

POLITICIZATION OF MEMORY THROUGH THE MONUMENT CULTURE

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Summary:

In this article we will try to point out the differences between historical and individual memory. This distinction is found in memorial culture as one of the major media which assists the institutionalization of individual memories. We will see how history continually uses individual memories and puts them in the service of dominant ideology. At the same time, the rhetoric of government and educational system shapes collective memory and promotes specific versions of the past. Monumentalization of individual memories will be discussed as a first step in the politics of forgetting.

Traditional histories usually conceive memory as individual, emotional, subjective. Thus, all writing that is opposite individual memory is considered history: collective, scientific, objective. This position questions the possibility of collective memory. However we're not going to deal with this question here, but with how collective memory is shaped and by whom. Contemporary society has established a whole range of special institutions that deal with shaping collective memory, such as: schools, museums, mass media, and memorials. Cultural remembrance regulates the motives and conditions needed for collective memory to create cultural identity. With the aim to systematize such settings, , the societies create 'conditions of memory' of various kinds, such as commemorative days, monuments, memorials or places of remembrance. Yet, these conditions may affect memory only when visitors give them meaning, otherwise, they cannot, independently perform memory.¹

¹ Barbara A. Misztal, *Theories of Social Remembering*, Open University Press, Philadelphia, 2003, pp. 19-22.

The influence of a group is crucial for the process of the memory, whether soft, or hard, institutionalized, historical memory. It is very important to make a clear distinction between those these two types of memory. It shows the difference between the individual need to remember and need of the dominant ideology to institutionalize memory. In the former, the past is preserved in the memory of every individual but this memory can be kept alive only through his/her interpersonal interaction. In case that interpersonal interaction does not exist, memory starts to fade away and slowly to disappear. Therefore, there is a need to monumentalize memory in order to transfer it to the next generation. But, the process of institutionalization is often politicized by the political elites, which selectively choose elements of the past to build a better future. In both cases, the influence of a group is unavoidable, but in the case of historical memory, it is always directed by the politics of the dominant culture. In that sense, we can say that historical memory is built on the ruins of individual memory.²

In historical memory, the events are not remembered directly but through indirect stimulation of reading, hearing or through commemorative ceremonies in which people perform to refresh the common remembrance of an event or person. In this case, the past is preserved and interpreted by social institutions. Through participation in commemorative meetings with members of the group, we can refresh the memory of the past that would have otherwise fade away, through it imaginative reincarnation.³ So governing political elites always direct the way historical memory is reconstructed. In spite of its independence of collective memory and the different, at times contradictory aims from those of collective memory, the practice of historical reconstruction can still gain meaning from collective memories of social groups. Namely an extreme case of such interaction occurs when the state apparatus is systematically used to take away the memory it citizens.

² Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire", in *Representations*, No. 26, 1989, p. 9.

³ Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, Ed. Lewis A. Coser, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago & London, 1992, p. 24.

“Mental enslavement of the subjects of a totalitarian regime begins when they take away his memories. When some grate power wants to deprive the minorities of their national consciousness, it uses methods of organized forgetting.”⁴

Here we can see the distinction between monumentalized memory of the dominant culture and the individual memory of the oppressed, which is usually transferred through oral culture, web sites, books, etc. The main media of hard memory are monuments and memorial centers. Their founding is also important for the particular memory of the individual since they give it participation and place within the dominant culture. On the other hand, political elites will never allow building a monument where the memory of group can be rooted. The roll of monuments and memorials is double folded. Their establishment in sites of memory is important both for the dominant i.e. governing groups and for the subordinates.

Monuments and commemoration days associated with them represented, in the 19th century, the most important medium in the work of the national memory. They did then what mass media are doing today. Till this day monuments are a particularly important medium of political education. Practically, history would have been impossible without this kind of memory. Especially in secular epoch, where the nation becomes the final and highest value, and where the monuments are one of the basic media of its articulation. Subsequently, national monuments can be considered sanctuaries, places where individuals can participate in the cult of the nation. In the end, their goal is to convert one amorphous mass into a solid formation of clear contours - a nation.⁵

The relation between the state and its memorials is multi folded. On the one hand governing groups are able to shape memory into a model that serves best the national interests. On the other hand when built, memorials often invert the original intentions of the state. In some cases, the monuments created according to the image of state ideals actually reverse the images of these ideals in the image of the monument itself. New

⁴ Pol Konerton, *Kako društva pamte*, Reč, Bgd, 2002, p. 26.

⁵ Alaida Asman, *Rad na nacionalnom pamćenju*, XX Vek, Bgd, 2002, p. 50-51.

generations visit these monuments under completely new circumstances and give them new meaning. The outcome is the evolution of the meaning of the memorials generated in modern times and society. Depending on who erects them and where, monuments recall the past in accordance with various national myths, ideals and political needs. They reflect the past experiences and current life of a group, as well as state memory. The reasons for building memorials and museums as well as the types of memories they represent, vary. Some are built for the needs of the group, and some because of the need of the state to explain the national past. While the goal of some memorials is to educate later generations and to inculcate a sense of shared experience and fate, some are considered expiation of guilt.⁶

In that sense living memory has greater importance since in many ways it resists politicization and mythologization. The monument refers to the past as well as to the future and its goal is to homogenize the group and give it identity and sovereignty. Thus, monumentalization deprives citizens of their personal memory. It is politicized according to a national key and in that sense, creates the interest of the group as whole. The monument aims to create consensus in the sense of establishing institutions, which will take responsibility to preserve the collective memory of a group. This is the beginning of a politics in which the individual memory is forgotten. The individual allows himself to let go of his memory and except the collective memory because a physical recognition is built. Monumental culture can be treated as a medium which governing group use in the service of history.

In the text *Between Memory and History*, Pierre Nora (Pierre Nora) clearly indicates the distinction between memory and history. For him, the memories are contained in a group, while the history is reconstruction of something, which is no more. The main problem, crucial for Nora, is the creation of a unitary national history. Nora also stands for the view that there is a contrast between the memories as a plural and multiplexed, the unitary nature of history.

⁶ James E. Zoung, "The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials in History", in: *Cultural memory studies*, (Ed.) Astrid Erll, Ansgar Nünning, Walter de Gruyter, Berlin, 2008, p. 357-366.

“Compared with the history, which is always in the hands of those who have power, memory can be considered as a form of protest. Memory is the revenge of the poor, the oppressed, the unhappy, the history of those who did not have the right to make history. Memory is the kind of justice, in other words, the memory remembers, and history forgets. All histories that became disciplines with scientific aspirations, until today are actually built against the memories, which are always regarded as personal, psychological, deceptive, based solely on the basis of testimony. At the heart of history, in fact, is a critical discourse that is antithetic to memory. History constantly doubts the memory and its real mission is to destroy it. The aim of the history is not to exalt what happened in reality, but to abolish it.”⁷

So we can say, that in the genre of monuments, history becomes an instrument of politics. In such an interpretation of history, there is a clear distinction between history as a science and a living memory. Historical data must be materialized and condensed into hard symbols when it moves from the context of historical consciousness into the context of national memory. So, monumental culture can be seen as opposition to oral history. Mild forms of memory, despite the fact that they can later become relative, destructed and instrumentalized, carry far greater significance for the collective memory of the group.

⁷ Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire", u: *Representations*, br. 26, 1989, p. 9.

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