

## ARTICLE

# NATIONAL IDEA AND HISTORICAL MEMORY

Gulnaz K. Gizatova<sup>1\*</sup>, Olga G. Ivanova<sup>2</sup>, Alexander S. Safonov<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Social Philosophy, Institute of Social and Philosophical Sciences and Mass Communications,  
Kazan, RUSSIA

<sup>2</sup>Department of Philosophy, KAI, Kazan, Tatarstan, RUSSIA

## ABSTRACT

The national idea can be interpreted as a set of values in their spiritual and symbolic expression, as a system of goals guiding the activities of the people, and so the national idea plays an important role in the history of the people, being one of the foundations for its self-identification, providing consolidation of different social groups, especially in critical periods of history. The national idea is always determined from social and cultural aspect, it is formed by the historical conditions of the people's existence, its mentality, traditions, values. In the formation of a national idea, the most important factors are objective processes, the subject of which is an ethnos. The national idea is aimed at overcoming the most important contradictions, difficulties, unresolved problems that restrain the development of the nation, creating guidelines that become a program for the development of the ethnos for the future. At the same time, being oriented to the future, the national idea cannot be formed and maintain its viability if it's not based on the historical experience of a particular ethnos, the experience that is reflected, first of all, in the historical memory of this people. The connection between the national idea and historical memory is of a complex nature. Historical memory is a complex phenomenon that has both objective and subjective levels of its existence and reflection. In recent decades, historical memory has been regarded as one of the most important scientific problems, which can be explained by a number of reasons, among which we can single out a "linguistic turn" in philosophy, the development of narratology and, above all, the aggravation of national contradictions in the world, which led to the growth of national self-awareness.

## INTRODUCTION

**KEY WORDS**  
national, national idea,  
historical memory,  
narratology, historical  
experience, illusory.

As we know, the problem of the national idea turned out to be the focus of attention among Russian scholars and publicists in the 90-ies, when with the collapse of the communist ideology and the awareness of the country disintegration real threat, they created the need to develop a new ideology capable of society consolidation. National idea has to be the core of this ideology. And now, there has been an active discussion on the following issues for almost 30 years: can a national idea exist and does it exist or is it a mythologeme? Can Russia have a national idea, and does the country need it? Are the concepts "Russian idea", "the national idea of Russia" synonymous and what is their correlation if they are not synonymous? Answering these questions, the scholars are in different, sometimes polar positions. E.A. Batalov in the monograph "The Russian Idea and the American Dream" calls them "mass social myths", "great myths" [1]. According to V. Kozhinov, it is difficult to detect a national idea in the history of our country, and Russia does not need a national idea, because we are above such an idea (our emphasis) [2]. I.B. Orlov adheres to the same view: "Russia almost never had a clearly formulated national idea, although all of its components separately have been existed in the popular consciousness for a long time" [3]. Most researchers note that the very concept of a "national idea" is rather vague and its various interpretations are possible. The national idea can be interpreted as a set of values in their spiritual and symbolic expression (Orlov), as a system of goals, as a spiritual attitude, guiding people activities, etc. At the same time, social scientists agree that the national idea plays a big role in the history of people, being one of the foundations of its self-identification, contributing to the unification of all layers of society, especially during critical periods of history.

## METHODS

In this article, social and philosophical methods were implemented, including the methodological tools of hermeneutics. Besides, they applied a comparative historical method during the consideration of the national idea transformation.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The site of the project "New Philosophy" demonstrates an interesting discussion, which is directly related to the topic of this article. The authors of the project chose the definition of a national idea as the subject of analysis and critics, which they found in the philosophical dictionary edited by V.Ye. Kemerov. At the same time, the authors of the site emphasize that this definition is almost the only one they could detect in modern social and philosophical literature. The definition is formulated as follows: "A national idea is a systematized generalization of national self-consciousness in its supra-temporal being, most often represented in the form of socio-philosophical or sociopolitical texts and artistic works. Accordingly, a national idea can have both a rationalized and an image-typing mode of its expression. The essence of the National idea is the problem of existence meaning for a given nation-ethnos" [4]. Omitting the part of the project author critical argumentation, we give their (underlined by us - G.G., O.I., A.S.) definition of a

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\*Corresponding Author  
Email:  
Gulnaz.Gizatova@kpfu.ru

national idea, which, as they emphasize, is completely different from the previous one. And it is true indeed. According to the developers of the "New Philosophy", the national idea is a certain universal idea, the implementation of which will improve the quality of life dramatically for the total number of the country citizens and the whole country in general. This idea should go beyond the framework of the nation, people, country and should be applicable not only for Russia, but also for the whole world, i.e. can be replicated on the entire planet. On the one hand, this idea should be very capacious, i.e. it can be expressed in several phrases, but on the other hand, this idea should cover all areas of human activity [Read 4]. Giving credit to the desire of the authors for the universal interpretation of the national idea, we would like to note the obvious abstractness and the utopian nature of such an approach. Of course, the national idea is a universal idea as the authors emphasize. One cannot but agree with this. But it's quite obvious that a national idea cannot be any other than a universal one, in the sense that any national idea always expresses certain principles and values that were developed as the result of the socio-historical development of humanity as a whole. At the same time, the consideration of the national idea as a universal one clearly reduces the heuristic possibilities of such phenomenon study as national consciousness, national self-consciousness, national identity, national memory, etc. It should be noted that the concept of "universal" is not a scientific category. As V.V. Shnyukov points out rightly, it is quite likely that the "universal" is a theoretical construct, or an ideological fiction. Besides, the author emphasizes that the difficulty for research is also that foreign philosophy has no single term corresponding to "universal" in Russian, although one can distinguish the concepts that correlate with "universal" by content. The use of the terms "absolute", "universal", "generic", inherent in "human nature", etc. testifies both to the significance of this concept, and to the incompleteness of its development not only in the domestic, but also in Western philosophy. So, there is a single theme of "universal" both in science and beyond its framework, but the development of a single concept is a project rather than reality [5].

The national idea is always determined socially and culturally, it is shaped by the historical conditions of people existence, its mentality, traditions, and values. So, I.A. Ilyin, speaking of Russian national idea, emphasized that "it must express the Russian historical originality and the Russian historical vocation at the same time" [6].

Even more serious objections are raised by the abovementioned definition of a national idea as a national one when they refer to real phenomena of formed and emerging national ideas. So, J. Adams, who used the term "American dream" first, interpreted it as a dream "of a land where a person's life could become better, richer and fuller depending on his abilities and achievements" [7]. The American political historian, the professor of Columbia University Alan Brinkley formulates the American national idea as follows: nothing is such a central factor for America image as the idea of individual freedom ... And this was, in his opinion, the defining characteristic of American democracy for more than two centuries [Read 8].

A completely different approach to the national idea understanding, as well as a fundamentally different tone in the formulation of a national idea, is revealed on the website of the national party of Ireland.

Our guiding principle is the National Idea. The idea that everything depends primarily on the existence of the Irish nation and that all economic, cultural and social considerations must be subordinate to this. In other words, before we consider the social policy of the Irish people, there must be the Irish people ... The creation of the link with the people past creates a sense of collective testing and guides people to the future. The identification with past and future generations gives society the basic ideals as the community members. People who see themselves as a whole are more likely to sacrifice for this whole, for its benefit. And it is less likely that they will sacrifice themselves for a society in which they feel themselves as mere tourists [See: 9]. Considering the national idea as the most important factor of people preservation, the authors present an alternative to the national idea. And the alternative they outlined is a real modern society, which is characterized as follows. The relations that unite society are weakening. Clumsy government mechanisms appear instead. We all become state clients. There are no more compatriots or even just citizens. And the state, in its current form, is just the franchise of globalized capitalism. We have no politicians. We do not have government employees. We have no journalists. We have brand representatives instead [8]. Returning to our thesis that a national idea cannot be defined as universal and identified with a universal idea, we would like to emphasize even on the basis of the provided examples that any general patterns are refracted through specific and, above all, national-cultural characteristics. Therefore, to talk about the possibility of the same national idea application, to make it "applicable ... for the whole world, i.e. so that it can be replicated throughout the entire planet," in our opinion, means the complete ignoring of the historical development peculiarities and contradictions of an ethnos, complex socio-political and spiritual-moral processes, traditions and mentality, specific for a specific ethnos only. [9]

In our opinion, the most important factors of a national idea development are the objective processes, the subject of which is one or another ethnos. The national idea is aimed to overcome the most important contradictions, difficulties, unresolved problems that hold back the development of the nation, creating the guidelines that become the program for the development of an ethnic group for the future. At the same time, being oriented towards the future, a national idea cannot be formed and maintain its viability if it does not rely on the historical experience of a particular ethnic group, an experience that is reflected, above all, in the historical memory of a given people. Thus, in accordance with the "neo-primordialist" understanding of all modern nations as the products of the ancient ethnic "building material", the

followers of E. Smith strongly emphasized the cultural, symbolic (ethnic) and mythological aspects of nation-building [10].

The connection of the national idea and historical memory has a complex nature. Naturally, the roots of any national idea go deep into the history of a people, and one cannot but agree with Kozhinov when he says that “no popular idea exists without the historical memory of the people” [2]. At the same time, the “mummification” of the national idea as a historical past prevents an adequate assessment of society state at a specific historical moment and thus the definition of goals and objectives for the future, which is one of the main functions of the national idea. According to A.A. Kutsenkov, “the national idea exists not to fix the achieved state of society, but to call forward” [11]. In the above-mentioned monograph, E. Batalov notes that the formation of the American national myth (American Dream) was less influenced by the country historical past, since the immigrants who arrived in the United States did not have a common national history, and it is more oriented to futurological nature, the striving for future [1].

## CONCLUSIONS

Historical memory is a complex phenomenon that has both objective and subjective levels of its existence and reflection. In recent decades, historical memory is considered as one of the most important scientific problems, which is explained by a number of reasons, among which are the “linguistic turn” in philosophy, the development of narratology and, above all, the aggravation of national contradictions in the world, which caused the growth of national identity. Historical memory is the basis of national-ethnic identity, has a great influence on a national idea development. But the following point of view seems to be quite legitimate: the historical memory reflects not so much historical reality but a subjective reflection of this reality. Hence, historical memory can potentially act as a tool for deliberate history distortion or falsification [12].

A fundamentally different approach is possible to understand the national idea as a special form of collective self-deception, as an idealized view of the nation about itself, which is always separated from reality and the real state of affairs. Proceeding from this, it can be assumed that the national idea is a certain idealized model and to explain the existing gap between it and reality precisely by this. However, modeling assumes that the model contains all the essential characteristics, both positive and negative ones, while the national idea includes selectively only the positive properties of the nation. When they say that the national idea is “the thought of God about the nation in eternity” (Berdyayev), they hardly assume that this thought may be the thought of contempt. Besides, a particular concern with the problem of a national idea articulation is inherent to the nations with the claim to Messiah role, so it is doubtful that will reproach or condemn themselves.

Based on this, we can say that the national idea is the essence of the nation self-determination through self-deception. However, we believe that the value of a national idea is its recognition as a lie. If the illusion is hidden or simply not noticed, then the national idea turns into an escape from reality. In contrast, if a national idea is recognized as an illusion, then it can serve as reality change model. There are two ways before a nation: to reconcile with oneself in the sweet deception of the fact that it is better than it actually is, or try to change its real state of affairs with a national idea as a goal. By confronting a national idea with reality, the national idea either replaces the real and the imaginary is presented as real, or this collision becomes the way of reality change. The comparison of a false national idea with the true essence of a nation is a way of a holistic acceptance of reality. It is the way to notice flaws in oneself, and not to conceal them under the cover of unwarranted self-importance. The same goes for historical memory. With only a phantom of a national idea concerning the nation desires, its history ceases to be the way of self-exaltation or self-justification for it. The history in this case is accepted as a whole, along with errors, since it is the correction of the mistakes from the past and the present that is the path to the national idea implementation.

A national idea has a negative meaning when it is intended to answer the question “who are we?”, although in a positive and productive sense, the national idea answers the question “who should we become?”. At the same time, it is impossible to identify the national idea with the concept of fate, since fate implies the inevitability of the national idea embodiment. It is required to understand that the national idea is not guaranteed in any way, that this illusion can be actual only through everyday efforts. If you do not hold in your head the thought that a national idea is such a productive illusion, then this illusion can take the place of reality and then the nation will find itself in the situation that Nietzsche describes with the words “poverty and filth, and a miserable self-satisfaction.” Thus, there is a relevance of the national idea comprehensive analysis. This is possible only on the basis of its relationship statement with the national self-consciousness, which includes the historical memory of the people, which may contain both idealized ideas of the ethnos about itself and the people illusions.

### CONFLICT OF INTEREST

There is no conflict of interest.

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## FINANCIAL DISCLOSURE

None

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