

**SCTMG 2023**  
**International Scientific Conference «Social and Cultural Transformations in the Context of  
Modern Globalism»**

**CULTURAL MEMORY AS A SOCIAL PHENOMENON:  
THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL ANALYSIS**

Alita Abdulaeva (a)\*, Lydia Kurbanova (b)  
\*Corresponding author

(a) Kadyrov Chechen State University, Grozny, Russia, elita8881@mail.ru  
(b) Kadyrov Chechen State University, Grozny, Russia, medna59@mail.ru

**Abstract**

The aim of the study is to present a theoretical analysis of the phenomenon of cultural memory as a social phenomenon, as well as to consider the main approaches to its study in foreign and domestic humanitarian discourse. The phenomenon of memory, as such, in its individual, collective, social dimension, has been one of the categories in demand for research for hundreds of years. Nevertheless, it is in recent decades that the theme of cultural memory as a stable social construct, acting as a link between the past, present and future, has become relevant with new force, acquiring, in the current socio-historical realities, a new, if not to say, missionary sound. The methodology of the research is based on general philosophical methods: dialectical cognition, analysis, synthesis, analogy, etc. The result of the presented comparativist research is the conclusion that the phenomenon of cultural memory, its nature and essential characteristics, today continues to remain in the status of a debatable category, where the development of a single, generally accepted concept of cultural memory is still far from complete, and the vector of scientific research is interdisciplinary in nature.

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*Keywords:* Culture, cultural memory, collective memory, heritage, historical memory, individual memory

## 1. Introduction

The relevance of the presented topic is conditioned, first of all, by the peculiarities of the socio-historical context in which the civilization of the third millennium is developing. Today, in the conditions of global transformation processes, covering all, without exception, areas of human existence, the issues of spiritual reflection, the search for meanings, moral pillars, on which, in fact, only society can rely in the hope of preserving its own identity and stability in the situation of total civilizational acceleration, become acutely demanded. From this point of view, memory, as a mechanism of continuity, a guide and a link between the past and the future, acts as a form of objectification of human history in the present, and against the background of deep transformations of today's day, it acquires nothing less than strategic importance (Kochelyaeva, 2015).

Memory, as such, has been an object of research interest for many centuries, representing one of the fundamental categories of humanitarian discourse. In the most diverse branches of scientific knowledge (philosophy, anthropology, physiology, psychology, history, cultural studies, etc.), memory has been considered in various aspects, from phenomenological to phenomenological and cultural. Memory has been considered in its different aspects, from phenomenological to historiosophic and cultural. Sustained interest to this problematic is certainly evident, since memory, being the main instrument of preservation and transmission of material and spiritual values, is a category of enduring importance for both an individual and society as a whole. With all the scale of the accumulated academic material in the field of memory research, today's interest in memory, the so-called "memory boom", is becoming an unprecedented phenomenon in the humanitarian field (Giza, 2024; Mascareno & Chavez, 2024; Mambetova et al., 2024).

## 2. Problem Statement

At each historical stage, the forms, methods and interpretations of the past acquire a coloring peculiar to the current moment, germinating in human consciousness in the version dictated by the situation "here and now". New conditions, "growing" to historical contexts, layering on them and integrating into them, form new meanings and images, creating every time a mobile environment for the development of public consciousness (Kochelyaeva, 2007). Such contradictions are especially acute in the periods of global transformations and social breakdowns, generating multiple crises and change of worldview meanings and reference points. Here we can fully and completely refer to the interpretations of P. Nora, one of the most prominent researchers. Nora (2005), one of the outstanding researchers of memory, who noted that the boom of memory studies that began in the late 1980s, is primarily due to the rapid dynamics of social processes and the total "acceleration of history", superfast transformations and innovative integrations that have left no sphere of our existence without its influence (Collet-Sabé, 2023; Manakbayeva, 2023; Sheveleva, 2024).

## 3. Research Questions

The current socio-cultural and geopolitical agenda, characterized as a time of cataclysms, crises and total destabilization, has led to transformations in the processes of interaction between the past, present and future. The juxtaposition of such diametrically opposed trends, where the significant past, reflected in traditional values, is layered on the culture of the era of globalization, coexists with it and is an integral attribute of social development and a guarantor of sustainability. This gives rise to the search for new approaches to understanding such phenomenon as "memory" (Kosobutskaya, 2017). Today we can talk about the formation and development of a new scientific paradigm focused on the consideration of man and society in the context of their relationship with the course of history. Great attention is paid to socio-cultural aspects of human existence, the analysis of individual and collective identity, intercultural interaction, the relationship of human communities with time, culture, history, memory.

#### **4. Purpose of the Study**

Among the emerging research directions, the most notable, significant, and at the same time, the most controversial one was the interdisciplinary study of the "history of memory" (Repina, 2003). This direction, which has emerged as an independent field of scientific knowledge and is called memory studies, combines the most diverse aspects of memory research from the perspective of many disciplines and outlines the most diverse range of problems: identity, individual memory, social, historical, collective, cultural memory and many other memory categories. Our research interest is focused on one of these categories, namely, cultural memory as a social phenomenon.

#### **5. Research Methods**

The theoretical and methodological basis of the study is the most famous theories and concepts of memory presented in the works of both foreign (M. Halbwachs, P. Ricoeur, J. Assmann, P. Nora, et al.) and domestic (Y.M. Lotman, E.A. Ivashina, A.R. Luria, M.M. Bakhtin, et al.) researchers. The theoretical analysis of the corpus of actual sources in the field of humanitarian research of cultural memory as a social phenomenon became the basis of the work. The approaches generally accepted in science (systemic, dialectical, philosophical-cultural, structural-functional, as well as analysis, synthesis and analogy) allowed us to clarify the essence of such concepts as "memory", "collective memory", "social memory", "cultural memory" and identify the main criteria for their differentiation.

#### **6. Findings**

In the context of the above-mentioned aspects, the aim of our research is to present a theoretical analysis of the phenomenon of cultural memory as a social phenomenon, as well as to consider the main approaches to its study in foreign and domestic humanitarian discourse.

This goal determined the main objectives of the study. It aims to analyze the background of the formation of the concept of "cultural memory", to consider the content characteristics of the phenomenon and identify its relationship with the concepts of individual, collective and social memory. It involves comparing different approaches to the study of cultural memory to substantiate the significance of cultural memory in public consciousness in the context of globalization.

The perception of cultural memory exactly in the status of a meta-concept is explained by its place in culture, in its broad understanding, as one of the components of collective memory, aimed at storing, maintaining and implementing behavioral and communicative skills of both individual and any social communities (Ragozina, 2017).

In the early 20th century, the first concepts oriented to understanding memory as an object of sociocultural and philosophical comprehension appeared. The first theories of memory, aimed at its interpretation through the prism of social and cultural aspects, are associated primarily with the names of Western researchers: E. Durkheim, M. Halbwachs, F. Bartlett, A. Warburg, J. G. Mead, et al. The key aspect of their theories is the understanding of memory as a phenomenon with dynamic characteristics, subject to external influences (Tolkacheva, 2016). By defining the collective dimension of memory using different terms: "collective", "historical", "social", "cultural memory", different authors either identify them or strictly differentiate them; there is no unanimously accepted understanding of memory as a social phenomenon in memory studies today (Kosobutskaya, 2017). However, attempts to organize such terminological chaos and to determine the relationship between the proposed definitions should be considered as a positive marker, demonstrating the natural and natural research process of forming a new "paradigm of memory" (Kroitor, 2010).

M. Halbwachs built his own fabrications based on the main provisions of the sociological concept of E. Durkheim, who considered culture in its inseparable unity with society, where both develop in parallel interaction according to one specific law. According to E. Durkheim, it is the collective consciousness that has the priority power, which, as he believed, not only is not subordinate to individual individuals, but also has the most powerful force influencing them (Durkheim, 1995). M. Halbwachs (2007) writes: "individuals come and go, are born and die, but society continues to exist as a kind of self-sufficient integrity", and in this he is absolutely in line with his teacher (p. 24).

According to E. Durkheim (1995), the formation, reproduction and recreation of these practices are the basis, the spiritual core of those common ideas that ensure the integrity of a community.

M. Halbwachs (2007) considers the social context of memory through the category of "memory frames" or "memory boundaries", which means certain reference points, "anchors", reference collective memories, clinging to which a person reconstructs the events of the past, relying on the memory of others.

The theory of social memory has formed around itself a whole plead of ardent adherents, such as R. Bastide, C. Lévi-Strauss, P. Ricoeur, and, at the same time, predetermined the emergence of completely different concepts that offer us a completely different view of the phenomenon of collective memory (N. A. Kochelyaeva, 2015).

In the field of memorial studies, J. Assmann (2004) is undoubtedly considered a classic who presented one of the fundamental studies of cultural memory as a phenomenon reflecting the social aspects of being. Nevertheless, (and Assmann himself makes it public), the very notion of cultural memory was introduced into humanitarian knowledge several decades earlier by representatives of the Moscow-Tartu school of semiotics, whose ideological inspiration was the outstanding Y. M. Lotman; it was he who introduced the term "cultural memory" into scientific discourse. The main subject of Lotman's research interest, which occupied him throughout his scientific career, was culture in its sign-symbolic manifestation. Lotman (1992) emphasized the specificity of the functioning of cultural memory

mechanisms as a key point; he pointed out that the perception and evaluation of texts are always mediated by spatial and temporal characteristics: any new time brings new cultural codes, which means that their decoding in each specific time period has a new interpretation.

Defining culture as a non-hereditary memory of society, Y. M. Lotman (1992) noted that it is based on the system of prohibitions and prescriptions. This thesis reflects the social nature of culture, although it does not deny the possibility of individual culture (in the case when a person identifies himself with a certain community), this is the first; the second is that the culture as a memory always exists in a historical context. These principles proceed from the mechanisms of translation of life experience into its textual expression, that is, before becoming a true element of culture, a historical fact or event must be correlated with a certain sign-symbol in language, then becoming a text. Y. M. Lotman (2010) writes: "... the introduction of a fact into the collective memory reveals all the signs of translation from one language into another, in this case, into the language of culture" (p. 21).

We believe that the reference to the positions of Y. M. Lotman was appropriate and timely, because it makes it obvious that his approach to the study of cultural memory was a springboard to the further development of memorial problems. J. Assmann (2004, p. 33) writes: "...in the late 70s of the twentieth century, the problem of 'text archaeology' was raised in the scientific community. It was these studies, which gave grounds for understanding the text as a "renewed message ... in a stretched situation", that led to the fact that "... phenomena and problems, in connection with which the notion of "cultural memory" was called for, came into view "Cultural memory" grew from the concept of "stretched situation", following Yuri Lotman and other cultural theorists.

In the framework of our problematic, we cannot avoid another notable figure in the field of memorial studies, P. Nora, a French historian who proposed his concept of cultural memory. Nora considers the history of culture through the concept of "places of memory", objects, in which memory finds shelter, being the embodiment of cultural memory. The author refers to places of memory as forms of objectification of the past: archives, memorials, monuments, ceremonies and others. Places of memory are not always expressed exclusively in the material form. Nora also includes various celebrations, solemn and ritual speeches, and significant dates. It is not so much the form of fixation of this memory that is important, but rather the desire of society to remember historical events of value to it and to preserve them in the present through symbolic actions or objects. Society is increasingly attracted to memories as a defense mechanism that allows it to feel it's belonging to the origins, belonging to the collective consciousness, spatial and temporal continuity (Nora, 2005).

Among contemporary foreign authors, Astrid Erll's research has had a wide response. The author gives an interpretation of cultural memory as a connection between the past and the present in the socio-cultural aspect with the inevitable condition of including the past in the context of the current time. This interpretation implies that cultural memory should be considered at different levels, from individual memories of a person to the level of memory places, which sometimes have an international scope (Erll & Nunning, 2008).

Their point of view is expressed by V. Fortunati and E. Lamberti, defining cultural memory as a complex construct consisting not only of images and facts of the past and individual and group experience, but also of the forms of perception in which these experiences appear in the present. Through

commemoration, the events of the past, although they do not change in content, are nevertheless actualized in the present day and filled with new meanings. Based on the authors' position, a person can never know the true version of the past; being transformed at each historical stage, its meaning in the present is different from the original. Memory is a dynamic category; cultural memory depends on the social situation and changes in time (Fortunati & Lamberti, 2008).

It is impossible to outline the whole range of problems and diversity of approaches to the phenomenon of cultural memory in the format of this study. We have considered only some of the most well-known and significant concepts of cultural memory today. As we can see, the ambiguity of opinions is increasingly expanding the discursive field of the problem, and we cannot speak about consensus and unanimity of opinions yet; only one thing is obvious: this topic requires deep interdisciplinary research and is becoming more and more important in the modern world.

The domestic school of sociocultural studies of memory is based on the original concept of cultural memory of Y. M. Lotman. His idea of culture as a meaning-generating construct reflected also in memory, where it (culture) is not only stored, but also reproduced in new meanings and values, is continued in the works of E. A. Ivanshina. She writes about the ability of texts to metamorphose, when they, being lost, discover the ability to regenerate, in the process of which the source text is inevitably deformed, encountering other texts. The result of metamorphosis is a new text, which, nevertheless, carries information about its former self (E. A. Ivanshina, 2010).

Awareness of the growing importance of memory as a socio-cultural phenomenon of modernity is found in the studies of many Russian researchers. The main directions of these studies are historical-philosophical and historical-cultural approaches (Y. A. Arnautova, M. Barga, A. Vasiliev, et al.) (Tolkacheva, 2016).

Applied aspects of cultural memory, forms of its objectification in space: commemorative practices, forms of historical representations of a person and society, are discussed in detail in the Russian socio-philosophical environment in various aspects by E. Besedina, T. Burkova, A. Boroznyak. They raise the issues of traumatization and deformation of cultural memory and transformation of historical consciousness of society (Ragozina, 2017).

The scientific works of L. P. Repina, who considers cultural memory as a process that determines the formation of socio-cultural identity of society through the mechanisms of memorialization and reconstruction of the past in the collective consciousness, each time actualizing them in accordance with the needs of the present, are of great interest. L. P. Repina (2003) does not equivocally advocate the equivalence of the concepts of cultural and historical memory, nor does she draw a boundary between them; the author considers the consideration of the "image of the past" through the analysis of its different levels: rational, mental and emotional to be the only correct approach.

It should be said that in domestic science, the consideration of cultural and historical memory in the context of their relationship with the mentality is one of the characteristic trends. Cultural and historical memory, as two basic constructs that determine the content of collective consciousness, are the main factors in the formation of national identity. In the conditions of critical development of society, the historical consciousness of social groups becomes vulnerable and especially susceptible to

transformation; its adaptation to the realities and current needs of the time takes place. Today this context is of particular importance for the Russian society.

## 7. Conclusion

Summarizing the above, we note that the phenomenon of cultural memory today has no unambiguous interpretation either in foreign or in domestic scientific and humanitarian space. In the broadest interpretation, cultural memory is considered as a sign-symbolic construct reflecting the culture and way of life of previous generations, embodied in two aspects: memorial and actual, and acting as a guide and link between the past and the present. As one of the most specific and complete definitions of cultural memory, we are close to the formulation of M. N. Kroitor.

Cultural memory is an explanatory principle that reveals the mechanisms of social reproduction, a continuous process of recreating the past in the actual present, a branched information system that contains in "rolled up" form, a set of culturally fixed rules of organization of social activity... (Repina, 2003, p. 11)

In general, all the diversity of author's concepts and approaches to the study of cultural memory finds unity in the postulates of the collective nature of cultural memory, its social conditionality, determinism by actual conditions, imagery and objectification in memorial practices and material objects.

## Acknowledgments

The research was carried out with the support of the grant of the Russian Science Foundation (RNF) No. 23-28-00698.

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