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The Historical Past as a Factor of Sociocultural Transformations of Postmodernity

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Abstract

The content of the reflexive process over the historical past is substantiated in the article. The character of influence on this process in the conditions of social development in the 21st century is studied. The reasons of eventually accumulated mistrust to credibility of knowledge about the past are considered; at the same time within the postmodern tradition it led to reinterpreting the historical past by postmodernists who deny its sanctity and self-sufficiency. The category of "modernity" that is a complex temporally dispersed category which can combine the past, present and future. In the article the idea that the strategies of implementing global social project not only determine the focus and content of "progressive" and in fact technogenic and utilitarian social development but also act as a catalyst to rethink social and individual values, ideals and principles is highlighted. In this connection traditionalistic historical consciousness is going through a period of underlying culture and value transformations. Transformations of historical consciousness affect such an important component of collective goal-setting as attitude to the "past" as to a certain image, a picture of a bygone reality. In the modern world the fashion for the "tradition" and the "archaic" becomes noticeable and certain communities try to archaize their political, economic and sociocultural practice. As a result "modernity" as a centered European project of 17-19 centuries (project "Modern") transforms into "postmodernity" that is not only mosaic-like "postmodernism" but also "ultramodernism" which combines the "past", "present" and "future" and where diverse political and social practices coexist in a market that is more and more unified by the globalization processes. In these conditions a rising factor of social uncertainty complicates planning and forecasting on the state of future society.

Keywords: Modernity, Postmodernity, Social projecting, Historical past, Sociocultural transformations, Social dynamics.

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I. Introduction

"Modernity" is a complex temporally dispersed formation which can combine the past, present and future. This occurs not in a tangible but in a symbolic form in sociocultural space where different value orientations, styles and ways of life, legal and ethic schemes peacefully coexist and compete (Agassi, 2011: 574-595). The cognition of this process of "time crossing" is one of relevant tasks of socio-philosophical cognition (Tallant, 2010). At the same time in the 21st century in Russia that is actively involved in the dynamic globalization process, social cognition becomes extremely vital and demanded since a new stage in the human historical development requires adequate and deep philosophical reflection (Elder-Vass, 2007: 408-432). Both internal intentional development of modern Russian society and external context of the processes of world globalization contribute directly to changes in Russian social being and consciousness in different fields and sociocultural practices. The strategies of implementing global social project not only determine the focus and content of "progressive" and in fact technogenic and utilitarian social development but also act as a catalyst to rethink social and individual values, ideals and principles. Traditionalistic social consciousness is going through a period of underlying culture and value transformations no less than other forms of social consciousness. This is caused by the fact that already in the end of 20 century it started to demonstrate evident signs of both moral and physical "deterioration". Physical "deterioration" is due to the fact that social consciousness does not reflect adequately the social dynamics, whereas moral "deterioration" is accounted for by inability of social consciousness to inspire research confidence in social scientists owing to rapid social changes (Baklanova, Baklanov, Kolomak, & Pokhilko, 2014: 5-7). Therefore, the topic of reference to the historical past and its influence on perceiving the present can be considered as relevant and demanded in modern philosophy.

II. The specifics of transforming historical consciousness in modern society

Transformations of historical consciousness affect, in turn, such an important component of collective goal-setting as attitude to the "past" as to a certain image, a picture of a bygone reality. Thus, it is obvious that this is not so much the "physical" past of the social world but the "image" of past events idealized for this or that style of thinking, for one or another normative system (Searle, 2010). But if in the Christian medieval historiography or in the French Enlightenment theory of history the past was considered more or less holistically and linearly ("from the creation of the world to the second coming" or as "a movement along the path of human progress"), in modern society the "past" becomes more and more mosaic-like and diffuses temporally, that is, as it is ideologically necessary, it either "distances itself" from today (chronologically or culturally) or "returns" to us in the form of certain significant events. The fashion for the "tradition" and the "archaic" becomes noticeable and, moreover, certain communities try to archaize their political, economic and sociocultural practices and snugly hide in the "temporal shell" trying to outwit the globalization storm (Craven, 1986: 113). Sometimes in developed societies there is a temporal aberration as a transfer to the future. Such a temporal transfer project, for example, was very popular in the USSR where people were called upon to reconcile themselves with the burdens of everyday life for decades in order to compensate for these deprivations in the "bright future".

"Modernity" as a centered European project of 17-19th centuries (project "Modern") transforms into "postmodernity" that is not only mosaic-like "postmodernism" but also "ultramodernism" which combines the "past", "present" and "future" and where diverse political and social practices coexist in a market that is more and more unified by the globalization processes. In this regard the social practices of postmodernity generate new risks connected with manipulating mass consciousness by means of social networks and mass media. However, the source of such risks consists not in representation of the historical past and not in its scientific interpretations. It can be found in the lack of deep holistic scientific knowledge, wide spread and domination of popular culture that makes public relations and falsifying the base for individual choice in

respect of goals and value orientations in everyday and strategic actions including economic and political spheres (Zinn, 2009).

Sociopolitical, economic, ethno-confessional and other realia of postmodernity strongly require deep rethinking of culture and civilization values and social lifestyles as well as more precise boundaries of individual and whole social communities identity. The situation is aggravated by the fact that in the conditions of informatization and technicalization of social practices, these boundaries are increasingly blurred and minimized. The cultural counterbalance and social-ontological alternative to this global value-normative rethinking is the centuries-old experience of social-historical development, which, in spite of the fact that it was acquired in the period of premodernism and modernism, is, in fact, the only stable basis for the purposeful formation of society in general and individual social institutions, groups and communities. The pluralism of opinions and the chaotic, Brownian motion of ideas and worldviews in postmodern society in shaping the image of the future makes it necessary to create holistic, consistent in nature new social projects—appeals to the past. The chaotic state of uncertainty of social actors in postmodern society forces them to rely on the stable boundaries of their own identity indicated by an appeal to the past (Abadía, 2010: 105-108).

The constant review and search of its own grounds make the reference to the historical past one of the main factors determining social life in the conditions of rapid social changes. In other words, in order to maintain and strengthen social stability in these or those local communities at a new historical stage of the development of mankind, it is necessary to be aware and to steadily form civilization-national identity (Milkov, 2011). However, the formation and maintenance of civilization-national identity should not turn into a path to autarky and social isolation which leads to political anger and aggression (as in North Korea).

III. Peculiarities of methodological strategies of studying historical consciousness and the historical past

In this connection it is necessary to note that, in spite of fact that there are a great number of modern researches on historical consciousness and social identity, the implementation of globalization project presently follows transhumanism pattern; thus, the problem of analyzing the attitude to the past in the process of existence of postmodern society is far from being solved, and constant continuous research is required.

Taking into account the specifics of research of transformation of attitude to the past, it should be noted that it does not have strictly linear development vector in postmodern society. Being connected with various aspects of social being and social consciousness this change receives the impulses of development that are different in character, strength and content. The causes that generate it cannot be built into a single causal chain; both instrumental and existential reasons are found among them. The first group of reasons reflects the cumulative effect of the progressive growth of historical knowledge and is characterized by the improvement and simplification of the means of access to them, the increase in quality and the "threshold of admissibility" of the interpretation of actual factual material. The existential group of reasons is generated by changes in the individual's self-awareness who in the conditions of technogenic civilization and globalizing society uses an entirely different way to articulate the meaning of his own life and to raise questions about the purpose and importance of history of society.

We should also take into account the change of attitude to inevitable time factor. Time is the basic constituting factor for social change. Time constantly changes providing any group, community or institute with a kind of "non-identity" of conditions of every act, action or deed. Alongside this, having accepted the inevitability of time factor it is necessary to acknowledge the significance and importance of history as well that in turn contributes to emerging and developing interconnection of separate elements and systems of individualities and totalities. Furthermore, cultural phenomena takes place and is called "the acceleration

of historical time"; its essence consists in the fact that during the 20th century (including present days) there has been steady and quite stable dynamics of rapid growth in the number of significant historic events that occurred within a comparatively short time span. This fact is perceived subjectively as "eventful conglomeration of historical facts" that overshadows continuous and logical sequence of the course of history. Considering such a fragmented view on history it ceases to be conditional and demonstrates the signs of discreteness. To study present history the descriptive empirical methods become most adequate as well as the methods of art and metaphor legitimated by postmodernists since these methods capture the essence of current changes and do not require strict scientific verification (Wuthrich, 2012: 442).

Modern transformations of attitude to the historical past are based on another component that is the change of perceiving historical images that can be considered as neither cause nor as effect but should be viewed as only one of constituents of current processes. Diversifying the sources of historical knowledge in the conditions of information society, their multiplication and significant heterogeneity lead to destruction of a formerly common historical scheme that is illustrated by the images of the past combining rational and emotional components. The images of the past in the individual's consciousness in the conditions of developing technogenic informational civilization and in globalizing society become less natural as the opportunity of their potential unity within the holistic narrative of identity is disrupted and the world historical picture itself is fragmented, thus, becoming relativistic, unstable and non-linear.

The mechanism of forming the images of the past occurs at the two levels of historical consciousness: everyday and theoretical. Empiric cognition mainly acts by means of sensual perception of the object, whereas the methods, oriented towards logic and reason, are implemented within theoretical cognition (Baklanova & Baklanov, 2013) that makes the given type of historical cognition rational. The specifics of the attitude to the historical past are determined by the impact of the modern changes in the world picture in which Eurocentrism recedes into the background and the historical space is "narrowed". A. Toffler assesses the current processes of transition from modernist orientations of "classical" society of the West to guidelines, values and realia of postmodernity in the following way: "I coined the term future shock to describe the shattering stress and disorientation that we induce in individuals by subjecting them to too much change in too short a time. First, it became clear that future shock is no longer a distantly potential danger, but a real sickness from which increasingly large numbers already suffer. <...> Future shock is a sickness which comes from too much change in too short a time. <...> In the most rapidly changing environment to which man has ever been exposed, we remain pitifully ignorant of how the human animal copes" (Toffler, 1970).

IV. Conclusion

A rising factor of social uncertainty complicates future planning and forecasting. In these conditions the ability to foresee the state of external environment (external for this or that community) and the trajectory of the development of institutes, communities and the whole subsystems is reduced that is a feature characteristic of postmodern society. "This foreseeing is based on the study of previous conditions and their changes including the analysis of one's own consciousness and understanding of these conditions, one's own solutions and actions. For such an analysis it is necessary to possess reflexive skills that make the ability to "refer to the past". It unacceptable to undermine the reflexive ability, otherwise it will result in losing skills of projecting. A researcher cannot predict possible consequences of present actions. Thus, before foreseeing it is necessary to remember" (Kara-Murza, 2006: 3). To put it another way, not only the reality of the "present", modern but also world picture of the past has significant influence on predicting and projecting social systems and elements of the future.

Modern social practices intentionally directed towards the wrecking of traditions, social foundations in the process of the world globalization create by the other side of their implementation the need to refer to social-ontological and sociocultural origins of social communities that in this case is not only logical but also extremely demanded. The challenges of modernity/postmodernity are always evident and unequivocal, whereas the opportunities to answer those challenges are ambiguous, vague and not completely definite. And in such conditions the past can act as a basis to remove contradictions. This scheme can be especially relevant for the present-day Russia while forming sociocultural identity. The question is what "past" is "used" by specific social groups, political technologists in the process of forming identity. Nevertheless, modifications and transformations that occurred in the reception of the "past" within modern/postmodern constantly complicating society involve every social subject from individual to large social community; such modifications are determined by immanent logic of the dynamics of human society. The attitude to history, to the historical past in society in the conceptual theoretical aspect is presented as a transdisciplinary problem and the issues considered in the given article constitute only a part of research perspectives of this problem.

Conflict of interest

The authors confirm that the data do not contain any conflict of interest.

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