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Manipulation of Time Continuity in Shared Narratives. On the Construction of Collective “Truths” and Its Ambivalent Function in the Social World and in Education



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Abstract This article discusses the topic of politically motivated manipulation of time continuity in shared narratives. It examines the consequences of the irrational fusion of fragments of the stories of different protagonists who live in different historical periods, sometimes separated by centuries. The integration of bits and pieces of the myths borrowed from the past into the narratives of the present can take on psychotic proportions. It can seriously damage the living tissue of personal and collective memory. The story of the past, told in a certain way, can influence the self-perception of people, making them feel

partly like heroes with a special mission, as well as victims, threatened by a hostile world, isolated, acting in response to the past, and therefore out of touch with reality. The result is the impossibility of distinguishing current events as a set of specific political and psychological forces that require a specific response to an urgent situation (Kalinowska, 2012). Current threats are thus perceived not only in their specificity, but in constant vigilance in the light of past traumas and illogical linking of the past, present, and future. The goal of this article is the understanding of this process with the help of Vamik Volkan's psychoanalytic concept of "time collapse" (Volkan & Javakhishvili, 2022), and Michael Rothberg's theory of the "implicated subject" (2019). When we talk about the transition to democracy and solidarity in education, we must understand the way of thinking that deviates from them.

Keywords time collapse, education, implicated subject, collective memory, shared narrativity, propaganda

Introduction

There is a growing consensus among psychologists that appropriate temporality in reflecting on the past and telling stories about it has significant positive effects on the integrity of narrative identity, the quality of relationships with oneself and others, the ability to experience the depth and meaning of life, and overall mental health (Zimbardo & Sword, 2017). By appropriate temporality, we mean a well-structured chronology and the continuity of our narratives. A distortion of temporality occurs when fragments of stories are shifted from the past to the present and vice versa. The collective sharing of partially true, but temporally distorted stories about real events that significantly affected the destinies and identities of large groups often has highly negative consequences. At the level of individual experience, these include feelings of inner emptiness, rootlessness, separation, and a sense of loss of meaning in life (Volkan, 2008, Barkan, 2006, 2013). At the level of collective narrative, this can lead to the collectively approved triggering of extraordinarily destructive movements, such as wars.

Power Struggles, Distortions of the Past and Reflective Pedagogy

In an attempt to understand the covert violence in various communicative strategies for the creation of political narratives about the collective past in order to manipulate large groups, we can often observe a representation of the present in which current events are randomly and illogically linked to myths and stories from the past. This usually involves oversimplified, unreflected, and inaccurate comparisons of contemporary actors with past heroes, victims, perpetrators, and accomplices. It is one of the most frequently observed communicative strategies used by autocratic or totalitarian politicians to gain power. By deliberately linking aspects of a social group's collective past out of context, pseudo-narratives are created. These can become dangerously widespread and pervasive. When a shared space of collective narrative becomes overly contaminated with these pseudo-narratives, it can contribute to the creation and maintenance of conflict among

individuals, within groups, and even, in the case of large groups, internationally (Volkan, 1977, 2008).

Pseudo-historicization and temporal distortion of reality are a direct threat to democratic education. The leitmotif of the EU education strategy today is to guide students towards a shared respect for the truth represented by scientific knowledge and an awareness of the mutual trust and communication necessary for effective and creative cooperation. This is consistent with today's psychoanalytic perspectives on healthy personality development (Luyten et al., 2022). An educated and mature human being should act on the basis of an adequate knowledge of reality. Self-knowledge and self-understanding, always incomplete and difficult, should be the basic content of this knowledge. A mature person has the strength to be humble and to reflect on the fact that self-knowledge is loaded with emotions about one's own thoughts, which, when additionally shaped by traumatic childhood experiences and also supported by an ingrained ideology, can consistently resist critical reflection (Hermach, 2009). Current views consider reflective functioning (e.g. mentalization) both a condition and a manifestation of mental health (Luyten et al., 2020, Luyten & Fonagy, 2022). Related to this is the tolerance of uncertainty. Not being completely sure of one's own interpretations of social situations, yet not giving up trying to understand the inner reality of those involved, is a sign of mental health. What we call true is extremely complex, constantly changing, and never finite. The assumption of the existence of a single truth, which is hoped for by the person who seeks certainty, is fundamentally false and can cause a great deal of harm. The goal of education should be an age-appropriate broadening of the student's horizon of knowledge, respect for multiple perspectives, and tolerance for the incompleteness and difficulty of self-knowledge. It should also lead to the recognition and appreciation of individual differences in collaborative activities and the willingness to resolve natural conflicts through reflective communication. The educational strategy of the Czech Republic has for a long time systematically supported the development of reflectivity, critical thinking and cooperative communication in order to prevent the escalation of conflicts. Teachers

have begun to understand the developmental nature of reflectivity, its gradual development in the context of stable, safe, and accepting relationships through thoughtful, open communication. More experienced and educated teachers are expected to be able to reflect on events in a more complex way, and to be responsible for initiating and supporting this reflectivity in a shared educational space, thus strengthening students' epistemic trust and cooperative orientation. If the teacher perceives the child's emerging individuality with genuine interest and helps him/her to construct his/her own and distinctive relationship to the past, knowing that we do not know historical reality directly, but that we co-create a mental "truth" about it in pieces and without claiming completeness, without denying the child's right to make mistakes, then the teacher is practicing an open, reflective, and responsive pedagogy that promotes the child's interest in multiple perspectives, tolerance, and humanity. This is the slow but rewarding way to build the competence of the students to test the reality of the stories that are being told in the wider public environment. The spread of distorted narratives about collective past on social media poses a significant challenge to education, as it can quickly spread false information, negatively impact students' trust in credible sources, and create confusion and cynicism among students. Addressing this challenge is a critical task for educators.

Collective Memory and Reflection of the "Great Story"

To understand the apparent ease with which personal and collective histories are contaminated by external elements of the past, let's consider how memory works in light of current theories of collective memory. Individual memory is an important tool for transforming events into experience through the human ability to reconstruct, organize, and reflect on experience (Assman & Czaplicka, 1995). At the level of commonly shared memories, i.e. at the collective level, memory uses its transformative function in the creation of official historical narratives, commemorative practices such as the celebration of significant anniversaries, sites of memory dedicated to the commemoration and interpretation of historical events, or the construction of

monuments in public spaces that serve as “carriers of memory” (Kalinowska, 2012). Collective memory helps to create and stabilize a society’s identity. According to Halbwachs (1980), the frameworks of collective memory are closely related to language. They are symbolically expressed in many ways, especially through verbalization, and mark a common space where people can relate to the past. These frameworks have an interactive, dialogical quality and depend on the system of symbols that is specific to a given culture – on national symbols and myths, on ideals that reflect the past experiences and the present life of the community (Young, 1993). An open and multi-faceted collective memory is indispensable for the health of a community, allowing it to stabilize the chaos of social events and transform them into a narratives whose meaning is emotionally shared, contributing to the creation of the “great stories” of the society to which community belongs (Kalinowska, 2012). In their positive stabilizing role, great stories promote cooperation, prosperity and solidarity within and beyond communities.

An example of the great story of our own history can be found in the words spoken by the German Chancellor Olaf Scholz at the Charles University in Prague in front of a crowded hall in the center of Prague, commemorating November 17, 1989 with the recalled slogan: “When, if not now? Who if not us?”, which he quoted in Czech. He addressed not only the audience, but, as he said, all Europeans and politicians, saying that “it is our future that is called Europe” and that “today we are facing challenges like never before” (Olaf Scholz, speech to members of the academic community at Charles University in Prague, 29 August 2022). Mature societies also reflect self-critically on dark periods of their own history, as exemplified by the expression of solidarity in the same speech by Olaf Scholz (*ibid.*): “The Germans wrote its darkest chapter: the closure of the Charles university by the Nazi occupiers, the shooting of protesting students, the deportation and murder of thousands of students and university staff in German concentration camps. These crimes still hurt and shame us, Germans. Speaking these words here – that is one of the reasons for my visit today. In addition, we often forget that for Central Europeans, freedom, suffering, and dictatorship did not end with the German occupation and the destruction of the

Second World War. One of the countless great thinkers among the alumni of this university reminded us of this during the Cold War. In 1983, Milan Kundera described the tragedy of Central Europe in that the Poles, Czechs, Slovaks, Baltic peoples, Hungarians, Romanians, Bulgarians and Yugoslavs woke up after the Second World War to find themselves in the East. That they have disappeared from the map of the West. We will not stand idly by and watch women, men and children being killed and free states being wiped off the map of the world, nor will we leave them to their fate behind walls and iron curtains. We do not want the 19th or 20th centuries back with their wars of conquest and totalitarian excesses.”

Two days later, in response to the Chancellor’s speech at the Charles University and the subsequent Prague summit of EU foreign ministers on 31 August 2022, TASS issued a press release with patriotic rhetoric highlighting the supposed guilt of the West. Responding to the previous quote from Olaf Scholz, TASS stated: “The aggressors who started the war and the authors of the ideology of racial purity perceive themselves cynically as the nation that confronted them” and further, “in a number of countries the campaign of distorting history and falsifying the role of the Soviet Union in the victory over Nazism has intensified” and “Prague has acted as Kiev’s advocate since the beginning of Russia’s special military operation to denazify and demilitarize Ukraine” (TASS, 31. 8. 2022).

The alleged accusations link fragments of the truth about the past with the present, as if Nazi terror still reigned in Germany. The proclamation ignores the carefully worded apology that Olaf Scholz, as the “implicated subject”, offered, reflecting on collective guilt in the “Rothbergian” sense. Although he is neither criminally responsible nor indictable by a court of law, he feels politically and morally responsible to reflect on and address his involvement – the implication (Knitel & Forchieri, 2020). The post-war generations did not participate in National Socialism, but were implicated by “accident of birth”. If this movement had not existed, they might not have been born. This entails a very specific responsibility. Implicated subjects have a responsibility to “remember” and reflect on violence by, among other things,

addressing and fighting against its underlying racist logic (ibid.), just as Olaf Scholz does in his speech. However, the TASS report ignores the social change that has taken place in democratic Germany through reflection, repentance and restorative justice, which has had time to mature and deepen over nearly 80 years. The report makes no distinction whatsoever between the different nature of criminal, legal, political and moral responsibility in Germany today, which is accused of cynicism, as if the crimes of the Third Reich were happening today and the alleged perpetrator could not escape this guilt. In contrast to this accusation, other TASS reports have been truly cynical, presenting the current destruction of Mariupol as a success that will lead to the liberation of Donbass. In relation to its own past, propaganda in Russia emphasizes the glory and victory of 1945 as the exclusive center of history, with malignant religious elements (transcendence to the “Great Mother Russia”) and sacred elements (the natural human need for experiences of value, beauty, and the sacred is exploited by linking with propaganda elements).

From thinking in black and white mythical categories of “eternal perpetrator” versus “victim/rescuer”, It is only a step to consider that the victim/rescuer represented by a “savior person” (the political leader with a narcissistic ego suffering from inflation) has the right to punish the perpetrator, also a “collective person” represented in another nation, “forever and ever”. An awareness of the fact that collectives are made up of millions of individual personalities with minds of their own would negate the logic of a savior person who justifies the war as a rescue mission to restore the great empire. And an awareness of the possibility of social development outside the autocratic framework would in turn deny the mythologized logic of the petrified eternalism argument – the empire has *always* been great, therefore it is justified to expand *now*. Dragons in fairy tales usually have seven heads. In fact, it is rarely possible for one head to remove six others in order to decide everything, which is usually the ambition of the totalitarian politician – the one-headed dragon who takes full responsibility for reflecting on the collective past and the future direction of the nation. This direction has gone astray in the case of contemporary Russia, in

a cyclical and tragic repetition of the same misunderstanding of the enormous risks of distorting the continuity of time in propaganda. Let us recall the slogans “With the Soviet Union forever and never otherwise!” from the period of normalisation in Czechoslovakia. Today, children can read similar slogans in Russian history textbooks, with the difference that the Soviet Union is replaced by the word “homeland”.

Deriving individual identity from the ancient trauma or glory of a nation, as if these were absolute values that should override everything else, is a heavy manipulation of the truth, a denial of the possibility of individual reflection. Not only is individual responsibility for reflectivity, as a character virtue, denied, but reflection itself is denied. Psychoanalysts today consider such attitudes a sign of immature reflectivity, manifested in prereflective modes of thought. One of these is psychic equivalence, when a person thinks an idea is true simply because he thinks it himself (Asen & Fonagy, 2021). If an individual mistakenly takes his own idea to be universally true, he will tend to deny another’s claim to a different view. Psychoanalysts know how long and difficult it is to get someone who is constantly using psychic equivalence to think more objectively. In cases of malignant personality disorders, the prognosis for treatment is poor. Dialogue with someone who always returns self-righteous criticism as a weapon against the opponent leads nowhere. A maximally narrow view, untested by reality, is imposed on the other person.

Currently, the discourse in interdisciplinary memory studies turns to the problematization of the category of perpetrator and the reconsideration of different modalities of complicity, guilt and responsibility. New and useful concepts that have been missing in thinking about collective guilt are created, such as the concept of the “implicated subject” (Rothberg, 2019). Ignoring these tools for more accurate reflection is an unfortunate step backward for Russia, a denial of the value of truth and epistemic credibility and character virtues of individuals – historians, scientists, teachers, who are personally the pillars of education, teaching students critical thinking, and reflecting together on the common past in professional forums.

Collective Trauma, Reflection and Mourning

Collective memory is fragile, influenced by various defensive responses, and susceptible to politically-motivated modifications, so it is often associated with selective forgetting or amplification rather than accurate recollection (Kalinowska, 2012). The stabilizing, supportive and meaning-making function of collective memory is disrupted and destroyed in times of conflict and war, when experiences of violence and existential fear cause indescribable psychological suffering, accompanied by unprocessed and repressed grief and mourning (Schwab, 2010). The disruption of memory caused by trauma and the subsequent emotional dissociation - the separation of emotions from experience – prevents individuals and groups from experiencing emotions normally. Trauma is associated with the shock of individuals, with the gradual realization that the community no longer exists as an effective support network and that a significant part of the common “We” has disappeared (Kalinowska, 2012). The continuity of identity, based on memory, is broken. Although there is still some sense of self, however damaged, altered, and difficult to grasp, the perception of “we” as a connection of individuals in a larger entity has disappeared. This is accompanied by a loss of trust in oneself, the surrounding family, community, government, and the larger environment in which people live (ibid.). Collective trauma destroys the structure of the community, with its traditions and symbolic order, because it dramatically alters the known context, which is no longer comprehensible, predictable and secure, intimate, shared and coherent.

According to Volkan and Zintl (1993), it is a painful paradox that the process of mourning, which gradually frees us from the lost past and repetitive thoughts about things that have long passed, and the suffering we have witnessed, requires a significant degree of psychological structure and integration, i.e. a strong enough self to regulate overwhelming emotions. In the case of collective trauma, this also requires sufficient preservation of group integration, since the “basic tissue of social life” must not be damaged too severely (Homans, 2000). However, it is precisely the significant disruption or complete absence of psychological structure and social bonds that is a key feature of

collective trauma in the case of mass loss of life. The result is a separation of the trauma from the culture, in which the traumatic experience is largely or entirely outside of the social discourse (Laub & Auerhahn, 1993). This is manifested either directly in the collapse of social processes, or in significant changes or the emergence of new ideologies (Volkan, 2008, 2012). The group may begin to build monuments associated with massive trauma, mythologize traumatic events, suppress and/or unconsciously transfer feelings associated with the trauma to the next generation in what is called transgenerational transfer (Hirsch, 2008; Connolly, 2011). When members of the victim group are unable to grieve such losses, they pass on to descendants images of their wounded selves and psychological tasks to be completed, such as reversing feelings of humiliation and powerlessness and completing the work of mourning.

The deeply traumatic events of the long period of World War II caused the loss of relatives, familiar surroundings and culture, and irreversible wounds and gaps in family histories. For the countries of Eastern Europe, the end of the war meant the beginning of a new era of repression under totalitarian communist regimes, which led to further suppression of war traumas. Not only were people unable to symbolize traumatic experiences and find words and images to create healing stories, but any attempt to tell stories of mental and physical injuries represented a potential threat to the fragile stability of injured personal, family, and collective identities in the midst of a political structure that sought to create its own distinct narrative (Laub & Auerhahn, 1993; Laub, 2005, 2012, 2013). At times when it was necessary to come together to mourn, to remember, to experience intensely, and to provide each other with the empathy needed to grieve and say goodbye to a lost past, additional traumatic experiences were accumulated for the citizens. Governments in Eastern European countries shaped their history for political purposes. They required citizens to conform to this altered history or risk severe persecution and repression. There was no room for discussion of the traumas caused by communist regimes in countries that had “liberated” themselves (Kalinowska, 2012) and the psychological pain was pushed to the periphery

of interest. Collective memory could not provide the stabilizing function that allows past events to connect with traumatic memories to create an integrated experience and thus gain lessons learned – wisdom. It was not possible to create meaningful memories. Collective memory was misused to support the totalitarian narrative – certain contents were removed, redefined or replaced by others, and a large part of the past was completely excluded from the discourse. It could not serve as a safe space for processing traumatic memories, as in other democratic countries where works of art and cinematography helped people to connect internally with the emotions accompanying the losses suffered by our ancestors, our collective souls, and to experience shock, anger, sadness, unfulfilled love, and to mourn, remember, create and speak openly. Honestly reconstructing events, sharing stories and testimonies is an essential contribution to restoring a shattered identity after difficult times. But in Eastern Europe, the history of the past was again distorted, a significant part of it forgotten in one of the many forms of forgetting (Connerton, 2009), in the name of survival and physical restoration of what has been shattered. According to Paul Connerton's categorization of forgetting (2008, 2009), this form of violence could be classified as "repressive erasure". The new ideology required the creation of a unified, homogeneous collective composed of undifferentiated parts that would not allow the existence of anything that began to differentiate and thus become individualized. Group values are formed and refined over time, through historical events, as people share stories with each other. And since it is in this sharing that the desirable virtues, strengths, and values are formulated and adopted, despotic rulers know very well that to destroy the original, natural stories and thus erase the solid values that give people strength, courage, and wisdom is to protect themselves against resistance and rebellion. It is difficult to speak of reflection when we live in a space that demands, under pressure, an uncompromising rejection of a series of unreal internal and external enemies. In communist Czechoslovakia, anything and everything could be a dangerous and hostile "bourgeois relic". Eastern European countries lacked an institutionalized framework for dealing with the collective traumatic past

and allowing for the open discussion initiated in Western Europe by works such as Jaspers' *The Question of Guilt* or Arendt's *The Banality of Evil*. Instead, a deep contradiction emerged: On the one hand, there was a duty to remember information related to the new identity of the communist citizen as a hero; on the other hand, there was a widespread distrust of this official history, as well as a hidden fear and resistance to traumatic memories as a defense against overwhelming emotions of sadness, anger, and powerlessness.

Every totalitarian regime ruthlessly alters its own history. Only fragments of past events remain to be shared and transmitted, taken out of context and forcibly woven into an artificial narrative that serves to shape the identity of its members in the desired direction. If a member of the community dares to think outside the prescribed framework of interpretation, he poses a threat to the integrity of the regime's rigid narrative. The basic symptom of a totalitarian society is an unrealistic and often paranoid relationship to the past, in which historical facts are distorted, idealized as models, or denied and devalued as obstacles. Through this fragmenting manipulation of facts that have happened, into distorted images and unreal experiences, memories are controlled in an attempt to determine what can be remembered and how. A fundamental pillar of the maintenance of totalitarian power is a prescribed relationship to a fragmented history. According to the theory of multi-directional memory (Rothberg, 2011, 2019), collective memory operates dialogically and shared memories are not private property but rather overlapping resources for the continual reinterpretation of identity. They are always dialogical, constantly evolving in shared stories that connect people. The politically motivated production of historical narratives builds on the exploitation of the natural human need for dialogical participation in sharing and plays a major role in international and national conflicts (ibid.).

The View of Psychoanalysis

The purpose of this article is to show that the process leading to the success of propaganda is related to the manipulation of past facts and chronology in shared narratives. To achieve our goal, it is important

to show that the distortion of collective memory does not take place in a vacuum, but through the receptive attitudes of many individuals who are frustrated for various reasons. Therefore, we borrow Freud's concept of the integration of the past through analysis (in today's terminology, through reflection).

In the early 20th century, Sigmund Freud emphasized the importance of a good relationship with the past for mental health. Clinical experience taught Freud that the most significant positive changes in one's experience and behavior are achieved by reflecting on past experiences and traumas, both personal and collective, and integrating them into a symbolic form of meaningful, realistic, and communicable narrative. Contemporary psychoanalysis is also concerned with how closely and logically personal narratives of the past relate to the present reality of the person and whether unresolved traumas from the personal or collective past are reflected in them. When something bad happens to a healthy (mentally) person, the event triggers a chain of emotions that is normal in terms of contingency (they react to the loss with sadness, not anger), intensity (the manifestation of sadness is proportional to the loss), and duration (the length of the mourning is proportional to the depth of the relationship with the lost object). Sometimes a person experiences emotions that are out of proportion to reality, which may be a manifestation of emotions experienced by his ancestors, members of his group, in another time and traumatic situation – transgenerationally transmitted emotions (Volkan, 2001; Conolly, 2011; Kogan, 2012; Ritter, 2015). It can be a flood of emotions that were appropriate in someone else's past, but experiencing them in the present has a flavor of unreality, irrationality, fanaticism (Hirsch, 2008).

In severe cases of unintegrated personal or collective pasts, individuals may blindly identify with aspects of others' pasts. Losing the distance and perspective that allows for solidarity and compassion, they identify with elements of someone else's story to the point where the differentiating line between self and other (the self/other distinction) becomes blurred. However, this distinction is a hallmark of mature reflection and mentalization, a fundamental prerequisite for mental health, and at the same time a requirement for experiencing respect

for another person and the possibility of love – for someone who is an individual in his or her authenticity, freedom, and uniqueness, in a separate existence (Luyten et al., 2020; Lyuten and Fonagy, 2022). The more severe the personality pathology, the more difficult it is for the individual to recognize and tolerate the other's individuality and autonomy, and to experience respect and interest in the other's mind, rather than feeling threatened and frustrated by the other's otherness and inherently opaque mind, which is uncontrollable – as we cannot have a direct insight into the other's mind. Aggression and violence are a natural result of these psychological conditions. The most socially intelligent way to gain insight into another person's mind is through the use of reflective communication. However, this collaborative tool is typically hindered when an individual is suffering from unintegrated trauma triggered by associations with a distorted narrative that is mistakenly perceived as personally relevant. And the subsequent frustration with one's lack of understanding of others often leads to attempts to control others' thoughts, often by manipulating the collective narrative. To achieve this on a collective level, and to gain an illusory sense of security that everyone thinks the same and is predictable, this person needs many allies, which he gains through intimidation, blackmail and bribery, since he is unable to establish reciprocity and trust. Even today, we are witnessing how massively a single politician in one European state has managed to gain total control of the state media, which relentlessly crushes the seeds of alternative perspectives and presents a highly distorted version of an imposed "truth" about the past to everyone.

Freud Was Troubled by Human Aggression and the Crimes of the First World War

Freud assumed that the unintegrated past would inevitably manifest itself sooner or later, often in strange and surprising ways. It was not until after the First World War that this basic idea gained wider recognition. This was due to the retrospective confirmation of depth psychology, which emphasized the potentially devastating effects of the unprocessed contents of the unconscious on the individual and society

as a whole. For Freud, World War I was a confirmation of his own ideas about human destructiveness. He saw it as a manifestation of the irrational forces in the human being. The fascination with aggression and the paradoxical tendencies to repeat pathology was even a permanent feature of Freud's thinking in the years before the war. Long before the First World War, Freud had already proclaimed that our freedom is to a large extent an illusion, since we are all more or less pulled by unconscious and autonomous emotional impulses that were once repressed into the realm of the unconscious because of their social undesirability.

In the tragic events of the First and Second World Wars, many of Freud's ideas became disturbingly fulfilled, and a more fundamental question arose that went beyond the need to physically rebuild ruined cities and culture. It was necessary to deeply understand the psychological reasons for mass destruction, for only by understanding could the postwar generation effectively prevent similar catastrophes such as the two world wars and especially the Holocaust. The renewed professional interest in the hidden dynamics of the human mind marked the beginning of a most fruitful period in psychology. In order to prevent similar catastrophes from happening in the future, there was a great deal of discussion among experts about the causes of human destructiveness. A positive influence on the further development of psychoanalytic thought was the deconstruction of the illusory myth of the hero who, if he wishes, can freely decide his own fate and happiness (Jung, 1963). This myth lost its magical power, at least temporarily, in post-war Europe. The horrors of war showed how much man can be influenced by unrecognized inner forces and how he can become a tool of mindless, blind destruction.

A powerful school of thought emerged that developed the legacy of the late Freud. It was represented by such greats as Erik Erikson with his emphasis on trust, John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth with their discovery of attachment types and their links to mental health, Otto Kernberg with his penetrating analysis of narcissistic psychopathology, Peter Fonagy with his theory of mentalization and his sociocultural theory of the development of the self, which greatly expanded the horizons of depth psychological knowledge about the development and structure

of personality, and Vamik Volkan with his theory of large group identity. Gradually, the basic premise on which most later psychotherapeutic schools were based was formulated, namely, the assumption that the way we relate to our personal past and the degree of rationality with which we can integrate past experiences into a coherent identity have a determining influence on our relationships, life satisfaction, and overall mental and physical health (Fonagy et al., 2002). The conscious integration of past experiences into meaningful, reality-based wholes predicts personal growth (Kalsched, 2010). Contemporary narrative identity theories also emphasize the meaningfulness, complexity, and coherence of past experiences organized into meaningful stories (McAdams & McLean, 2013; Fivush & Merrill, 2014).

The Concept of Time Collapse by Vamik Volkan

Stories about the past are often misused in political power struggles. They bring to life elements of the glorious past, create a sense of social cohesion, are understandable, and allow for the collective release of repressed feelings related to the personal past, such as grief, self-pity, injustice, sorrow, desire for revenge, anger. These feelings are directed by manipulative political leaders in their narratives against someone – a common enemy in the present, who is perceived as unworthy and responsible. But in reality, this target, which is wrongly perceived as an “enemy”, did not cause these feelings and has nothing to do with them (Volkan, 2008). The simplified stories provide a sense of security and a reassuring answer to the question: “Who am I right now?” (Volkan, 2019). The attraction of collective reliving of unintegrated elements of the past is so strong that even educated and intelligent people can often be drawn into the content of such stories and subsequent emotional regression. They may not realize that they themselves are becoming a channel for reliving the feelings of the collective psyche. In this context, Volkan (2001) speaks of a “time collapse”, in which a current event activates expectations, fantasies, and fears associated with past traumatic events and awakens unintegrated emotions dormant in individual and collective memory. The whole process

is unconscious (*ibid.*). Images that originate from a nation's own history do not seem to provoke strong defensive reactions, so that even intelligent people may not be able to distinguish the nature of their unreality, that is, the image is deprived of concreteness, is idealized, and is placed in another time. In turbulent times of change and uncertainty, the great images of a nation's collective past can be surprisingly easily used and exploited by a ruling establishment or a totalitarian and confident leader to mobilize the masses (Volkan & Fowler, 2009; Volkan, 2012).

It is believed that in certain historical situations, large groups undergoing trauma or humiliation may be more likely to choose or accept a leader with narcissistic personality traits as a "savior" because of his or her self-confidence and exaggerated sense of superiority, which may be perceived as rather unhealthy in calm times. This leader's belief in his or her own power and intelligence can provide comfort and a sense of security to the group. In turn, to maintain his own grandiosity and to hide his need for dependency, the leader may use the group's dependency and worship (Volkan, 2019). These leaders may consciously or unconsciously manipulate the group and be the initiators of change within it. While not all leaders with narcissistic traits are destructive, some may have reparative goals and they seek to enhance the functioning and self-esteem of their followers. But destructive leaders may seek to elevate their group by comparing their perceived superiority to an "inferior" group that is a target for humiliation and destruction (Volkan, 2019). The most vulnerable societies in this regard are those in which the value of a critical view of one's own past is not sufficiently reflected and emphasized in education. Often it is because of the vicious circle in which the narrow and pervasive distorted narratives take over the educational sphere.

From a psychoanalytic point of view, this is a collective regressive psychological movement that occurs under such a leadership because it turns to the past and back to the collective image, and the personality dissolves in the collective. However, personal growth could only occur if a wise enough member of the community understood the hidden

symbolic meaning of the story. But in a state of regression, we may begin to feel empathy for the hero of the story. We may even want to do something good for him, such as atone for his pain or take revenge on his behalf. It is easy to forget that the event in question could have happened hundreds of years ago to someone whose story (at least as it is portrayed) is, moreover, unlikely, and even if it did happen, we personally have nothing to do with it at all (Volkan, 2022). By experiencing emotions that we consider objective, even though they are borrowed from another time and other people, we begin to believe in artificially fabricated connections between the past and the present. Without being aware of the fact that fragments of historical narrative and the present have been mixed, a fascinating collective phenomenon takes place. Suddenly, the raw and intense feelings of the story's protagonists come alive in the souls of those who listen. A cleverly orchestrated great story from a nation's history can be the catalyst for strong emotions in a significant portion of the population, without which the launch of a major historical movement, such as the initiation of a war, would be unthinkable. Totalitarian ideologies always pave the way for achieving their goals by mythologizing them, trying to get the population to accept them as their own. This can be achieved by getting a significant portion of the population to identify with an archetypal hero or victim model. Everything that happens afterwards in response to the unrealistic and disconnected life story is inherently unreal, and the result is a real disaster.

Author and peace activist Elie Wiesel, who was deported with his father from Budapest to Auschwitz in 1944 at the age of 14, at the height of the camp's killing spree, and who also survived the tragic death march when the Nazis inexplicably tried to move all the prisoners still able to walk to Buchenwald ahead of the approaching Red Army, said in an interview just days before he died: "It was done at the end of a war that was already lost for Germany, and despite that they had enough resources and, of course, the will to kill Jews. To this day I cannot understand it at all, it was not even in their national interest. Why did they do it? It will always remain a mystery to me..." (Wiesel, 2016

interview). They acted this way because of their absorption into the collective and their alignment with the myth of a great empire. In this myth, they played a significant role and were able to transcend their individual identity without regard to the accuracy of the myth. These people preferred to kill, and they would rather die themselves, than to give up their myth. In this myth, my own individual life and death have no meaning, the only meaning is to reinforce the idea of contributing to a great heroic story. Jung called this condition “ego inflation” (Jung, 1963/1998). It occurs when one’s personality is expanded beyond its limits through identification with a historical or religious figure. This creates an inflated sense of self-importance, balanced by feelings of inferiority. Jung saw inflation as the conscious ego’s attempt to possess the power of an archetype, resulting in a distorted or broken ego that can lead to serious psychopathology. The ego expands to include elements to which it has no legitimate claim (Jung, 1963/1998). It does so because it is approved, attractive, and perceived as powerful by society’s great narrative. The fall into time-collapsed fantasy is not noticed.

A healthy democratic society does not have a dominant, pervasive myth that contaminates every single mind. We may have myths, such as the story of Harry Potter, but it is widely understood that it is a fairy tale. The moment we would start identifying with Harry and fighting against someone in his name and for his life, it would indicate a psychiatric problem. Such an illness can be induced in large groups in the process of retelling stories with elements of time collapse. It is a misuse of the basic human need to create a narrative identity, as well as the basic human need to structure and organize one’s identity experience around self-preservation, self-knowledge, trust, and cooperation.

Chosen Trauma and Malignant Propaganda

The term “chosen trauma” refers to a shared collective memory of a traumatic event experienced by a large group in the distant past, characterized by loss, humiliation, and powerlessness at the hands of enemies, as well as an inability to properly mourn these losses. The term “chosen” does not mean that a group consciously “chooses” to hyper-focus on a past traumatic event, but rather that it becomes a central

aspect of their identity, often mixed with a sense of pride (Volkan, 2022). All related narratives and tasks refer to the same historical event, separated from the present by decades or centuries. The shared mental image of this event serves as a unifying factor for the members of the group and becomes a key aspect of their shared identity. Such reactivation of fragments of the past can be used by political leaders to mobilize new mass movements, some of them deadly and destructive (Volkan, 2019; Volkan & Javakhishvili, 2022).

Volkan and Javakhishvili (2022) described seven steps of dangerous propaganda with elements of chosen trauma and fame, illustrated by the war in Ukraine. This model of propaganda evolution can help international security experts identify early signs of autocracy in a state's domestic and international politics and make more accurate predictions about its future development.

1. Reinforcement of a shared sense of victimization in society by encouraging the dissemination of stories of chosen trauma/glory: The chosen trauma of Russians is their suffering and victory in World War II.
2. Creation of a temporal collapse that mixes the image of the past "enemy" with the present devalued group of opponents, both inside and outside the country: the association of the Nazi Party of World War II with the entire Ukrainian nation.
3. Presentation of the political leader as the all-powerful "savior" of his own large group, while continuing to devalue and dehumanize the opposition group.
4. Elevation of the identity of the large group above that of the individual, through the education in the schools and the reporting in the media. History is reduced to myths of common origin, historical continuity, common linguistic, religious, cultural and ideological factors.
5. Generalization of "we" identity (mass group narcissism) contaminated by a sense of entitlement – members of the mass group feel entitled to regain what their ancestors lost decades or centuries ago.
6. Creating social concern about the psychological boundaries of a large group through obsession with physical borders. An example is Putin's desire to expand the physical borders of present-day Russia. But this

can only happen if the country in question has greater military superiority than the country whose territory is being claimed. Marginalized groups within the state (currently the Uighurs in China, for example) can also be excluded and isolated.

7. In the process of dehumanization, the ideology of rights and entitlements transforms the image of the “enemy” against whom it is right to take vengeful action. This enables extremist acts such as mass murder and other criminal acts.

Massive propaganda initiated by a totalitarian leader who claims to have exclusive rights over the description of what has happened leads to loneliness, separation from others and also from oneself due to the lack of corrective feedback, which is considered undesirable. This leads to a decrease in sensitivity to the different points of view that underlie the natural interpersonal conflicts that a healthy human being is able to tolerate and deal with, especially thanks to the basic trust that misunderstandings can be communicated in an open dialogue, by showing interest in the other’s point of view, by gradually searching for common solutions. In societies where someone, by virtue of his superior power, dares to define for others, from his limited perspective, what happened and how, while allowing no one else to reflect and reconstruct this version of history, and demanding ever more insistently blind approval, narrow-mindedness, injustice, and inequality deepen, with a leader who becomes ever more isolated and dependent only on himself. Jaroslav Kurfurst, a well-known Czech diplomat and academic expert in political geography, writes: “Every state naturally promotes its own interests, but in democracies the umbrella of democratic principles of the rule of law extends over its actions. Its methods and activities are subject not only to its own laws and norms and the rules of international law, but above all to the constant scrutiny of other political parties – rivals – the media and many actors in the free sphere. This makes democratic systems very different from the autocratic concept of the organic state, which defends a vertical of power personalized by an autocrat who often legitimizes his power

with higher ideological concepts ranging from patriotism to religion” (Kurfurst, 2021, p. 372).

Implicated Subject and Responsibility for Reflection on the Past

The original contribution to understanding and reflecting on these processes and protecting against time collapse in shared narratives is Michael Rothberg’s concept of the implicated subject (2019). He realized that a few established concepts – perpetrator, victim, bystander, accomplice, and beneficiary – were not sufficient to address the issue of collective guilt. All histories of violence, even the most personal, have many protagonists who play important roles. Rothberg looks at actors who share a given space and are in some way indirectly implicated in collective violence and domination. He noticed that the discourse lacked an adequate term to describe indirect, collective forms of action that enable and spread violence and exploitation, but cannot be described as forms of violence and domination in terms of direct criminal guilt. He searched for a term to describe the so-called structural forms of responsibility that result from natural and symbiotic participation in power structures, for example, by being born into an autocratic, or any other, society and being socialized within it to maintain its power structure. One can benefit from these structures and be in accordance with power and privilege without initially building a network of centralized power himself. These inheritors do not create or manage power regimes, but they inhabit them and can participate in their maintenance (Knittel & Forchieri, 2020).

The concept of the “implicated subject” is meant to fill a gap in thinking about violence, the domination of inequality on the one hand, and historical and political responsibility on the other (Rothberg, 2019). Even when the perpetrators of political violence are easily identifiable, the conditions of violence involve many more subjects without whom violence would not be possible. The realm of implication suggests the need for a broader collective understanding of responsibility. Rothberg explores this form of responsibility and suggests that acknowledging implicated responsibility can lead to new forms of solidarity (ibid.).

Reflection is desired in some systemic structures and suppressed and persecuted in others. This was insightfully described by Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann, who introduced the term “spiral of silence” to explain the fact that the vast majority of people do not have the courage to speak out against oppression for fear of possible punishment (in Kalvas & Pribylová, 2019). This term further deepened the understanding of the context of the Holocaust, which, according to Noelle-Neumann, was made possible by the silence of the broader population of Germany at the time. According to Rothberg (2019), this position automatically places them – implicates them – in an undemanded and indirect entanglement with Nazism. Recognition of the extreme consequences (the Holocaust) of implicated participation in collective guilt implies a moral duty of reflection, a commitment to solidarity and unity (Rothberg, 2011, 2019). People operate within different forms of participation and non-participation in power structures. Direct participation in violence makes a person morally and legally guilty (a perpetrator). Under the implicated subject category, Rothberg (2019) does not imagine identity in terms of self or identity in a temporal continuum. Rather, to be an implicated subject is to occupy a place, a position in shifting historical contexts. From a social psychological perspective, this concept is closer to “social role” than “identity”. Implicated subjects are not simply uninvolved and innocent bystanders, but bear a certain responsibility for past events and structures to which they are close. They have a responsibility to reflect on and remember these events. The solution and the goal is the transformation of these “implications” into solidarity. Solidarity is not easy to achieve, since it is not a natural force, but must be constructed among people, which requires different kinds of work (Rothberg, 2019; Lambek, 1996). It is the work that society must do to find reconciliation within itself (Maslowski, 2014). The concept of “implication” could be a starting point for thinking about how to translate our responsibility into concrete acts of solidarity with those more directly affected by domination and violence. One of the acts of this solidarity is to define our values in a polite and firm way, not to

live in an illusion, not to distort time in our thoughts and, not to waste time in our actions.

Conclusion

The collective memory is our wealth, something that gives us roots. People who document, preserve, approach, and maintain the past in its undistorted form are indispensable to society. To bear witness to the traumatic past of our nations, to bear responsibility, to call for solidarity, requires awareness and commitment. This perspective makes us more human, more responsible, and frees us from many illusions and self-centeredness. It gives us insight into political and psychological context, and our possible contribution to the improvement of humanity becomes more realistic through the lessons of the past. Volkan's theory of the development of totalitarian structures through propaganda with elements of chosen trauma and the repetition of time-collapsed, arbitrarily merged stories is an original insight into the genesis of these fascinating processes. Another concept closely related to the dangerous collective psychosis of time-collapse narratives is the implicated subject. Rothberg realized that it was necessary to invent a new word to describe an extremely important position that emerges as essential to understanding the key actions of the actors involved in intergroup violence. Perhaps it is the word "implicated" that will catch on with the broader professional and lay public, allowing us to speak more accurately about important forms of indirect responsibility for actions that harm the minds, bodies, and lives of many people. Through dialogue, using new terminology, we can deepen our understanding, from which new expressions of solidarity will grow, as well as an argumentative strength capable of countering the manipulative narratives spread by political leaders with narcissistic and totalitarian traits.

By examining the history of education and using other disciplines such as psychoanalysis and memory studies, historians of education gain a deeper understanding of education's role in shaping society. They are discovering cycles of propaganda that infiltrate schools as well as periods and contexts of education that foster critical thinking and collaboration. For education, national security and the active individual

defence of democratic principles have so far been peripheral issues. But education can fight for these principles effectively by building students' resilience and resistance to false narratives through awareness of how the propaganda, lies, and manipulation, or "the lie industry", as journalist Alexandra Alvarova (2022) calls deliberate disinformation, works.

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