

ISCKMC 2020**International Scientific Congress «KNOWLEDGE, MAN AND CIVILIZATION»****HISTORICAL MEMORY OF WAR AND CONFLICT AS A
COMPONENT OF POLITICAL RISK**

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Abstract

The paper presents the study results which show that the historical memory of wars and conflicts, based on the collection and analysis of individual and collective testimonies of participants and/or eyewitnesses of hostilities, can be the integral component in assessing a political risk and the possibility of conflict resumption and exacerbation. This issue is undeveloped in the national political science. There are permissible fears that the historical memory cannot be studied from a scientific point of view, since the past does not exist as the rigid, objective or factual reality. It is suggested that the importance of the narrative story of wars and conflicts is particularly important, given that the collection of people's thoughts and beliefs about themselves and their nation is difficult to measure effectively (in terms of quantitative indicators). However, this is exactly what influences having the significant, if not decisive, impact on the behavior of ethnic groups and entire nations, reflecting or camouflaging pride, shame, fear, revenge, and comfort for a significant number of citizens. The study resulted in: 1) the analysis of a number of academic papers on the development of theoretic and methodological justifications towards the historical memory in the context of violence and its relationship with the political sphere; 2) the empirical research within the framework of the Russian Scientific Fund, project No. 17-18-01411, which aimed at collecting the interviews with eyewitnesses and/or participants of some wars and armed conflicts in the South of Russia.

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1. Introduction

Mythologized ideas about the military past are generally used in the political sphere to mobilize collective memory. In this case, the memory of the past becomes a full-fledged political tool in the present. The final representation of memory in the scientific and practical direction – political memory – takes place on the wave of the post-war boom (after 1945). At that time, reflections on memory were closely related to public remembrance or commemration. The firm position within the post-war memory took the Holocaust, the memories of which formed at the empirical level a significant part of the overall memory of the victims of the war of the 20th century (Winter, 2001).

Also, the end of the World War II initiated the conceptual discussions about how to study not only the past about a war or a conflict in politics, but also the emotions inherent in this past about people's participation in a war (Giesen & Eisenstadt, 2015).

In the 2000th, in the world political science the audit of the past was under consideration, directly related to the high-profile events that have led to some significant changes in the system of the international relations. Two World Wars and the Holocaust (Zehfuss, 2007), the Vietnam War, the armed conflict in Chechnya (Williams, 2000), the September 11, the 2001 attacks (Edkins & Jenny, 2003), the disintegration of Yugoslavia and the follow-up Balkan conflicts (Ray, 2006), the apartheid regime in South Africa led to the emergence of reconciliation groups aimed at “healing by turning to the past” (Meskell, 2006), and reintegrated historical memory into the political practice (Sasley, 2011).

As a rule, many academic studies dedicated to the historical memory of wars and conflicts show the selective role of the past in the reproduction of the present and the future (including the characteristic of most wars and conflicts of the 20th and 21st centuries – trauma). Trauma of the past can serve as a basis for the social practices, designed on the habitual (in everyday life) memory of wars and conflicts, which is expressed in memorials, monuments, days of remembrance and commemorative practices, museums built and established as part of the narration linking the traumatic past with the present (Miller, 2019). Consequently, individual traumatic memories can be socially institutionalized and lived year after year, gradually becoming a part of the individual and collective identity.

At the same time, trauma (memory) is closely related to the armed conflicts, the study of which has allowed developing the concept of a traumatized society. The incomplete list of such societies includes Afghanistan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Chechnya, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Eastern Ukraine (Donbass), Eritrea and other territories (Maercker & Hecker, 2016). The term “traumatized society” is also used by many experts in relation to those groups that have either already experienced historical trauma or are still in the process of living in the aftermath (e.g. Jewish families articulating the holocaust remembrance) (Tolts, 2007).

However, the term “traumatized societies” has been repeatedly scientifically questioned in the study of the effects of wars and armed conflicts because it is often used arbitrarily and is given without a detailed description of its characteristics. It is not ruled out that the large-scale trauma caused by war or armed conflict can lead to some subsequent changes in the public institutions and even their complete or partial elimination. Therefore, the analysis of the extensive and/or long-term effects of human trauma as a result of war or armed conflict should also include the historical memory.

2. Problem Statement

The study of the historical memory of wars and conflicts as a component of a political risk is undeveloped in the national (Russian) political science. There are permissible fears that the historical memory cannot be studied from a scientific point of view, since the past does not exist as a rigid, objective or factual reality, which is to comprehend and accept (George, 1979). The historical memory of wars and conflicts is a volatile set of (collective) ideas, often altered by time, the emotions of its carriers and the political (internal and external) conditions affecting its state; not a static, permanent and truly measurable phenomenon.

3. Research Questions

The paper addresses a number of questions: how is the phenomenon of the historical memory of wars and conflicts developed in domestic and foreign political science? Is it possible to quantify the memory of wars and conflicts? Can this memory act as direct or indirect evidence of the continuing conflict in a traumatized society? Is it possible to embed the historical memory of wars and conflicts as a component of political risk?

4. Purpose of the Study

This work aims to study and integrate the historical memory of wars and conflicts as a component of a political risk.

5. Research Methods

The study resulted in: 1) the analysis of a number of academic papers on the development of theoretic and methodological justifications towards the historical memory in the context of violence and its relationship with the political sphere; 2) the empirical research within the framework of the Russian Scientific Foundation, project No. 17-18-01411, which aimed at collecting the interviews with eyewitnesses and/or participants of some wars and armed conflicts in the South of Russia. In particular, since 2017 to 2019, 18 interviews were conducted with 22 eyewitnesses of the Ossetian-Ingush conflict that took place in the period of October 31 – November 4, 1992 in the Prigorodny region of the Republic of North Ossetia – Alania. The interviews were conducted in Vladikavkaz (4 respondents), the city of Nazran (9), the villages of Sunzha (2), Chermen (5) of the Prigorodny district of the Republic of North Ossetia – Alania, as well as in the city of Rostov-on-Don (2). The interview time was from 38 to 206 minutes (up to 1 hour – 8 interviews, from 1 to 2 hours – 10 interviews). The choice of the Ossetian-Ingush conflict as a research case is due to the fact that since 2005 the problem of resolving the Ossetian-Ingush conflict has acquired special urgency. Ingushetia turned out to be the only region of Russia where the administrative boundaries of the Republic are not defined. The narratives collected testify to the existing trauma among all parties to the conflict and the continuing relevance of the unresolved conflict for individual participants.

6. Findings

The study showed that the historical memory of wars and conflicts, as a rule, in the academic works is considered: 1) in the context of the behavioral direction of psychology, 2) as a social narrative that is created and controlled by the political elites as a tool for mobilizing society.

The few papers on the research topic are built on the basis of refraction of the past through the political prism of East Asia, where the key problem of “omission” of variables is revealed (Johnston, 2012). Along with this, the historical past and political realities of another region that experienced a significant number of wars and armed conflicts in the 20th century – Eastern Europe is “an excellent laboratory for observing how genuine or obvious memories of the past can exacerbate the current conflicts and how they change themselves in the process” (Jedlicki, 1999, p. 227). However, in the middle of the 20th century, the sociological and anthropological approaches of E. Durkheim and M. Halbwachs towards the study of the historical memory were pushed aside by the empirically oriented and positivist tradition by the dominant sociological tradition in the United States (as cited in Roudometof, 2002).

The historical memory about wars and conflicts as a political risk is almost completely ignored in political science and is not used to define any political risks. The only exception is the pioneering work of the American researcher Wang (2017), who uses the historical memory to explain the political actions and the emergence of social movements at the country level of political relations in China. He believes that a controversial memory and associated with it the social discourse can lead to nationalism and some international conflicts. Faced with the difficulty of quantifying the intangible elements of the historical memory (for example, the interviews with eyewitnesses and / or participants in wars and conflicts) (Green, 2004), Wang insists on constructing a theoretical and methodological framework in which to confirm (more than disprove) the significance of the historical memory outside the context of a single country and, thus, to reveal the power of the historical memory in national identity formation, perception of events, and then making some political decisions (Wang, 2017). A similar mechanism operates in the process of determining the political risks.

This study required an appeal to the contemporary regional experience of the North Caucasus, the region that experienced the consequences of a series of armed conflicts from 1991 to 2009. The collection of empirical information in the form of the interviews on the Ossetian-Ingush conflict showed that the conflict itself was the result of historical offences and mutual claims of the Ossetians and the Ingushes living on this territory. During the conflict, the age of the respondents ranged from 10 to 60 years (born in 1930s – 3 respondents, 1940s – 2, 1950s – 9, 1960s – 3, 1970s – 2, 1980s – 1).

When collecting the memories about this armed conflict, it was important to record the oral testimony of all parties involved. Therefore, the interviews were recorded with the representatives of both the Ingush (9 people) and the Ossetian (8 people) sides, as well as with 4 Russians, including 2 military men, who took part in the separation of the conflicting parties. The rest of the respondents are civilians, most of them at the time when the conflict started lived in the Prigorodny District.

At the same time, the recording data in the city Nazran was coordinated by the volunteers of one Ingush public institution to search for the missing people, who selected the Ingush respondents in advance. On the contrary, the recording data in Vladikavkaz was not distinguished by a refrain about searching for the missing people, but was built around the assumption and, in some cases, confidence that

the Ingush side deliberately knew about the armed stage of the 1992 conflict and did not warn the Ossetian neighbors in the places of mixed residence of the Ingushes and Ossetians. Many Ossetian respondents recorded the disappearance of the Ingushes from the territory of Vladikavkaz, the settlements of the Prigorodny District, shortly before active military actions (fighting). As the interviews' texts show, the conflicting parties see the origins of the conflict in different ways. The Ingush respondents see the reasons for the confrontation in the post-war deportation of the Ingush and arbitrary changes in the administrative boundaries in the region.

In some cases, the interviews were accompanied by familiarization with autocommunicative sources (diaries of the respondents themselves, correspondence with representatives of the republican and federal authorities). Few respondents shared such sources, explaining this by their unwillingness to refer to their memories, and often showing fears about their future life. Almost in all interviews with the Ingush respondents, there was a narrative about the loss of one or several relatives at once, whose remains were not found and buried. At the time of the recording of the interview, some Ingush respondents retained the hope of finding their relatives alive, but, according to their assumption, in conditions of forcible detention.

The recorded interviews with eyewitnesses and participants in the Ossetian-Ingush conflict demonstrate the lack of the settlement of the conflict, the high urgency of searching for the missing people. The post-conflict stage was complicated by the fact that territorial claims over the Prigorodny District still find a public response both among the Ingushes and Ossetians, acting as factors of persisting contradictions. On the one hand, both the Ingushes and Ossetians recalled that until 1992 they lived side by side with each other, many of them had friendly relations, on the other hand, the respondents of both groups noted that the opposite side had prepared in advance for military operations. At the same time, the eyewitnesses blame each other for this conflict, on the Russian authorities, and on the local internal affairs bodies.

7. Conclusion

The study of the historical memory contributes to understanding of how the country's past events affect the development of the national identity, which is extremely important, because the national identity forms the national interests that guide the development of the national and foreign policies. In understanding the historical memory and national identity of the state, it is also possible to clarify the intentions and actions of other countries, and, therefore, to identify some possible political risks.

Obviously, the historical memory (as a variable) must be considered within the framework of the synthesis of several scientific theories.

It is suggested that the importance of the narrative story of wars and conflicts is particularly important, given that the collection of people's thoughts and beliefs about themselves and their nation is difficult to measure effectively (in terms of quantitative indicators). However, this is exactly what influences having the significant, if not decisive, impact on the behavior of ethnic groups and entire nations, reflecting or camouflaging pride, shame, fear, revenge, and comfort for a significant number of citizens.

The collected oral evidence about the events of the Ossetian-Ingush conflict indicates the need for further study of its consequences for the parties involved, the modification of individual memories over time, their influence on the formation of the collective memory and on the preservation of antagonistic relations between neighbors.

These conclusions should be taken into account when identifying the political risks in the North Caucasus.

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