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**Dr. J. K. Olick’s reconsideration of the “collective memory” studies**

The article outlines the main aspects of “process-relationism” - a modern approach to collective memory developed by Dr. J. K. Olick. The article considers the features of the new approach in contrast to the traditional one and elicits the possible addition that may help to trace a connection between two rather different concepts.

*Key words:* collective memory, Jeffrey Olick, memory studies, memorial politics, Maurice Halbwachs.

The collective memory studies have never been as popular as now. Societies all around the globe seek to think through and reflect on the dramatic events of the XX century as well as develop new approaches to historical studies and maintenance of memorial politics, which is not an easy task in terms of constantly changing political climate.

Today’s inarguable leader of the referred research on how memorial climate is influenced by politics is an American sociologist Dr. Jeffrey K. Olick, a Professor of Sociology and History and Chair of the Sociology Department at the University of Virginia. He is famous for reviewing the concept of “collective memory”, originated in France and first described by the French sociologist and philosopher Maurice Halbwachs. Dr. Olick’s works are not very well-known in Russia yet, however, more and more specialists interested in collective memory refer to his investigations.

Jeffrey Olick is an author of a monograph “The Politics of Regret: On Collective Memory and Historical Responsibility” (NY, 2007) where he looks into the problems that Germany faced after World War II when seeking to overcome its painful history. He is also an author of several works dedicated to conceptualizing social memory and national identity as well as an editor of a collection of articles “The Collective Memory Reader” (NY, 2011). It was him to initiate first ever university course (held at the University of Virginia) fully dedicated to study of collective memory in an interdisciplinary field.

Though Dr. Olick in his research is mainly focusing on the case of Germany and the socio-political problems it faced when reviving the country in the second part of the XX century, the ideas and approach he develops in respect of the collective memory concept can be applied widely to analyze the “memorial climate” of the different periods of the civilized past.

Dr. Olick admits that as well as many researchers looking into the topic he founds his ideas on the concept developed by French sociologist and philosopher Maurice Halbwachs (1877-1945). Halbwachs’s book “Les Cadres sociaux de la mémoire” – “The social frameworks of memory” (1925) has made a revolution in approach to memory prior considered to be a private physiopsychological tool rather than a social phenomenon. His next work “La memoire collective” – “On collective memory” (1950) boosted scientific interest to collective memory at the intersection of sociology, psychology and philosophy. Halbwachs was the first to describe the phenomenon of collective memory, which is represented by mnemonic traces and commemorative practices. He also claimed that individuals can only remember and recall memories within the specific social frameworks which establish borders to archives of individual minds. For instance, an adult person can recall events from early childhood only with the help of the other “eyewitnesses” like his parents who would tell him/her about it.

Dr. Olick, giving proper respect to Halbwachs as the founder father of the collective memory concept, mentions that Halbwachs still thinks a bit in a way of a XIX-century-theorist considering the collective and individual levels “as problems of different orders”. Dr. Olick throughout his works has been proving the opposite: he claims the interconnection between the layers of individual and collective memories while looking into the impact of those on political decisions and socio-cultural climate of one nation.

To illustrate the two competing approaches to memory studies popular nowadays, Dr. Olick distinguishes between “collected memory” and “collective memory”. From his point of view, the proclaimers of “collected memory” consider the individualistic accumulation of memories by each member which – in a group – compile collected memory. It is also an expression of collective will – for instance, how a generation identifies itself as such based on common historical experience. The other approach is based on the postulate that the society possesses its own specific collective memory sui generis, meaning the society as a whole has a memory.

Dr. Olick seeks to prove that the “collective memory” approach is currently revived and actual more than ever. It seems that, studying the complex problems connected to German revival of national identity and developing attitudes to the past, Dr. Olick through his arguments is trying to acquit such generalizing approach as “collective memory” in contrast to individualistic-humanistic tendencies of the post-war cultural and scientific environment. He does not though reject the individualistic approach of “collected memory”, but includes the individual aggregated experiences inside the frameworks of social memory as a whole. For example, the people of one generation sharing historical experience still are influenced by some facts of the past that they never witnessed: and since they treat/evaluate this knowledge in a certain way, they compile a generation. That is how memories and generations are “mutually constitutive”. The collected memory is understood as an intermediary level between individual and collective memorial levels.

Avoiding the metaphysical connotations that the term can carry, Dr. Olick reinterprets “collective memory “ as an umbrella term for “wide variety of mnemonic processes, practices and outcomes”. He however cautions against considering collective memory as an object, and proclaims regarding it as a number of temporal processes happening at different layers of society, and thus being a social activity rather that a static object. In this approach the artefacts of collective memory like archives, monuments, architecture, museums as well as traditions, customs, celebrations, folklore etc. are no more than external artificial objects existing within the frames of collective memory and being evidently created by a group during the memorial process.

Dr. Olick calls his approach “process-relationism”. He formulates four basic principles of archaic approach to collective memory and overturns them providing the for new ones.

As per Dr. Olick, the archaic approach was based on:

1. Unity: collective memory is unitary and consensual;
2. Mimetic directness: collective memory represents the past as an objective reality, not existing initially as a number of representations;
3. Tangibility: collective memory being rather a thing than a process or an activity;
4. Independence: collective memory is a separate form of culture.

Dr. Olick suggest to replace these postulates with the following counterconcepts:

1. Field: collective memory as a network of concepts (values) produced by different social institutions and often competing with each other. Fields can be illustrated on a diagram as overlapping circles.
2. Medium: сollective memory deals with representations, “there is no unmediated reality”, history constitutes facts about the past. The medium is changeable and varies from one field to another. The medium influences the memories and contexts, but they are also caused by existing and changing memories.
3. Genre: relativity of collective memory practice. Mnemonic rituals are held in conjunction of the past and the present continuously, the formed and reconstructed memories are only comprehensible via textuality of memory that relates it to earlier memories and other contexts.
4. Profile: unique contours of the political meaning systems at given points in time describe diverse meaning elements like the images of the past, identity, attributions of responsibility, heroes, styles, moral and practical purposes and many more. Profile can never be reduced to any of its elements, forming unique situation that describes collective memory.

Generally inheriting the fundamentals of the continental theory of collective memory, Dr. Olick develops a synthetically complex approach to the case: he considers collective memory as an all-pervading substance, at the same time it is diverse due to variegated structure of the society itself. Collective memory is temporal, meaning it is a constant continuous process of remembering, commemorating, evaluating of events, facts, situations and many more. This is the core of his process-relationism approach that combines temporality of memory with relativity of memories in time as well as all the included elements, modes, images, patterns and mediums of memory to each other, contexts, social layers, profiles. Process-relationism bring political experts to the forefront letting them forecast the collective memory trends.

Process-relationism, seeking to avoid any metaphysical connotations, is a rather radical reconsideration of traditional approach to collective memory since it sees collective memory as an amenable, vulnerable process, highly dependent on changeable political climate and socio-political trends, leaving behind the physical or narrative representation of collective memory that in the aggregate can be called heritage. The attitude to heritage as something valuable and perception of it as such, no matter if it carries positive or traumatic memories, can be taken as an invariable basis of collective memory, constraining some supporting points of memories.

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