

T. U. Perga
*State Institution «Institute of the World History
of Academy of Science of Ukraine»*

УДК 504.03+94(471)

**ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY OF UKRAINE THROUGH
THE PRISM OF MEMORY ON CHERNOBYL DISASTER**

У статті презентовано новий підхід до дослідження індивідуальної, колективної та історичної пам'яті — через призму екологічних катастроф.

Ключові слова: індивідуальна пам'ять, травма, екологічна катастрофа, аварія на ЧАЕС.

The paper presents a new approach to the research of individual, collective and historical memory — through the prism of environmental disasters. Although they lead not only to physical but also to mental trauma in modern scientific discourse this aspect has not become a subject of special studies. In the example of Chernobyl disaster traumatic experience of 50 residents of Kiev, who received indirect effects of the accident, is analyzed. It is shown the formation a stable distrust of the authorities of the USSR, which is transferred to the present and entails a negative assessment of the environmental policy of independent Ukraine. Factors, which cause such situation and its relationship with the views of respondents on their future, are established. The conclusion of the feasibility of using the questionnaire method for determining the main trends traumatic impact of environmental disasters on individual memory is done. Directions for further in-depth research in this area are proposed.

Keywords: individual memory, trauma, environmental disaster, the accident at Chernobyl nuclear plant.

В статье представлен новый подход к исследованию индивидуальной, коллективной и исторической памяти — через призму экологических катастроф. Хотя они приводят не только к физическим, но и к психическим травмам, в современном научном дискурсе этот аспект пока не стал предметом специальных исследований.

Ключевые слова: индивидуальная память, травма, экологическая катастрофа, авария на ЧАЭС.

Natural and man-made disasters test the human spirit and often result in pain and suffering that transcends physical wounds. They also influence on the individual and collective memory, attitude to the national environmental policy and confidence to the political elites. This is demonstrated by the ac-

cident at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant, which became the largest man-made environmental disaster of the XX century. Even today, 30 years later, many events are viewed by Ukrainian citizens through its prism.

In modern scientific discourse traumatic experience of environmental disasters has not been yet investigated. In contrast, great attention has been paid to the traumatic experience of the Holocaust [1; 5], World War II [14], different forms of violence [2; 9] etc. Important place in the works of Ukrainian researchers occupies the historical analysis of the trauma in memory caused by the most ambitious tragedy of national history — the Great Famine of 1932–1933 [6; 7; 8; 10; 11; 14]. Therefore, the focus proposed in this essay is fundamentally new in contemporary memory studies.

Development of this area put to scientists many tasks. One of them is a new understanding of trauma and its impact on historical, individual and collective memory. So, first of all it's important to clarify the understanding of trauma. For a long time diagnosing of trauma and post-traumatic syndrome was the prerogative of doctors, psychologists and psychoanalysts. However, the growing interest to this problem, especially in historical and cultural studies expanded the understanding of trauma. Today it rather means a series of consequences of extremely painful, deep and strong emotional shock. American Psychiatric Association recognized the events that lead to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), not only war, torture, rape, the Nazi Holocaust, the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and other forms of violence but also natural disasters (such as earthquakes, hurricanes, and eruptions volcanoes) and human-made disasters (such as factory explosions, airplane crashes, and automobile accidents) [13].

According to the criteria established by the international community, trauma could result from one or more of the following scenarios, in which the individual directly experiences the traumatic event, witnesses the traumatic event in person, learns that the traumatic event occurred to a close family member or close friend (with the actual or threatened death being either violent or accidental) or experiences first-hand repeated or extreme exposure to aversive details of the traumatic event (not through media, pictures, television or movies unless work-related) [3]. This expands the group of people that can get trauma. Due to complex of subscribed factors, we consider the Chernobyl disaster the event that had a significant traumatic effect on a wide range of people.

In this context it's necessary to clarify the signals of trauma. There are some generally accepted criteria for PTSD among which: intrusion, avoidance, negative alterations in cognitions and mood, and alterations in arousal and reactivity etc. They are based on analysis of external manifestations, including emo-

tions and body movements. As Ogienko V. stressed, traumatic memory first of all is available as isolated, non-verbal, emotional fragments and symptoms that are expressed in «body memory» [12, p. 240]. For example, Gadi BenEzer, who investigated the effects of 2-year travel of Ethiopian Jews to their historic homeland, identified 13 signals of trauma: self-report, a «hidden» event, long silence, loss of emotional control, emotional detachment or numbness, repetitive reporting, losing oneself in traumatic event, intrusive images, forceful argumentation of conduct with event, cognitive-emotional disorientation, inability to tell a story at all, changes in voice, change in body language [2, p. 34–35]. Development the signals of trauma have not been completed. Result of this essay could make contribution to this process.

The main objective of this research is the identifying of traumatic experience or its consequences. According to my hypothesis, even after 30 years it is possible to find them in the individual memory of people, indirectly affected by Chernobyl disaster. To test this hypothesis was selected group of people (50 persons) who at the time of the accident (1986) lives in Kiev. It was assumed, that seeing settlers from the Chernobyl zone, hearing various rumors and feeling fear from possible radiation contamination of Kyiv territory, they experienced significant traumatic impact. Age of the respondents in this research was 47–82 years; in the time of accident they were 17–52 y.o. It was supposed, that at this age they could not only accept, but also analyze the information. So their answers may represent the views of the majority of Kyiv residents and considered reliable source for research in this field.

In the investigation of the traumatic experience a wide range of qualitative and quantitative methods are used. For example, researchers of Denmark, Norway and Sweden, analyzing the consequences of the tsunami in the Indian Ocean in 2004 used questionnaires and telephone interviews. But majority of scientists prefer the method of face-to-face interview. The intimate nature of the trauma makes this method popular among historians, who consider it the most productive in the oral history research (for example, F. J. Wertz [15], Dwork [4], Lieblich [9]). In my opinion, it is effective in the work with direct participants and witnesses of traumatic event. But taking into account a long period after the Chernobyl disaster and its indirect impact it was have chosen the method of questionnaire. Unlike face-to-face interviews, it does not allow to analyze non-verbal signals. It is based on the self-awareness of feelings of respondent. But this helps interviewer to avoid false interpretations and gather a rich data. This will demonstrate the main trends and perspectives of further research. So, one more task of this essay is testing the method of questionnaire in memory studies (especially in the research of long-term consequences of traumatic impact).

According to results of the survey, «classic» signs of trauma in the tested group were not found. However, there were identified consequences of traumatic impact of the Chernobyl disaster on the behavior and mentality of respondents. The main of them — is a stable distrust of the authorities. Formation of such situation was facilitated by several factors.

It's necessary to point on attempts of the Soviet government to hide the truth and scale of the disaster and falsification the information. There were many controversies in words and activity of Soviet state bodies. Although the official information about the accident appeared only at April 29, 1986, most of respondents received it on April 26 (the first day after the accident) through the rumors. In official media the explosion on the nuclear plant was described as «...serious but local in scale accident ... case insignificant compared to the threat of an arms race and nuclear war». In all articles there were phrases like «the situation is stabilized», «the level of radioactive emissions decreased 2–3 times», «there is no danger for health» etc. At the same time, on April 28 near 50 000 persons were evacuated from Pripyat and Chernobyl and in some weeks — more than 7000 from 30 km zone. At the end of May all schoolchildren from Kyiv, Zhytomyr and Chernihiv regions were sent on summer holidays to cleaner regions of Ukraine. Such dualism led respondents to believe that something is bad and dangerous.

The news about the accident and described above events generated in the majority of respondents feelings of fear and anxiety. Some of them felt fear or horror, some were confused, some has realized that situation is serious. However, about 10% did not react on this information because they could not understand how to accept it (the Soviet Union promoted the idea of peaceful and secure atom). For this reason, almost half of the respondents could not understand the level of danger and another part could not understand it fully.

Such understanding came in the next years. In 1990 Verkhovna Rada of the USSR recognized that some journalists and officials gave misinformation which caused great harm to citizens exposed by radiation. Declaring the independence of Ukraine in 1991 gave impetus to opening archives and investigation of criminal acts of power, which concealed truthful information about the real threat of explosion on Chernobyl nuclear plant. This strengthened the feeling of distrust to the government.

One more contribution to the growing of this feeling made the delay with giving recommendations to people how to protect themselves from harm effects of radiation, for example, daily wet cleaning, wiping window sills, placing wet rags at the door of the apartment, reducing exposure to fresh air, limiting consumption of milk etc. Most respondents received such recommendations from friends or acquaintances but not from the government. Minis-

ter of the Health of Ukrainian SSR Romanenko appeared in the media space (TV) only on May 6, 1986 and his recommendations were very limited. Only 4 of 35 respondents received needed information from the official sources, and 3 people turned to doctors and medical literature.

The feeling of fear and the desire to protect themselves from radiation caused many respondents to develop their own models of behavior that could be called as survival strategies. The most popular were the following: departure from Kyiv (60%), limiting visiting open air and nature (80%), limiting gathering berries (especially blueberries) and mushrooms (75%). 95% of respondents followed these recommendations. However, some persons used other measures: cutting the hair (fear of gathering radiation), purchasing of dosimeters, using iodine etc. Undoubtedly, the need to adhere to these measures affected the psyche of people and led to the development of the stress.

In generally, respondents followed such recommendations during first 1–2 years after the accident. Some prolonged these restrictions for 5 years. While now all of them lifted but about 60% at purchase of berries and mushrooms continue to ask where they were gathered and 15% of respondents refused from their eating due to the fear of their contaminated with radiation patterns.

Another residual signal of traumatic experience is seen in the fear of visiting the 30 km. zone and adjacent areas. The reason of such behavior is the same — confidence in the pollution of this territory by the radioactive patterns. It is observed in more than half of respondents.

It is clear that the absence of access to the reliable information in the Soviet Union have generated in many respondents feeling of insecurity and the need to worry about themselves. Despite some respondents explain such policy of the government by objective factors («they were confused and do not know what to do», were «not prepared for the scale of the accident»), the majority estimated it as negative and used such epithets as unprofessional, irresponsibility, omissions, deceit, incompetence.

Described above factors had influenced on the views of respondents. About half of them after the accident changed outlook on life. Some of them lost the trust to the government bodies. One respondent wrote that he persuaded in the «lie, ignorance and inaction of the authorities». Important role in this played the fact that members of the ruling Soviet elite «immediately took their children from Kyiv, but nothing said to people».

It's important to emphasize that the Chernobyl accident made a group of respondents more sensitive to external stimuli that remind them of the traumatic event. This is shown by the reaction on the information about the forest fire in summer 2015 in the 30-km zone. Feelings of anxiety, fear, fear for the children, danger and light panic, 2/3 of respondents have associated these

feelings with the possible transferring to Kyiv radioactive particles. It's supposed that the fear of radioactive contamination will remain in the subconscious of this group of people for many years.

All respondents except one think that the consequences of the accident have not yet been overcome. The majority of them see danger in further radioactive pollution due to the incompleteness of «Shelter» over the station. Also they expressed fear of aggravation diseases, possible long-term consequences of mutation of genes and natural species, contraband export of materials from polluted areas, contamination of water sources, not finished the decay of radioactive elements, irresponsibility and incompetence of government experts, misunderstanding by authorities of arisen threat etc. The most precisely those fears expressed in the statement of one respondent «for our days Chernobyl catastrophe hangs over Ukrainian as the sword of Damocles».

Due to this, the overwhelming number of respondents thinks that a similar accident could happen in the future. They feel mostly anxiety and fear, uncertainty about future, hopelessness and even the desire to leave Ukraine. Only 4 persons do not believe in such possibility, and 4 persons do not want to think about this problem. So the negative evaluation of modern environmental policy of Ukraine by all respondents seems logic.

Thus, the results of research allow to draw number of conclusions and assumptions.

1. Even 30 years after the Chernobyl disaster it remains in the memory of Kyiv residents as important event that caused the change of their behavior (in the short, medium or long term perspective) or views on the life.

2. Long period after the accident completely or partially leveled traumatic effects, so signals of trauma were not found. But there were identified two consequences of Chernobyl disaster. One — is the fear of some people to eat food or breathe the air that may be polluted by the radioactive elements.

3. The second feeling, which was showed by all respondents, is persistent distrust to the authorities which have hidden from Ukrainians truthful and complete information on the accident. This sense transfers to the present moment and causes the negative evaluation of the environmental policy of Ukraine.

4. Such situation forms the attitude to the future, which seems to them respondents in dark colors and causes anxiety, which could eventually lead to sustained stress.

5. The survey has shown the perspectives of the further development of this problem. The most productive could become the research of direct participants of events — liquidators and settlers from of 30 km. zone of Chernobyl nuclear plant. Research of this group demands using the methods of the oral history.

1. Burchardt N. Transgenerational transmission in the families of Holocaust survivors in England / N. Burchardt // *Between Generations: Family Models, Myths and Memories* / Ed. by D. Bertaux and P. Thompson. International Yearbook of Oral History and Life Stories. — Vol. 2. — Oxford, 1993. — P. 121–37.
2. BenEzer Gadi. Trauma Signals in Life Stories / BenEzer Gadi // *Trauma and Life Stories: International Perspective* / Ed. by Kim Lacy Rogers, Selma Leydesdorff and Graham Dawson. Routledge studies in Memory and Narrative. — London : Routledge, 1999. — P. 29–42.
3. DSM-5 Criteria for PTSD : [Electronic resource]. — Acces : http://www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/PTSD-overview/dsm5_criteria_ptsd.asp
4. Dwork D. Children With a Star: Jewish Youth In Nazi Europe / Dwork D. — New Haven and London : Yale University Press, 1994. — 380 p.
5. Kellermann N. Transmission of Holocaust Trauma : [Electronic resource] / Kellermann N. — Acces : <http://www1.yadvashem.org/yv/en/education/languages/dutch/pdf/kellermann.pdf>
6. Hrynevych L. Stalin's «revolution from the top» and the famine in 1933 as factors politicization of Ukrainian community / L. Hrynevych // *Ukrainian Historical Journal*. — 2003. — № 5. — P. 50–64.
7. Kis Oksana. The collective memory and historical trauma: theoretical reflection on the background of women's memories of Holodomor : [Electronic resource] / Kis Oksana. — Acces : <http://uamoderna.com/md/216-216>
8. Kulchytsky S. Holodomor of 1932–1933. Genocide: the difficulty of understanding / Kulchytsky S. — K. : Our Time, 2007. — 424 p.
9. Lieblich A. Seasons of Captivity: The Inner World of Pows / Lieblich A. — New York : NYU Press, 1994. — 344 p.
10. Ogienko V. Historical trauma of Famine: problem, hypothesis and research methodology / V. Ogienko // *National and Historical Memory*. — Vol. 6 — K. : Priorities, 2013. — P. 45–56.
11. Ogienko V. Cultural trauma in modern foreign historiography: concept and method / V. Ogienko // *National and historical memory*. — 2011. — Vol. 1. — P. 148–160.
12. Ogienko V. Traumatic event, individual memory about it and personal narratives: between the traumatic event and its representation / V. Ogienko // *National and historical memory*. — 2011. — Vol. 3. — P. 227–244.
- 14 Ogienko V. Historical trauma of Holodomor: problem, hypothesis and methodology of research / V.Ogienko // *National and Historical Memory*. — 2013. — Vol. 6. — P.145–156.
15. Posttraumatic Stress Disorder : [Electronic resource]. — Acces : <http://www.dsm5.org/Documents/PTSD%20Fact%20Sheet.pdf>
16. Rupperecht N. The Holocaust and World War II: In History and in Memory / Rupperecht N. — London : Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012. — 340 p.
17. Wertsch J. V. Voices of Collective Remembering / Wertsch J. V. — London : Cambridge University Press, 2002. — 212 p.