuous process of discussions, which flow through the time within the political culture. Neither of these theoretical approaches is of narrow or dogmatic character; they differ primarily in emphasis.

Recollection of the past is an active, constructive process, not just a matter of information retrieval. To remember is to place a part of the past in the service of conceptions and needs of the present [1, p. 374]. As Karl Marx observed 150 years ago, «Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all the dead generations weights like a nightmare on the brain of the living. And just when they seem engaged in revolutionizing themselves and things, in creating something that has never yet existed, precisely in such periods of revolutionary crisis they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service and borrow from them names, battle cries and costumes in order to present the new scene of world history in this time-honoured disguise and this borrowed language» [2, p. 10].

Almost all political rhetoric relies on the past as a means of legitimization. The French revolutionaries of the 1790s had to refer to the past, the Roman republic to find a legitimization for political action that did not depend on royal decrees (it was Roman law that recognized the primacy of private property). As a

rule, revolutionary movements also seek their mottos and ambitions in the past [3, pp. 9-10]. Probably the national historical consciousness and its infrastructures have gradually begun to develop in French and European societies since the Great French Revolution. It was since the 19th century that scholars and politicians have started to accept the importance of the fundamental link between the nation and its past. This link was one of the most important factors for the growth of nationalist and nation building ideologies, and in the process of the establishment of the capitalistic nations in general [Cf.: 4, pp. 127-129. See also: 5, pp. 50-55, 77-79, 95-98, 108, 141-147; 6, pp. 37, 73, 75-76, 171; 7, pp.24-29; 9; 10]. As Eric Hobsbawm has noticed, «Nations without a past are contradictions in terms. What makes a nation *is* the past, what justifies one nation against others is the past, and historians are the people who produce it» [8, p. 3].

Memory and the historical memory in particular, is one of the most important elements, which defines the edges of «ethnic community (ethny),» «nation,» and «national identity» [9, pp.14, 21, 40, 43 etc; 10, pp. 11-17 etc.]. Among the rituals, customs, and common myths the shared historical memories and traditions are a means of tying the members of the nation and determining their relations and actions. According to Anthony Smith, one of the best Western experts on this issue, memories and the understanding of their communal past or pasts, forms the «ethnohistory» of the nation or ethnic community. It is multi-stranded and contested, which implies a continuous process of reinterpretation of national identities. Every generation contributes its own interpretations of national identity, and for that reason national identity is never fixed or static: it is always being reconstructed in response to new needs, interests and perceptions, though always within certain limits. According to A. Smith, the central question of nationalism, which in general is one of the most powerful social and political forces in the modern world and has the most important role in nation building and national development processes, is the role of the past in the creation of the present [10, pp. 180-181, 187; 11, pp. 43-56].

According to A. Smith, the essential element in any kind of human identity is memory [10, p. 208]. Both historical and collective memory is based upon the people's knowledge and attitude towards their nation's historical past on the whole or certain episodes thereof, real or perceived. At the same time, as it has already been mentioned, these memories are not static; they are subjected to transformations, which may be caused by internal developments and external influences.

Generally, thoughts about society are almost always manifested through the images of individuals. History is perceived in the same way: remembrance of the past begins with the remembrance of men. Individuals composing a society al-

most always fell the need to have ancestors, heroes¹, and one of the roles of great men is to fill that need [3, p. 10]. And here special importance is attached to the question, what kind of historical individuals should be, or are desirable to be remembered, and what parts of their activity should be presented to future generations? That is, we face the political uses of the past [13, pp. 301, 302, 315].

This task is a part of a more general problem which is nowadays mostly considered, discussed and challenged, leading to the clash of opinions and resulting in the emergence of individual avenues. In brief, the essence of the question is as follows: some authors maintain that the past is mutable, made and remade for present-day use, depending on the demands of the present. Another group of the theorists believes that the collective memory survives the changes in the society; moreover, it is the past that forms our notions of the present and not vice versa. The third, comparatively smaller group of memory scholars argues that the same present may carry different memories and different realia may carry the same memory, and thus in political culture collective memory is a dynamic and ongoing process of debate, which flows through time.

None of these theoretical approaches are of narrow or dogmatic character, they differ primarily in emphasis.

One of the most essential and repeatedly occurring conclusions of M. Halbwachs, one of the classic theorists of memory, is as follows, «A remembrance is in very large measure a reconstruction of the past achieved with data borrowed from the present, a reconstruction prepared, furthermore, by reconstructions of earlier periods wherein past images had already been altered» [14, p. 69].

He was sure that memories concerning some individuals or occurrences are liable to continuous alterations because of two types of mutually interconnected processes. First, new information is collected about the events and notions of the past and thus the horizons of knowledge are widened; as a result, new memory may be shaped that is perceived to be (or actually is) closer to the reality. The second reason is that the groups carrying the remembrance and their views change, whereas it is from their viewpoint that the individual considers the past. The more the individual becomes involved in each of these groups and participates more intimately in its memory, the more he refreshes and supplements his remembrances. By developing these opinions and in some sense by generalizing them, he directly declares that our understanding of the past is always instrument to the solution of present-day problems: «If, as we believe, collective memory is

¹In this respect it is noteworthy that after long debate the Jews mark the Holocaust Day not on one of the days symbolizing mass violence but on the day of Warsaw uprising in the Jewish ghetto against Nazis, i.e., they mark the day of armed struggle [12, p. 28].

essentially a reconstruction of the past, if it adapts the image of ancient facts to the beliefs and spiritual needs of the present, then a knowledge of the origin of these facts must be secondary, if not altogether useless, for the reality of the past is no longer *in the past*» [1, p. 376].

A group of well-known researchers of remembrance and identity (G. Mead, M. Fuko, E. Hobsbawm, T. Ranger, Ch. Cooley, etc.) who continued the theoretical development of this observation by M. Halbwachs also believe that the past is created in the present, and thus it is adaptable. A powerful line of the so-called «presentist» approach is observed in the scientific studies referring to the memory issues. These studies record the ways through which the reflections of the past are changed in the course of time. They also note how different groups use the past for solving present-day problems engaging in various manipulations while commenting on the past with the purpose of achieving definite goals. Based on various examples the numerous studies carried out by the above authors and their adherents reveal the transformation of the significance of historical events passing from one generation to another in accordance with changes in infrastructures of social problems and needs. In other words, according to the authors of this direction, any historical event is evaluated differently in different period of times, dependent on the requirements of the very period¹. Thus, according to G. Mead and M. Halbwachs, the collective memory is a subject of fundamental revision when the new values and social structures substitute the old ones. They believe that «the past is a foreign country,» as the inscriptional title of another author's book prompts. [Cf.: 16].

George Herbert Mead was not familiar with Halbwachs' works. The essence of the theory, based on the works published in 1920s-1930s relies upon the idea that «reality is always that of a present» despite the fact that the present includes the past and the future. Whereas, the past arises through memory and exists in images which form «the backward limit of the present.» In its time his theory [17; 18; 19] was a radical departure from traditional views [See 20 about Mead]. G. Mead announced that any concept of the past is constructed «from the standpoint of the new problem of today» and that all aspects of the past lose their relevance when the conditions of the present are changed. Mead's theory of the past includes statements similar to M. Halbwachs' ideas. The emphasis, however, is different. While Halbwachs seeks to show how the present situation affects our per-

¹ Compare with the facts of the Soviet past, when in 1985 the policy of the Glasnost was announced aimed at revealing the dark pages of the Soviet past. According to American researcher R. Davies «Nothing like this has ever happened before in the history of the world. In the course of 1987 and 1988, tens of millions of Soviet citizens became passionately involved in studying their country's past, and in rethinking the principles and practice of Soviet socialism.» [15, p.VII].

ception of the past, Mead's aim is to understand the use of historical knowledge in interpreting the present. Therefore, according to G. Mead, the way a «person has to bring up a certain portion of the past to determine what his present is, and in the same way the community wants to bring up the past so it can state the present situation and bring out what the actual issues themselves are.» Mead's second distinctive feature is that new pasts are most likely to emerge during periods of rapid change. Let us recall that during the period of Glasnost the Soviet citizens revealed a new past nearly every day. For example, in the Armenian reality during the years of Karabakh movement new pages of Russian-Turkish cooperation of the first quarter of the 20th century were revealed. New facts about the role of revolutionary leaders, and the Communist Party of the Soviet Union surfaced during the events crucial for the Armenian nation. The emergence of situations determined by such has destabilizing effect yet they may grow into a regular situation, if the past is reconstructed so that it assimilates and mixes in the meaningful flow of the developments.

G. Mead's definitions of the past include other provisions such as «social structural past,» «implied objective past,» «symbolically reconstructed past.» The latter involves redefining the meaning of past events in such a way that they have meaning in and utility for the present. The «use value» of history in the context of present-day power struggles may manifest itself in the following way: the reformist groups, for example, are consistently using the tactic of legitimizing their group interests through past accomplishments and then using these accomplishments to frame their present appearances. The construction of a mythical past and the reconstruction of an objective past serve certain pragmatic interests. Thus building the mythic past and restoration of the objective past are subjects to definite pragmatic problems [21, pp. 149-151; 20, pp. 163, 170].

One of the representatives of presentism, Charles Horton Cooley, observes that the function of the present, not past determines how famous people and events are preserved in the collective mind [22; 13, pp. 302-303]. E. Hobsbawm uses the term «invention of tradition», that is, the past has been invented, but of the cause of this process may be explained by the conditions and requirements of the present. He shows how the tradition is reshaped and adapted to the objectives of the present [23, pp. 1-14]. These concepts, which «seek not only to liberate the present from the past's grip (Edward Shils), but to establish the importance of the present relative to the past (Frances Fitzgerald),» consider the perception of the past to be strategic tools created in compliance with the requirements of the present, which make the past unstable, untrustworthy, unreliable, ungrounded, and something like a hostage for the present [24, p. 222].

Michael Schudson, who represents the opposing group notes that the news about the alteration by the Soviet Union of its own and world history to glorify the Soviet state and Communist party contributed to the increase in anti-Soviet attitudes in America in the 1960s. M. Schudson recalls anti-soviet novel, «1984» written by George Orwell in 1949 and labeled as an anti-soviet novel, where the new social order, that replaced the capitalist system, was represented as totalitarian, and Winston Smith, the main character, who worked as a cipher officer in the Ministry of Truth, erased facts undesirable to the ruling regime from the historical record. According to G. Orwell, one of the mottos of this imaginary state was a currently widespread phrase: «Who controls the past controls the future.» M. Schudson notices that six decades after the book's publication «we have all become Soviets in the eyes of many scholars,» because «how much our own constructions of the American past, for instance, have cleaned it up, ignoring conflict,» and at the same time the researchers are witnesses how, for example, «the Germans and Japanese have been retelling the story of World War II». In M. Schudson opinion, where the creation of a sense of the past is not in the hands of professional historians, it is all the more likely that the past will be used as a resource for legitimation rather than as an avenue toward truth [25, pp. 105-106].

One may come across direct manifestation of presentism in *the social limitations of the memory*. Thus, it is well known that our memory is greatly affected by our social environment [26, pp. 35-41]. Our environment, in some cases, may prevent us from remembering certain events of our life. That is, the extent of influence of social environment exerted upon the ways of remembrance of our past becomes more distinct when we understand that the major part of the things «memorized» by us is in fact filtered in the process of interpretation, which usually occurs in that social environment.

In response to the great importance attached to the presentism in the studies of social remembrance, a number of researchers single out approaches conventionally referred to as «pastism» (as we have conditionally formulated) or based on the past that is limited adaptability of the past. For example, M. Schudson believes, that «The past is in some respects, and under some conditions, highly resistant to efforts to make it over.» According to him, the full freedom to reconstruct the past in accordance with one's own present interests is limited by three factors [25, pp. 107-113]. First the structure of available past offers only part of the whole pasts and restricts the extent to which it can be changed, and at the same time, thus placing the other parts of the pasts beyond our reach. For example, the Americans may try to comment on or reinterpret the history of slavery in their country (indeed, a lot has already been forgotten), yet they cannot neglect the

various manifestations of this epoch, because the latter was a prolonged, traumatic experience for the nation, it is intimately connected with one of the defining events of American identity, the Civil War, it is inextricably linked to the character of the nation's most haunting hero, Abraham Lincoln; it is deeply embedded in the language and aspirations of civil rights struggles, the songs and stories of the American slaves and so on. Another example: it would be impossible now to rewrite the history of the 20th century and claim that the 1930s was a time of great prosperity for Americans. But if one claims that the 1830s was a time of great prosperity, only professional historians will be able to fundamentally explain this issue. During the first years of independence of the Third Armenian Republic the state propaganda mechanisms, different organizations began discrediting the achievements of the Soviet years, monuments were dismantled and expositions in museums were altered. Yet, it is not that easy to erase the numerous realities of the nearest past from the memory of the representatives of that period, and to create a reverse public opinion.

Second: the structure of individual choice makes some manifestations of the past unacceptable and the other ones impossible for consideration. Why? People can choose only from the available past and this past is limited: are individuals free to choose as they wish? Far from it. There are many limiting factors. These are, for example, the traumas, which are past experiences of people (organizations or nations) which cannot be ignored even when they would like to, cannot divert their attention from without courting anxiety, fear, and pain. Not only must Americans and Germans face the reality (slavery and the Holocaust, respectively) but they must do so repeatedly and obsessively no matter they like it or not. The past becomes a part of ourselves; and shapes us, it influences our consciousness, whether we like it or not. In the pathological, but familiar, form, people get trapped by their old wounds.

On the other hand, people react not only to extreme conditions in their own lives but to the ones in the lives of others. They do so not because of some traumatic experience they themselves have undergone but because they are aware of traumatic stories of others in similar situations, and as one of its manifestations certain emotional actions take place. Let us remember the charitable movement among thousands of people living in Europe and the USA in the period of the Armenian Genocide and the years to follow. This was expressed through numerous goodwill and orphan protecting undertakings and events, which were organized through funds donated by ordinary people.

People can not make a free choice also because their actions are often governed by the inertia of the past. A key feature that shapes the community's re-

sponse to conflict will be, quite simply, the way the community responded to conflict in the past; that is in any event they take into consideration the experience gained in the past. Many people are well aware of the situation, when to deal with a new problem or issue, people try to specify how it was solved in the past.

There are some facets of the past we cannot ignore or forget without feeling the loss of some part of ourselves. Not only the past, according to Freud lives in people's mental life; people's mental life lives in the past. Thus, for many Yerevanites (residents of Yerevan), their Yerevan origin is attached to the old buildings of the central part of Yerevan; consequently, their destruction (which is tantamount to alteration of the memory of different times) may even result in the domination of traumatic memories. In December 2004, during the discussion on preservation of the historical and cultural heritage of Yerevan held at Yerevan Hotel by the initiative of «Cooperation for Open Society» in their emotional reports a few old residents of Yerevan (a writer and a few architects) directly noted that they felt sorry for the destruction of the city center not only from aesthetic or architectural standpoint but also for the loss of remembrances caused by the physical alteration of the site [Cf. 27]. It is worth mentioning that a considerable part of participants agreed with them.

Third, the structure of the social conflict with respect to the past means that it is not always due up to us to decide what past is liable to remembering and what should be fallen into oblivion. People's ability to reconstruct the past just as they wish is limited by the crucial social fact that other people within their awareness are trying to do the same thing. This means, that control over the past is disputed and the past becomes contested terrain, and that there is a policy of memory that requires study.

M. Schudson noted that there is plenty of evidence that people and groups and nations rewrite the past to legitimate the present, but it should not lead to loose talk that suggests it is the whole story. – The present shapes our understanding of the past, indeed. But this is half of the truth, at best, and a particularly cynical half-truth, at that. The other half of the truth is that the past shapes the present, even when the most powerful people and classes and institutions hardly want it to.

One of the arguments of the representatives of «pastism» is the following: every society, whatever its ideological climate requires a sense of continuity with the past, and its enduring memories maintain this continuity. If beliefs about the past failed to outlive changes in society, then society's unity and continuity would be undermined. Émile Durkheim was among the early writers who made this unity and continuity problematic. Conceptions of the past, Durkheim believed, are culti-

vated by periodic commemoration rites [for more details see 26, pp. 47-64] whose function is not to transform the past by bending it to serve the present, but to reproduce the past, to make it live as it once did [24, p. 222; 28, pp. 415, 420].

According to another outstanding representative of this school of thought, E. Shils, on the concept of tradition (1981), the past makes the present. In his opinion commemoration is a way of claiming that the past has something to offer to the present, be it a warning or a model: in times of rampant change, the past provides a necessary point of reference for identity and action. According to E. Shils, the image of an epoch or a historical figure is not conceived and elaborated anew by each generation but is transmitted according to a «guiding pattern», which endows subsequent generations with a common heritage. Stable memories strengthen society's «temporal integration» by creating links between the living and the dead and promoting consensus over time. This consensus is resilient because memories create the grounds for their own perpetuation. According to M. Schudson, memories are not credible unless they conform to an existing structure of assumptions about the past. Thus, a true community is a «community of memory,» one whose past is retained by retelling the same «constitutive narrative,» by recalling the people who have always embodied and exemplified its moral values [29, pp. 31-32; 25; 24, p. 222].

As it was mentioned above, two theoretical approaches to collective memory are distinguishable. The former relates the discontinuities of the past to an ongoing constructive process motivated by the changing concerns of the present. The latter draws attention to continuities in our perceptions of the past and to the way these perceptions are maintained in the face of social change.

In contrast to the above mentioned widely spread opinions, where the past is either durable or malleable, the third group of authors (Barry Schwartz, Yael Zerubavel, Jeffrey Olick and others) argues for a more complex view of the relation between past and present in shaping collective memory. They are of the opinion that, «collective memory should be seen as an active process of sense-making through time» [30, p. 921], or according to a more expressive formulation of another author (B. Zelizer), «memory is not an unchanging vessel for carrying the past to the present: memory is a process [of continuous discussions] and not a thing, and it works differently at different points in time» [31, pp. 214-239; 32, p. 122]. The authors who adhere to these principles in their works try to answer to the questions whether the difference between these approaches can be resolved by rejecting one in favor of the other; whether conditions for the applicability of

each approach can be specified; whether a new theory that reconciles their conflicting claims can be formulated; or whether a single, unifying property exists beneath their manifest differences.

These, as well as the other above authors, come to this opinion in the result of detailed observation of definite and concrete appearances. The search for the answers to these questions is going on in the sphere of keeping notices/records on commemorations. For example B. Schwartz shows how the memory of George Washington, a non-democratic military and political leader, was democratized between 1965 and 1920 (before and after the Civil War, and prior to the end of the Progressive Era), under the influence of different political factors, which were underway in the US and throughout the 1920s, Washington came to be regarded by some as a complete businessman and captain of industry. On the one hand, this transformation adds weight to Mead's and Halbwachs's belief that the past is mutable, made and remade for present use; from the other hand the Americans never forgot Washington's original, aristocratic image, and thus are setting limits on later generations' ability to democratize Washington. This reflects É. Durkheim's and E. Shils's ideas on how collective memories outlive changes in society. Thus the case of Washington shows that there cannot be separate theories of collective memory one to explain changes in what is remembered; another to explain persistence in what is remembered. Nor do the facts of this case allow to incorporate the persistence and innovation of memory into a third, reconciliatory theory, because the present is constituted by the past, the past's retention as well as its reconstruction must be anchored in the present. As each generation modifies the beliefs presented by previous generations, there remains an assemblage of old beliefs coexisting with the new, including old beliefs about the past itself.

Accordingly, M. Halbwachs and G. Mead and their followers are right to anchor collective memory in the present. Their error is to underestimate the present's carrying power. They fail to see that the same present can sustain different memories and that different presents can sustain the same memory. B. Schwartz believes that once this error is corrected, the Mead/Halbwachs and the Durkheim/Shils approaches to collective memory can be seen as special cases of a broader generalization that relates both change and continuity in the perception of the past to immediate human experience. The example, which is brought in the article by B. Schwartz, shows that the original, aristocratic image of G. Washington was preserved and the new democratic image created by the same society. These contrasting images coexisted. That is, according to B. Schwartz, the past is

neither totally precarious, nor immutable, but is a stable image upon which new elements are intermittently superimposed. The past, then, is a familiar rather than a foreign country; its people different, but not strangers to the present [24, pp.221-234; 13, pp. 301-319].

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