Historical Memory as the Basis of Group Identity

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Abstract—**The paper examines the role of historiography in the formation of the identity of imaginary communities ("we-groups") by conceptualizing the past. Historiographic concepts serve both to define the boundaries of "their" group and self-identify its members, as well as to form opinions about other "we-groups". Concepts of identity based on the common perceptions of the past in this community are created within the framework of special institutions. They are considered as a phenomenon of "historical memory", which is a modus of "cultural memory". A distinctive feature of "historical memory" is an appeal to the mythological images and mutually exclusive interpretations of the past. In the ideological aspect, historiography serves as the basis for justifying the claims of this "we-group" in the present.**

Keywords—imaginary communities; "we-groups"; identity; "cultural memory"; "historical memory"; historiography; history; ideology; mythology

I. INTRODUCTION

Large social communities should be considered as "imaginary" communities, i.e. as representations of individuals about belonging to one or another "we-group". According to this concept, in contrast to small social groups based on real cohesion experience, all participants of which personally interact with each other, such communities as, for example, a nation exist only in the minds of individuals. Such a community is presented to those who identify themselves with it as something limited to other communities, but at the same time sovereign in relation to them.

If social interaction is an attribute of real-life social groups, then an attribute of imaginary communities is the mental image of similarity shared by its members [1]. An example of such a community is the nation: "since members of even the smallest nation will never know the majority of their fellow-nation, meet with them or even hear about them, while in the minds of each of them lives the image of their community "[2].

The term "we-group" is borrowed from ethnology, where it is used to describe social groups whose cohesion is not based on such objective criteria, such as language, religion, culture, race or habitat, but on the subjective recognition of belonging to group members [3]. The concepts imaginary community and "we-group" should be considered as different moduses of a social group. The imaginary

community is a modus, meaning stable social groups whose members are aware of their commonality and difference from other groups. The term "we-group" should be understood as an individual's representation of belonging to a certain imaginary community, with which he identifies himself, mentally setting the boundary between "we" and "they." Thus, in general, both of these concepts characterize the subject-object unity of both real and imagined social systems.

II. CULTURAL MEMORY AND GROUP IDENTITY

The concept of group identity refers to the ideas of individuals about the similarities with others, belonging to a certain group of similar and related past individuals. Group identity is largely due to the concept of a common history of members of this community.

Group identity is formalized in texts, images and symbols that perform ontological and axiological functions in relation to "we-group", answering the questions "who are we?", "Who are the others?". They are designed to solve the problem of individual self-determination of belonging to one or another imaginary community. The design of the image of the "other" ("they-group") gives the group the opportunity to realize their own identity and, therefore, constitutive for the genesis of group identity.

Group identity is always a matter of self-identification of individuals participating in it. It does not exist by itself, but only to the extent that individuals recognize their membership in a group. The degree of involvement in group identity "depends on how life is in the minds of group members and capable of motivating their thinking and activity" [4]. Consequently, the management of society is associated with the formation of abstract patterns that are fixed in culture. Their combinations form a "cultural memory", the modus of which is "historical memory" — a set of ideas of a common past that are stereotyped for members of this "we-group". But since these are not personal memories of individuals about real historical events, but simulacra, therefore, social perceptions of a common past can be called "historical memory", which is a modus of "cultural memory." The attribute of "historical memory" is that it "can only be done artificially within the framework of institutions unlike the immediate memories of the individual about the personal experience." [5] In this context, the memory of a person is individual in the sense that it is

always a unique combination of various elements of "cultural memory" and "communication memory" — the memories of a particular person, obtained in the course of social interaction.

Any imaginary community needs reference points and samples, on the basis of which self-identification of its member takes place. The rest of the views of its participants do not coincide, change and are not recognized as something unified and unchanging and, therefore, are not universal. The notion of a general that leads to the depth of centuries of the past is fundamental notion to the identity of "we-groups", regardless of whether they are religious, social, political, ethnic or national [6]. This happens because in contrast to the continuously changing social reality, the patterns of the past which are stored and reproduced in "historical memory" are unchanged, at least until the next stage of rethinking history, and convey the values that determine behavioral norms.

Thus, the concept of "historical memory" should be viewed as a set of sustainable ideas about a common past that has developed in a certain imaginary community as a result of the socialization of its members. In this sense, history is a present, in which ideas about the past and feelings about it appear as a construct of social reality [7].

Representations of the past are especially important for identity, since it is they that serve as the basis for its formation and maintenance. Therefore, each imaginary community creates an idea of its past. It is expressed in a symbolic form and in the form of narratives and performs the function of group identification on the basis of us and others.

What events are fixed as the system-forming elements of "historical memory"? First of all, those that symbolizes a pattern of behavior, a landmark for imitating members of this imaginary community. In these samples, the overall position of the group is expressed; they not only reproduce its past, but also from its present, defining the members' ideas about themselves and their attitude to other groups. "The representation of a common past that leads to the depths of centuries is of fundamental importance for rallying social groups: the older the history of a community, the more numerous its internal connections, and therefore, it is more united" [8].

The artificial nature of "cultural memory" is due to the fact that it exists only on the basis of coding. As a result of this activity, "fixation points" are created, which include texts, images, buildings, holidays, symbols, etc. This coding is carried out not spontaneously, but in the course of the activities of certain social institutions, such as the church, the media, cultural and educational institutions. Within these institutions, the task of creating "convenient" for this community perception about the past is realized by those who serve as custodians and carriers of tradition — representatives of different professions, but who can be collectively called "priests" of "cultural memory".

In everyday consciousness, the present is understood as the result of a chain of cause-and-effect relationships that has its origin in the past. This makes ideas about the past necessary for understanding the present and predicting the future, because it is impossible to understand the present without knowing its causes. Such an understanding of history underlies self-identification and acts as an attribute of all imaginary communities. Therefore, historiographical concepts create the structural basis of the worldview and self-identification of an individual with a certain "we-group".

What kind of imaginary community the individual considers himself to be is determined by his identity, and, in turn, identity by that model of representation of the past which he accepts as true: "Our history is our identity" [9].

III. THE ROLE OF HISTORIOGRAPHY IN THE FORMATION OF THE IMAGINARY COMMUNITIES

Historiography creates such ideas about the past, which serve as self-identification of individuals with a certain "we-group". Individual perceptions of a common past for an imaginary community are based on the collective image of ancestors, which constitute the concepts of group identity set forth in historical narratives. Through these concepts, which create a sense of unity among individuals who identify themselves with this community, the achievement of their stability and cohesion is realized. Since the incorporation of an individual into imaginary mega-level communities (national, religious, cultural) is carried out as a result of socialization and is objective in relation to the individual (Freudian superego), they are common to all members of this imaginary community. This imaginary community is fixed with the help of concepts that are equally understood by all members of this "we-group". As a result, the content of "historical memory" is socially determined and represents a set of stereotypes: a simplified, dogmatic and the only correct interpretation of historical events [10].

As a result, a canonical model of the past is created, which serves as a model for all members of this "we-group". Accordingly, carriers of ideas about the past that are different from those accepted in this "we-group" will correspond to other "we-groups" by its members. Therefore, the "historical memory", which is based on the model of the past shared by all members of the "we-group", is the basis of its identity.

Creating the only true and right image for the armed community of the past is achieved by ignoring the facts that contradict the narrative, simplifying the reality to the binary constructs, good-bad and own-others. The real history does not fit into this Procrustean bed; it is ambiguous, contradictory, and irrational. In the real past of social objects, chance dominates [11]. This past does not make sense and, therefore, cannot act as a reference sample for group identification.

Thus, representations about the past that have developed in the culture of this or that society are determined by the actual needs of self-identification of this society as a "we-group". The self-identification of the members of the "we-group", their representation of its difference from others, is formed on the basis of those representations of the past that allow us to answer the questions "who are we?" and "who are they?". From this it follows with necessity that different "we-groups" have different ideas about the past and different attitudes towards the same events of the past. And if the

essence of the individual, according to J.P. Sartre is his past, then for the "we-group" its past is its essence: "Mon essence est au passe, c est la loi de son etre" [12].

For example, let us compare the attitudes of the British and the Irish to the same events of the past: "for an ordinary Englishman, Cromwell's behavior, violation of the Union Act, famine of 1847 are suffering endured by people who have long been dead and acts committed in immemorial times by people with whom none of the living Irish or English have any real connections. However, in the minds of a patriotic Irish, these are almost modern events "[13].

As one of the tools for the formation of identity, historiography creates, stores and reproduces archetypes, symbols and stereotypes of thinking, allowing members of the "we-group" to orient themselves in the coordinate system of their own-others. "We-groups" see their embodiment in the past, appropriating glory and achievements of real or imagined ancestors: "looking at history as a straight continuous line gives people a sense of identity and belonging to their culture" [14]. Therefore, each imaginary community has a dominant narrative that describes the history of this "we-group" from its inception to the present.

Moreover, the very sustainability and viability of the "we-group" is determined by the extent to which its members, remembering their common history, are aware of the unity and identity of this community can be proud of their affiliation to it. In the historiography, "we-group" can be present as a semantic concept in different guises, referring to identity: Kievan Rus, Tatar-Mongols, Crusaders, Soviet people, Islamists, etc. [15]. Based on these concepts, semantic oppositions are built: West-East, Europe-Asia, Steppe-Rus, Muslim-Christians, etc. If the idea of the boundaries of the "we" — "they" continuum changes, the identity is transformed and, consequently, the representation of the past is replaced with the one that explains and legitimizes the changes that have occurred, acting as their apology. The degree of cohesion of individuals belonging to this group is also related to the idea of antiquity and deep historical roots, i.e. the older the community history is, the more it binds it and, consequently, it is more united.

The function of "historical memory" in relation to an imaginary community is to create an ideal image of the past as it should be to justify the legitimacy of the existing institutional order and to arouse a sense of pride in belonging to this "we-group" that feels its unity. The peculiarity of the "historical memory" is that for it does not matter, true or false representations underlie the ideal image [16].

It should be recognized that de facto historians often fail to remain neutral with respect to the social order and stereotypes of the "we-group": "Every historiography belongs to its own time and is rooted in the interests of its authors or their customers" [17]. The "priests" of the "historical memory" aspire to present the ideas of the past accepted in this "we-group" as reliable and the only true, declaring other representations of the past to be falsifications of history.

It is necessary to especially emphasize the situation often encountered in historiography, when researchers have no sources and facts of the past that allow us to formulate the image of the past required by the "we-group". Then, fulfilling the social order, the "priests" of "historical memory" create a speculative construct of the desired image of the past, which is given for historical fact: "Many events recognized as historical have never been anyone's memories" [18]. That is why historiography is not so much a process of accumulation of knowledge, but to a greater degree a movement of interpretations reflecting changes in the self-reflection of the "we-group". Within the framework of this discourse, a certain pattern is formed (often erroneous from the point of view of facts) of the perception of historical events and a given interpretation of them. Accordingly, the opposing representations of the past are perceived by the representatives of this "we-group" as a distortion (falsification) of the history, because undermines the belief in the basic benchmarks of its identity. The ideas of the past enshrined in culture are an important part of the culture of the present: they serve to create works of art and literature, are relayed by educational institutions and, thus, become an integral part of the processes of socialization of the individual in the framework of "we-group".

The past is not identical with the story about it. There is an insurmountable ontological and gnoseological distance between the past and the historian, since the past is non-being, and the historian represents being, and not just being, but being here and now (Haider's idea) [19]. In addition, this state of overcoming the irresistible has little in common with scientific knowledge, and to a greater extent aesthetic, moral and psychological. As a result, historiography, declaring that which is science and correctly describes the past, in reality includes mythological images. Moreover, the images corresponding to the facts presented in it by mutually exclusive interpretations [20]. Therefore, unlike science, historiography strives not for true, objective and axiologically neutral knowledge, but such a representation of the past that meets the interests of the ruling elite, which by means of historiography manipulates society - by controlling the past, controls the present: "Who controls the past, controls the future, who controls the present, controls the past" [21].

IV. CONCLUSION

The procedure of experiencing the past through artifacts and culture is necessary for self-identification of an individual as a member of a certain imaginary community. It is in the experience of the past that the feeling arises and is determined with which "we-group" the individual identifies himself. Historiography pursues the goal of creating such an image of the past that will maximally satisfy the needs of the elite in managing society, and "we-groups" in self-identification and cohesion. To achieve these goals, the "priests" of "historical memory" construct historical facts that, unlike the facts of science, do not meet any of the criteria of truth [22]. Therefore, historiography acts as a factual basis of ideological concepts. The integration of the individual into the group, and not the description and

explanation of the past — this is the social function of historiography. Therefore, for history, it is more important not to conform to the facts of the past, but to create such ideas about the past that are the most suitable for consolidating a particular "we-group". Moreover, each "we-group" seeks to extract the maximum benefit for itself from the past, to present it in the most favorable light for itself. Therefore, the degree of topicality and relevance of knowledge about the past, transmitted by historiography, is not determined by its reliability, but by the degree of conformity to the present moment in the life of a particular imaginary community.

Thus, history is the sum of the perceptions of the past that have developed in society, which are created and transmitted within the framework of certain institutions as part of "cultural memory". It is a "historical memory", which exists in the form of a semantic system and is a narrative in content, which is an ideologically determined model of the past.

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