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THANATOLOGICAL CHALLENGES OF CURRENT UKRAINIAN CULTURE

ТАНАТОЛОГІЧНІ ВИКЛИКИ СУЧАСНОЇ УКРАЇНСЬКОЇ КУЛЬТУРИ

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Those scientists who first paid attention to the inextricable connection between life and death were psychoanalysts. At the same time, Sigmund Freud considered Thanatos (an ancient image that symbolizes death) not as an external threat that had been symbolized but as an internal psychological setting. That's why, despite the culture is seen as expanding the safe and comfort zone of human life, frequently the tools for succeeding in it are repression and violence. There is always a place for destructiveness in culture and human consciences as well.

Aggression is the basic energy of the human psyche but it could appear through constructive and destructive manifestations. Erich Fromm described the mechanism of aggression generating as the collision of pleasure and reality principles. The motives of human behavior are the result of the interaction of internal drives and restrictions of the external world. The reality principle forces a person to adapt to life with others and often give up the desire for pleasure. Then the inner tension is manifested as aggression. Compared to animals, whose aggression is defensive, a person can become angry and violent even in the absence of an external threat. "The wish to destroy for the sake of destruction is different. Only man seems to take pleasure in destroying life without any reason or purpose other than that of destroying. To put it more generally, only man appears to be destructive beyond the aim of defense or of attaining what he needs" [Fromm, p. 186]

The Psychoanalyst Melanie Klein analyzing destructive tendencies of the human psyche that evoke disruptive actions and death drive, emphasized a threshold value of the oral stage of a baby's life. During this period the possibility of survival depends on the mother, but she is perceived split as a good and bad object at the same time. Mother's breasts are the tool providing survival possibility at the period, so they are desired the most, but the child can't establish total control over those breasts as well as over the mother's will. That tension produces such a strong emotion as envy. "Together with happy expressions, unavoidable grievances reinforce the innate conflict between love and hate, in fact, basically between life and death instincts, and result in the feeling that a good and a bad breast exist. As a consequence, early emotional life is characterized by sense of losing and regaining the good object. In speaking of an innate conflict between love and hate, I am implying that the capacity to both for love and for destructive impulses is, to some extent, constitutional, through varying individually in strength and interacting from the beginning with external conditions" [Klein, p. 180].

Envy is defined as suffering provoked by the fact someone possesses what we would like to own. Envy is a pain caused by admiration for someone. Unconscious envy, mixed with narcissistic inclinations of character, provokes a willingness to destroy and brings joy from destruction.

Psychoanalysis considers the death drive as an internal trait of human nature. But Thanatos can also be faced externally as the death of others. Such death is always nonsense because it's unable to be explained or expected, even if a person would be deadly ill. Anyone's passing away always seems unfair. That's why death is non-sense, there is no sense in it. This hole of meaninglessness is unbearable for the human consciousness. It can be expressed only through the symbolization through art practices and images.

After the war in Ukraine started, our citizens have been faced with strong, unfair, uncivilized, raw "forcing to death". Exactly that meaning stands behind the russian invaders' phrase about "forcing Ukrainians to obey". This existential threat gave rise to a broad public debate about the nature of Ukrainian national identity and shifted the answers to current challenges from only the territorial to also the temporal dimension: when did we appear, what's our destination and power?

Nowadays thanatological challenges have evoked memories of previous generations' exploits and resistance: from the Cossacks epoch in the XVI–XVIII century to the Ukrainian Insurgent Army of the XX century. Those are the pages of Ukrainian history that were tried to be destroyed along with their keepers – Ukrainian intellectuals – during Stalin's numerous repressive campaigns.

The strategy for achieving collective amnesia was too rough and demolishing. The cultural heritage objects were replaced by new public buildings – clubs, schools, resorts, psychiatric clinics, prisons. It was done to

wipe off even ruins because they are very eye-catching proofs of the past. Even cemeteries – the places of private reminiscences and communicative memory – had to be obliterated and alienated. The graves of the nobility representatives, Cossack knights, and Ukrainian Army commanders were erased from the landscapes. Their tombstones and crosses were ground into sand and added to construction mortar to build all those schools, collective farms, clinics, and prisons. While civilians were motivated to write anonymous denunciations, a person who had been visiting a cemetery frequently came across as suspicious: what do they hold on to, why do they so grieve, don't they like joyful Soviet reality?

A cemetery is a special location, where unbearable death gets its acceptable symbolization through religious rites and memorable signs. The Soviet politics of memory annihilation took both these tools away, covering the cultural wounds with propaganda and alternative discourse of “all the world envies our success”, so let citizens radiate happiness by spending time in all those collective farms, clubs, resorts, department stores, that were erected on the territories of the old cemeteries and churches.

The graveyard became a marginal place, alienated and dangerous. Anybody's passing away provoked crying in the closest circle of relatives, but it shouldn't have been demonstrated for long to help hide emotions and feelings deep inside. The death perception became perverse. At the same time, crowded funerals of public figures (including dissidents) took on a political context.

According to the words of French historian Philippe Aries, the measure of any nation's civility is determined by its attitude towards death. The USSR used to neglect and humiliate death. Not all those who lived were considered to deserve respect, but only those who died for political ideals. The graves of the Komsomol activists, partisans, soldiers, and political servicemen were located not in the marginalized spaces of cemeteries, but in the middle of the space of those who were alive – in the city and town centers. This is the way how the substitution of social memory and identity has been done.

The current challenge of the war in Ukraine is that instead of Soviet-times heroes alienated by propaganda, we unfortunately are receiving new emotionally close heroes who sacrificed their lives to defend free and democratic Ukraine. They have been our colleagues, classmates, university roommates, neighbors, and relatives. They are close and unforgettable for many Ukrainians, especially if take into account that the war in Ukraine is the most depicted one in the world history because of widespread personal devices. Many defenders have their accounts on social networks, and each army brigade has its press service. People follow fighting routes almost in real-time (as far as it is allowed and safe) along with their beloveds. Each death is mourned by millions of fellow citizens.

This way thanatological spaces are taken back along with the collective memory that had been tried to be wiped off during the Russian Empire and the USSR times.

Similar difficulties arose in the countries of the former Yugoslavia, which paid a bloody price for their independence. As Vieran Pavlaković noted in his research “Memory politics in the Former Yugoslavia”, the memory of the events of the 1990s still defines the framework of national, regional identity and social policy priorities. The challenges of the period are still mentioned in election programs and determine international relations of Balkan countries with their neighboring states. The war in Slovenia, Croatia, and North Macedonia contributed to the reassessment of previous wars and the experience of overcoming their consequences, in particular, Balkan wars, the Second World War. “While the wars of the 1990s created an entirely new memoryscape in the region, they also radically transformed the way in which each country commemorated the Second World War. [...] In Croatia alone, approximately 3,000 out of 6,000 antifascist monuments, memorial sites, and plaques were destroyed, damaged, removed, or altered, while a similar fate befell monuments in neighboring countries to a greater or lesser degree” [Pavlaković, p. 12–13].

In the Ukrainian case the narrative of memorization is forming during the war continuing. For example, in 2021 The Order of the Army Funeral Ritual was reviewed and completed. In 2022, the Government decided to establish the National Memorial Cemetery which was considered to be built in 2025. In two Ukrainian cities – Vinnytsia and Lviv – collective graves in the city centers were exhumated and replaced to the cemeteries. In the sphere of culture, the search, studying, census, and codification of the old graveyards has been launched. Graves of the Ukrainian cultural actors of the previous times became a destination to visit.

So, we can see how new symbols of thanatological mediation are being created, the silent past has been taken back along with forgotten names to strengthen national identity and solidarity in times of war challenges. Our new “Close Heroes” should become an example of remembering with gratitude and motivation to dignified life.

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