

# Methodological Approaches to the Psychological Analysis of Ethnic Conflicts and Ideas of Anti-Russian: Trauma and Trans-Generation Transmission

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In this paper, methodological foundations and contemporary approaches to analysis of interpersonal and interethnic relationships are viewed from perspective of understanding psychology, psychoanalysis, idea of transgenerational transmission, and other modern theories. Ukrainian events of 2013-2014 are analyzed, and historical predispositions of anti-Russian attitudes on post-Soviet space are explored. The author consistently describes the history of formation of the Ukrainian nation and state since the 17th century, when Ukraine was under the protectorate of Poland and explains the special role of Hetman of Ukraine Bohdan Khmelnytsky in the process of accession of Ukraine to Russia, but Ukrainian nation became a divided nation. Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact which resulted that Ukrainian nation (second time in its history) became a divided nation is described, as well as the activity of Ukrainian nationalists during the Second World War and after its end in Western Ukraine. The author describes in detail the uprising of the Ukrainian people against corruption and oligarchs in 2013 and the transformation of the focus of popular anger to Russia. Article gives special attention to the fact that the Russian people became divided nation and led to the current strained relations between Ukraine and Russia after the collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). In conclusion, the author offers the way to resolve this ethnic conflict.

*Keywords:* aggression, brainwashing, ethnic conflict, crisis, identification, narcissism of minor differences, psychic trauma, psychohistory, psycho-politics, trans-generation transmission, understanding psychology

## Introduction

In Soviet and Russian psychology, interethnic relationships have been for rather long time considered from perspective of such illusory concept as “internationalism”, and then, after 1991, from perspective of “tolerance”. These approaches seem to be just an attempt to disguise the problem or avoid its scientific research and analysis. In area of interethnic relationships, this lack of socio-psychological forecasting became especially obvious in post-Soviet time and was expressed most prominently in Russian-Ukrainian conflict. That is why it is appropriate to reconsider the main psychological concepts relevant to the problem of interethnic relationships.

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To begin with, I would like to outline psychological and psychoanalytic concepts I used as a basis of this paper. First of all, it is understanding psychology, founded by Dilthey (2004) and Jaspers (1997) in the beginning of the 20th century. Let me remind you the main idea expressed by Dilthey. He wrote that we explain nature, but we can only understand mental life (Dilthey, 2004). Or, even more correctly, we try to understand it. Ideas, developed by Jaspers (1997), are also important for my train of thought, such as the minimum three ideas:

1. Individual is what he/she is because of specific of his/her personal history, not just generally human, basis;
2. Psychic life is unthinkable without traditions which person gets through his/her community;
3. Nothing is forgotten in the area of inherited connections.

The second concept is Freud's psychoanalysis (Freud, 1990; 1991), in particular, concept of identification. According to Freud (Freud, 1990; 1991), identification is the initial form of emotional connection with individual's father, mother, kin, tribe and people. The next concept is trans-generational transmission, it is also a psychoanalytic idea developed by Freud and Burlingham (1943). In a few words, after tragic events children of survivors develop deeper identification with their parents and manifest symptoms related to parental psychic contents and to the past in general, which they did not and could not witness.

In result of massive psychic trauma caused by a hostile large group, thousands or even millions of individuals deposit their traumatized images into their children. It leads to a cumulative effect, which determines psychic content of the large group's identity. Shared task of the traumatized society could differ from generation to generation (Volkan, 2013). For instance, for one generation the task is to mourn the ancestors' trauma, to feel shame and to be aware of their sacrifice. For the next generation, shared task might be revenge for these losses, and these versions are not the only possible ones.

Returning to Freud (1991), we should mention his idea that contrasting individual and group psychic phenomena are ungrounded and loses a great deal of its sharpness when it is examined more closely, so that individual psychology is at the same time social psychology as well. Freud (1991) stressed that it is important to view human beings not only as separate people but also as members of a race, of a nation, of a caste, of a profession.

In my works (Reshetnikov, 2004; 2008; 2014), I have repeatedly mentioned and elaborated Professor Vamik Volkan's idea that interethnic conflicts develop like paranoia (Volkan, 2013), because the main psychic mechanisms manifested in all interethnic conflicts are projection and projective identification; their essence of which could be formulated as following: "It is not true that I victimize and hate X, but he victimizes and hates me". Let me add that in many cases such paranoia is manifested by both sides of international conflict.

We also need to pay attention to specific factors, which are usually neglected by academic science and which could be called "predictors". These factors have become more vivid in the last 15 years, when in addition to traditional for the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) jokes about Jews or Armenians with their subtle irony, jokes about Russian-Ukrainian and Russian-Baltic issues have become wide-spread in Russian society, and their emotional content was different (humiliating and devaluing).

Another psychological factor of interethnic relationships is so-called "narcissism of minor differences" (Freud, 1991). Its essence is the following: "If somebody is almost like me, but a bit different in language, traditions and customs, I perceive it as a caricature at me, which provokes my negative feelings". This

mechanism is manifested in relationships between historically close nations, such as British and Irish people, Jews and Arabs, Russians and Ukrainians.

After this short introduction, let us attempt to interpret contemporary events in Ukraine, starting with psycho-historic analysis.

Ukrainian people fought for their national identity and independence for many centuries. In this paper, we take the span of the last three to four centuries. In the 17th century, most part of Ukrainian population was under Polish rule. When we speak about history, we cannot overlook such an outstanding person as Bohdan Khmelnytsky. In 1647, he was elected Hetman (that is, the head) of Zaporozhian Army (military and political organization of Cossacks serving the Kingdom of Poland) and received the charter from Polish King. Immediately after that, in 1648, he initiated a war against Poland, first for Cossacks autonomy, and then, for independent Cossack Ukraine, up to Lviv and Halych. The war lasted five years without much success.

After five years of war, Khmelnytsky asked Russian Tsar Alexei Mikhailovich for help and in exchange promised him to incorporate Rus' (that is, Zaporozhian lands and annexed Polish lands with cities and troops) into Russia. In 1654, this proposal was accepted, and Cossacks accepted Russian over-lordship. It should be mentioned that this decision did not receive nation-wide support. In Kiev, Orthodox priests refused to swear allegiance to Russian Tsar, and many citizens and Cossacks were forced to do it. Bohdan Khmelnytsky was condemned as a traitor of Ukrainian people, and there were anti-Russian uprisings. However, after that Ukraine and Russia waged war against Poland together. The power balance changed, and the victory was closed.

Why couldn't they incorporate all Ukrainian lands into Russia? Poland was also exhausted by this war. Swedish King Karl X Gustav intended to use this situation and attacked Poland from the North (in 1655), but to strengthen Sweden was not in Russia's interests. Russia immediately concluded a peace treaty with Poland, and Sweden was attacked by joint Russian, Ukrainian, and Polish troops. In result of this war, Left-Bank Ukraine was formed and became a part of Russia. Western lands stayed under Polish rule. Ukrainians became a divided nation, different segments of which developed different historical memories and perspectives.

We need to remember that Russian Empire did not have national subdivisions; it was divided into provinces, one of which was Kiev Province. After revolution, in 1917, Russia established new subdivisions, first regions, and then, in 1922, 15 national republics of the USSR. Borders of national republics were not important and were assigned just in view of political goals.

For instance, population of Kiev Province consisted mostly of peasants, who were perceived as unreliable by Soviet power; it led to a decision to strengthen Ukrainian Republic by "working class". For this purpose, a number of Russian industrial regions were assigned to Soviet Ukraine by just a scrape of pen; they included contemporary Donetsk and Lugansk regions with their Russian population. It didn't have any significance in totalitarian state.

At about the same time (1932-1933), massive starvation took place in some regions of the USSR; in the last decades, Ukrainian media have actively propagated the idea that it was an intentional pre-planned genocide of Ukrainian people (Holodomor, hunger-extermination). However, there was the same disastrous situation with food supplies at that time in regions, such as North Caucasus, Povolzhye, Kazakhstan, and others, population of which suffered the same starvation, which was not selectively anti-Russian, anti-Ukrainian, anti-Kazakh and so on. It should be mentioned that the United Nations investigation, initiated by Ukraine and

carried out in 2008, did not confirm that it was genocide of Ukrainian people. However, Ukrainian media go on expanding on this topic, thus increasing interethnic tension.

Let us remember that contemporary Western Ukraine for many centuries was under Polish, Lithuanian, or Austrian-Hungarian rule. There was permanent fight for national liberation in these lands.

However, in 1939, in accordance with Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, a part of this land (which belonged to Poland but was populated by Ukrainians) was incorporated into Soviet Ukraine; more correctly to say, into the USSR in general. Western Ukrainians could hardly perceive it as liberation or re-union with their people. For them, it was just the next occupation which followed the previous one. Stalin's regime was at the peak of its cruelty then. Soviet power was imposed upon Western Ukrainians, peasants were robbed of their land and cattle, businessmen of their possessions, and dissidents were arrested and executed. Importantly, after their long history of being colonized, Ukrainians still did not own their historical land.

Officials of Nazi Germany were not stupid indeed. In 1941, Western Ukraine was occupied by Nazis, they declared that Ukrainian people were the main owners of their historical land. So, Germany secured its rear, and Western Ukrainians acquired hope for independence. While occupied by Nazis, Western Ukrainians established their administration, police and the Schutzstaffel (SS)<sup>1</sup> division, and after a few centuries of colonization and humiliation, they started their violent revenge upon Jews, Poles, and Russians; pogroms, gallows, and shootings became common practice.

It was natural for us that Russians and Eastern Ukrainians became enemy, because everybody who collaborated with fascists would always be enemy. We lost 28 million of our compatriots during that war. But population of Western Ukraine hated the Soviet power and Russians, and the majority of people supported Nazis and Nazi collaborators. We call them "banderovtsi", but for Western Ukrainians they were fighters for freedom and independence, like Stepan Bandera himself.

In 1944, the Soviet Army came back to Western Ukraine, which was natural for that time, started persecuting Ukrainian nationalists as Nazi collaborators, enemies, and traitors. It was liberating anti-fascist war for us, but for them, it was just the next occupation.

The Second World War ended in 1945, but fight against Ukrainian nationalists continued till 1953. According to different sources, each of the sides lost 60 to 90 thousand people. About 100 thousand were arrested and deported. There were public executions, shooting, or gallows, and other methods of so-called "Soviet correction", which were not openly discussed by public. However, families of murdered "banderovtsi" remembered these events and spoke about them, transmitting this memory from generation to generation. That is why their children and grandchildren have a different historical memory and different attitude to fascism and to Russia. Let me remind you that we are speaking about only a segment of Ukrainian population.

This segment, however, should be understood and accepted as something which exists in reality and cannot be quickly changed. But these people, whose worldview is strange for us, should also understand that we, Russians, and South-Eastern Ukrainians (who are ethnic Russians, Ukrainians, or representatives of other nationalities) have a different historical memory, too. They should also learn to understand and accept it.

To summarize, anti-Russian attitude in a segment of Ukrainian population has existed for centuries and has been repeatedly activated. Its external manifestations have been suppressed, but this fact could not

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<sup>1</sup> SS—an abbreviation of the German "Schutzstaffel"—"protection squads". During the Second World War, these storm troopers were transformed into a special SS-division, which was particularly brutal, including their activity against the civilian population. SS-troops also took control of all concentration camps and the prisoners of the death-camp, where millions of people were killed.

influence intergenerational transmission mechanisms. Let me remind you once again: nothing is forgotten in area of inherited connections.

Let us turn to current events. In 1991, Ukraine separated from the USSR and became an independent state, there was another event which went unnoticed. Time ago, Lugansk and Donetsk regions, as well as Crimea, which were populated mostly by Russians, were assigned to Ukraine. It was not important in the USSR, because it was the united country. But after events of 1991 (dissolution of the USSR), Russians became a divided nation.

I am not going to analyze political situation in Ukraine now. I will only mention that Ukrainian national elite shamelessly robbed the Ukrainian people in 1990s. The same situation in 1990s was in Russia, but in Ukraine, its scale was unprecedented. Social crisis in Ukraine was inevitable, but to some degree, it was compensated by ongoing protests (“orange revolution” and others), which let off the steam, but did not resolve the main problems.

In November 2013, the most powerful national protest movement started, which had been imminent for rather long time and which was directed against corruption, against the President ruling at that time, and against the power of oligarchs. It should be emphasized that from November 2013 to February 2014, this explosion of hatred and civil unrest was directed exclusively against corruption and against the President and oligarchs. The additional factor was hesitant position of oligarchs in Ukrainian government on issue of association with the European Union; it was one more stimulus for anti-oligarchic and anti-governmental mood.

In February 2014, when there was no problem with Crimea or Eastern Ukraine yet, the protest movement in just a few days became exclusively anti-Russian, and all other problems (including anti-oligarchic protest) simply disappeared from Ukrainian informational space. It should be mentioned that almost all media in Ukraine belong to oligarchs. In this case, it is possible to suggest that there was re-direction of aggression by methods of brainwashing. Considering the fact that a segment of Ukrainian population has always had anti-Russian attitude, it was not a difficult task.

It is rather strange that this anti-oligarchic revolution in Ukraine led to paradoxical results: another oligarch was elected the President instead of the previous one, and a few more oligarchs were assigned as new governors.

Returning to chronology of events, let us stress that there was no separatism in any Ukrainian region by February 2014. I would formulate the following hypothesis of how and why this separatism appeared. On February 23, 2014 (by the way, February 23 is the Russian Army Day), a legislative proposal was submitted to Rada (Ukrainian Parliament), aiming at abolishing Russian language as the second state language. This situation lasted for one week, and then the proposal was turned down. But for majority of people in Crimea (where a significant part of the population is military sailors) and Eastern Ukraine Russian language is their mother tongue and the only language they could speak. That is why even an attempt of such abolishment led to vigorous protest.

National language is one of the main factors of national identification. Destruction of a national language is similar to destruction of a nation; in psychoanalytic terms, it is an equivalent of castration. In result of this attempt, another protest movement started in Russian-speaking regions of Ukraine. At first, its participants required federalization and autonomy inside Ukraine.

People of Eastern regions who did not carry out any attacks, explosions, or shootings were condemned as separatists and terrorists, and nationalist militant brigades were sent to suppress them and later were supported

by regular troops. I would like to repeat that they did not attack anyone and did not leave their region at all. But after the first shootings and first murders, a different psychological mechanism was triggered, and the situation started to develop like a real paranoia.

Additional factors included the former oligarchic President's flight to Russia, referendum and separation of Crimea, humanitarian help from Russia to self-declared republics, Russian volunteers among irregular brigades in Lugansk and Donetsk—all these factors have increased anti-Russian attitude<sup>2</sup>.

On the other hand, although I do not know how wide-spread these events are, but there are some worrying slogans like "Ukraine above all" (the exact copy of Nazi slogan "Deutschland überalles"), torchlight processions, fascist symbols (swastikas) on posters, military uniforms, and rebirth of nationalism. They create additional reasons for mutual misunderstanding and escalation of the situation. All these manifestations of neo-Nazism and nationalism take place with the connivance of official authorities.

In general, it could be stated that at the moment there are two protest movements in Ukraine which have some similarities and some significant differences: 1. Similarities. In both cases, in Kiev and in Eastern Ukraine, there were massive protest movements and forceful assumption of power (in both cases, by illegitimate means); and 2. Differences. New Kiev power actually sent a message to Eastern regions: "You have to disown your historical memory, forget your personal and family history, sacrifices of your fathers and grandfathers and heroes you honored, and after that you should live, think, and perceive everything like we do and in our language, including approving SS veterans processions and bringing flowers to Stepan Bandera's monuments." In my opinion, it is imposed slavery. And at the same time, it is revenge, because Western Ukrainians were forced to learn other people's history and to honor other people's heroes for decades. Revenge is an explanation to "Fall of Lenin" phenomenon (destruction of Lenin monuments) and desecration of graves and monuments of heroes in the Second World War.

New leaders of Eastern regions declared: "We want to protect our historical memory, to live and think the way we want, to honor our fathers, grandfathers, and our national heroes. But we won't prevent you from living the way you want". For some reasons, the Western world perceives new Kiev power as rebels, and rebels of Eastern regions as terrorists.

If a few thousand Russian-speakers came to Germany, the UK, or a Western Ukrainian city, they would have to learn German, English or Ukrainian. It would be their choice. But there are a few million people in Lugansk and Donetsk regions, who did not move there; they have always lived there on their historical lands and spoken their language. I believe, it gives them a right to have autonomy.

We all need to understand that it is impossible to force millions of people of one nation to consider people from different nations. We should strive for reconciliation and consensus. We need to mourn those who lost their lives and to forget or even bury our former hatred. But if we try to prove to each other who was a hero and who was not, there will be no peace at all, as minimum for three to five generations of our children and grandchildren. Do we want it?

In my opinion, there are two ways to deal with the situation:

1. We can try to understand and accept specifics of national history and national identification of Eastern

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<sup>2</sup> Since March 2014, the Ukrainian media impose the idea that Russian regular troops including tank battalions have invaded Donetsk and Lugansk regions, but there have been no proof of this fact. Considering advanced technologies of satellite surveillance with video observation and photographic survey, if there was at least indirect proof, it would be immediately spread by all world media. So, it is internal Ukrainian's conflict and Russia—it is projection only.

and Western Ukrainians and facilitate their common striving for peace;

2. We can try to force one nation to live in accordance with other nation's worldview, but in this case, escalation of conflict is inevitable. It is not a territorial problem, but rather a problem of different mentalities.

In conclusion, I would like to say a few words about another psychological phenomenon. Anniversaries of events are accompanied with memories of the past, both happy and tragic ones, and psycho-emotional state of individuals and large groups is characterized by regression to apparently forgotten experiences and reactions, which might become as intense as when they take place for the first time. In context of contemporary Ukrainian events, it is appropriate to remember the date of incorporation of Left-Bank Ukraine into Russia: it was in 1654 (360 years ago), and significant part of population as well as Kiev upper class perceived it as a betrayal of Ukrainian people by Bogdan Khmelnytsky, which led to anti-Russian uprisings. It was 75 years ago when Western Ukraine according to Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact (1939) was incorporated into the USSR. In 1944, 70 years ago, the Soviet Army returned to Western Ukraine and continued its victorious march; simultaneously, the fight against "banderovtsi" started, which lasted till 1953. Stepan Bandera escaped in a Western country where he was found and murdered by a Soviet agent; it was in 1959, that is, 55 years ago. Keeping in mind that nothing is forgotten in the area of inherited connections, and considering psychological mechanisms of intergenerational transmission, we should admit that contemporary national policy in Ukraine is to significant degree determined by its history, and a special role is played by population of Western Ukraine, including formation of new Ukrainian language based on Western Ukrainian dialect.

The same historical memory is typical for population of Baltic countries and some regions of Belarus as well as for some repressed and deported people in Caucasus, Crimea, and Povolzhye. It should be mentioned that "Soviet" and "Russian" were synonymous for long period of time. Although Russian people suffered from Bolshevism and Stalinism not to less degree than others, their traumata are perceived as "intra-ethnic" (like intra-family) issue, while the abovementioned ethnic groups have much more complicated and internationally projected dynamics as result of humiliation suffered in the Soviet time. It is possible that these, not yet fully explored, phenomena have become the basis of anti-Russism, spread in post-Soviet space. Actually, all nations in post-Soviet countries, including Russia, as I have already argued in case of post-totalitarian states, can be classified as traumatized societies (Freud, 1990). However, there are methods in contemporary psychology which allow to reduce tension in such situations and form more adequate mutual perceptions in hostile parties; these methods, called "peoples diplomacy", have been tested in different regions of the world (Volkan, 2013). But first of all, it is vital that military conflict should come to its end.

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