

## **SECTION 14.**

### **PSYCHOLOGY AND PSYCHIATRY**

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## **A PSYCHOANALYTIC PERSPECTIVE ON HISTORICAL TRAUMA AND CLIMATE CHANGE IN CONTEMPORARY EUROPE**

The relevance and prospects of this study are determined by the fact that historical trauma in the modern psychoanalytic paradigm is understood not as a completed event, but as a dynamic process of unconscious transmission of catastrophic experience (wars, repressions, genocide) through generations. Today, this issue is becoming particularly acute in the context of the ecological crisis. Climate change acts as an autonomous source of stress, but also a powerful trigger, actualizing old collective wounds. The phenomenon of «double burden» requires a deep analysis of the protective mechanisms of the psyche, which prevent adequate perception of reality and block the processing of both past and present crisis experience.

The aim of the research is to focus on the psychoanalytic mechanisms of the relationship between historical trauma and the modern climate crisis, revealing the role of defensive processes in the formation of individual and collective identity in the context of environmental disasters.

In a psychoanalytic context, historical trauma is a collective experience of catastrophic events (wars, repressions, genocide), which is not limited to the life of one generation, but is unconsciously transmitted to descendants, shaping their psyche and identity.

The connection between historical trauma and climate change is currently considered through the concept of «double burden». The modern ecological crisis does not simply create new stress but acts as a trigger for old collective wounds. This "burden" acquires a special role in the context of a sense of psychological security. The connection between historical trauma and climate transformations forms a wide complex of «factors of influence on the subjective security of the individual» [2], covering both the perception and assessment of reality through the

prism of collective traumatic experience from the subjective side, and the objective violation of the security of habitual existence by climate disasters.

Psychoanalysis examines the connection between climate and historical trauma through deep, often unconscious mechanisms of denial, guilt, and projection. If cognitive psychology talks about stress, psychoanalysis is about how we hide from a reality that is too painful. From the perspective of psychoanalysis (especially object relations), a person uses splitting as a defense. We know about the catastrophe, but we live as if it is not there.

Trauma connection: If there has been a mass catastrophe in the history of a people, the psyche learns to «turn off» sensitivity to global threats in order to survive. This turns into a collective protective shell that prevents an adequate response to climate change today.

Psychoanalysts (for example, Vamik Volkan) speak of «selected traumas». Speaking about the two stages of grief as trauma, V. Volkan notes that the first stage is «a crisis of grief that begins from the moment of loss or the discovery of the fact of a near loss» [4]. And only by accepting the situation that provoked grief, having survived it, can a person move on to the second stage, which, according to V. Volkan, «can activate the complex internal process of overcoming» [4]. The unprocessed trauma of ancestors is passed on to descendants as a «psychological deposit». The climate crisis is today perceived as an unconscious return of the repressed: the fear of the «end of the world» is often a resonance with the real «end of the world» that great-grandfathers have already experienced (war, famine, exile).

Unlike ordinary grief, melancholy is a loss that a person cannot realize or mourn. Psychoanalysis sees in climate change an aspect of ecological melancholy, that is, the loss of «Mother Earth» as a primary object of security. Historical traumas associated with the loss of roots are superimposed on this, causing deep depression or, conversely, destructive aggression towards the environment (as an attempt to take revenge on the world for past pain).

Nancy McWilliams, as a representative of modern psychoanalysis and a master of psychological diagnosis, emphasizes not so much instincts as personality structure, security, and human dignity.

McWilliams often relies on the idea that for mental health, a person needs a sense of predictability in the world. In this context, historical trauma (wars, repression) destroys this trust for generations to come. Climate change for such a person is not an «ecological agenda» but confirmation that «the world has become dangerous again» [3]. Since «security is one of the basic needs that manifests itself in critical and dangerous situations» [1], such a loss of trust and belief in the danger of the world directly leads to the threat of violation of the satisfaction of this need,

which in turn leads to the accumulation of anxiety and a sense of hopelessness.

McWilliams details how different personalities deal with anxiety. In the context of climate crisis and historical memory, this dissociation implies that if our ancestors survived by «forgetting» the horror, modern descendants may dissociate from environmental threats.

According to Nancy McWilliams, in addition to dissociation, the individual may use more «active» but no less destructive ways to protect themselves from the fear of climatic and historical collapse.

The therapeutic approach implies that we cannot adapt to climate change until we acknowledge (reclaim) what has already been lost in the history of our family and our land. Without this, grief turns into chronic depression or apathy.

Dissociation («It's not me»). N. McWilliams notes that «characterological dissociative disorder sufferers» adults who have experienced childhood trauma can be «called multiple personalities» [3]. This is a way to save the psyche from being overloaded. If a person carries a historical trauma (for example, the memory of disasters where nothing depended on him), his psyche chooses to «switch off» so as not to feel horror at the climate. This looks like apathy, but in fact it is a deep freezing of feelings.

Hypercontrol («I'll fix everything»). This is an attempt to regain subjectivity, which, according to M. McWilliams, is analogous to the fact that «for a newborn, the world and the «I» are one whole» [3]. For people with obsessive-compulsive dynamics or the trauma of losing their home, manic adherence to eco-rules becomes a «magic ritual». It is a way of telling fate: «If I follow the rules perfectly, the catastrophe (historical or climatic) will not happen again».

These mechanisms feed off each other in society. Those in control get angry at the «indifferent» (dissociated). Those in dissociation see activists as crazy.

**Conclusions.** Historical trauma often forces us to see the world either as a «paradise» (which we have lost) or as a «hell» (which is coming). Accept that the planet and our future can be both dangerous and beautiful. Reduce the degree of catastrophization.

The current climate situation is not just an environmental challenge, but a deep psychological drama, closely intertwined with historical memory.

Climate change is a powerful trigger for historical trauma. It reactivates old scenarios of homelessness, deportation, and existential insecurity. For the psyche, it is not a «new event» but a retraumatization – a return of the horrors that our ancestors already experienced.

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