

## Delayed Cultural Trauma (Echoes of Mussolini's Rule in Italy)

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### ABSTRACT

The article, based on Anton Neretin's book "Mussolini: Fascism and the Problem of Structural Violence", discusses and introduces the concepts of cultural trauma and anti-trauma. They allow us to better understand the phenomenon of hushing up the disproportionate punishment of fascists in Italy after World War II, bordering on revenge and reprisals, despite the fact that often these were not even fascists, but random people. The author compares the concept of cultural trauma with the concept of individual psychological trauma, which he analyzed in other works. Antitrauma is defined by the opposite of experiences regarding trauma. In doing so, the author relies on the excellent historical material and socio-psychological analysis presented in Neretin's book, as well as the memoirs of Edith Eva Egert, who miraculously survived the Nazi death camp Auschwitz together with her sister Magda as a teenager. The author discusses three problems related to cultural trauma (what can be understood as the subject of cultural trauma, how it is formed, what the trauma itself is in this case); his main research method is the humanitarian-psychological and social reconstruction of how cultural trauma could have formed and functioned. Initially, he shows, antitrauma is formed in Italian society in connection with the activities and repressions of Mussolini. The second stage, the formation of cultural trauma itself, consisted of two parts: a long silence about the difficult to explain cruelty during the reprisals against the fascists and the appearance of works, primarily the books of G. Pansa, in which this silence and cruelty began to be discussed. As a result, Italians begin to realize the incomprehensibility and monstrosity of their behavior in the past. At the same time, a cultural trauma is formed. The fact is that historians, sociologists and writers talk not only about individual fascists or anti-fascists, but also constantly generalize to all Italians. The object and subject of their reflections are both the consciousness and actions of individual Italians and the civil war in Italy, the confrontation in its culture of two different communities.

**Keywords:** Trauma; Anti-trauma; Consciousness; Experiences; Repression; Culture; Italy; Society; Individual; War

### Introduction

The author of the book most often uses the expression "cultural trauma", although in scientific literature one can also find others - "collective trauma", "social trauma", "public trauma". For example, Elena Cherepanova in the article "Social Psychology of Trauma" notes that she identifies "three types

of collective trauma: mass, social and cultural"<sup>1</sup>. Collective traumas are compared with psychological ones, characteristic of individual individuals and if psychological ones are more or less understandable, then the same cannot be said about collective ones. Their nature, of course, is explained, definitions are given, but they are (at least for me) incomprehensible. A. Neretin gives the following description of cultural trauma by Ron Eyerman:

“The “traumatized” consciousness usually emerges much later, mainly when the chaos of events can find order in memories and be reflected in interpretations... Unlike psychological or physical trauma, when there is a wound and an experience of strong emotional suffering of an individual, cultural trauma means a dramatic loss of identity and meaning, a hole in the fabric of society that affects a group of people who have achieved a certain degree of cohesion”<sup>2</sup>. E. Cherepanova also writes about the transformation of identity. “By trauma we will understand an adaptive tectonic shift in self-identification in relation to oneself, others and the world. This is similar to the classic definition given by Jeffrey Aleksander. He defined collective trauma through the change in self-identification that it creates, which comes down to experiencing oneself as a victim”<sup>1</sup>.

Understanding both definitions of collective trauma given here presupposes the clarification of a number of other, no less complex and incomprehensible things, for example, what is the loss or transformation of identity, cultural memory, experiencing oneself as a victim, etc. For me, the gap between the empirical explanation and the weak theoretical explanation is obvious. Here is a completely understandable empirical explanation: “The acceptance of Mussolini’s regime,” writes A. Neretin, “and then armed resistance to it influenced the emergence of a sense of guilt among Italians and the cultural trauma provoked by this <...> Collective trauma arises not only when a society’s life values change dramatically, but also when an acute sense of guilt for one’s past appears, for example, many Germans now react painfully to the word “Hitler”, because they feel ashamed not only of these “black” pages in their history, but also, perhaps, of their ancestors, who fully supported Nazism and the Nazi regime. This same sense of guilt is also characteristic of Italian society”<sup>3</sup>. The question is, is the sense of guilt among many Germans and Italians (and how many of them are unknown) a collective trauma or is it perhaps not enough for a scientific explanation? But in posing the question this way, I obviously have to offer a stronger and more convincing explanation than simply “loss of identity,” “change in self-identification,” or “a sharp change in life values” and “guilt for the past.”

The author’s approach to understanding cultural trauma.

Firstly and here I am not original, I will distinguish between cultural (collective, social) and individual trauma and will give my understanding of the latter. Secondly, characterizing cultural trauma, I will try to resolve three main problems regarding cultural trauma (what can be understood as the subject of cultural trauma, how it is formed, what is the trauma itself in this case). Thirdly, the main research method for me is the humanitarian-psychological and social reconstruction of how cultural trauma could have developed and functioned.

Indeed, if we claim that cultural trauma “affects a group of people who have achieved a certain degree of cohesion” or is characteristic of a certain community, then a number of natural questions arise: what is this impact, what is the mechanism of cultural trauma, are all representatives of this group or community affected by cultural trauma (observations show that not all, then maybe the latter do not have trauma?), how is cultural trauma recognized and by whom?

Individual trauma is recognized and experienced by an individual; it is a rather persistent condition that is difficult to get rid of, while a person has a holistic consciousness that allows

this condition to be both recognized and experienced. Edith Eva Egert, who miraculously survived the Nazi death camp Auschwitz as a teenager with her sister Magda, explains in her book *The Choice*: “People ask me how I learned to overcome the past. Overcome? Overcome? I have never overcome anything. Every bombing, selection, death, every column of smoke rising into the sky, every moment of horror that seemed to me the last - all this lives in me, my memory, my nightmares. The past does not disappear. You cannot step over it, you cannot amputate it. It exists with me”<sup>4</sup>.

Here is the question: does a community (group) experiencing cultural trauma possess consciousness and a holistic corporeality, if not, then how can it be traumatized and react to the trauma that has developed? Another question concerns the time of awakening of cultural trauma: why does “traumatized consciousness arise, as a rule, much later,” and why was it not traumatized before? G. Pansa, who awakened the self-awareness of Italians at the very beginning of our century (his books were published in 2002 and 2003), “for the first time raised the problem not so much of cruel retribution against the defeated enemy (the fascists. – V.R.) - this is typical of any war – as of keeping silent about what had long been forbidden to talk about...<...> “In general,” notes G. Pansa, “20,000 people, including soldiers and civilians, were wiped off the face of the earth as a result of retribution (for real or imaginary affiliation with the supporters of the fascists. – A.N.) and as a result of political assassinations” ... Members of the Italian Resistance movement pursued the goal of not only killing the fascists, but also erasing their existence from memory, not caring about the families who could not find their relatives and bury them”<sup>3</sup>. This is very different from the only 9 executed people and the absence of concentration camps for Jews under Mussolini (Ibid., pp. 169, 95).

I show that individual trauma is not just unpleasant, difficult experiences caused by pain, fear, the expectation of great troubles, even death, but, firstly, those that change the psyche and corporeality (new “schemes” of reality are created, the corporeality is rebuilt to suit them) and secondly, these experiences are reproduced as soon as the conditions for this appear<sup>5</sup>. “My inner world,” writes Edith, “no longer supported me, it became a source of pain: uncontrollable memories, confusion, fear. I could stand in line for fish and when the seller called my name, instead of his face I saw the face of Mengele (the doctor who personally sent Auschwitz people to death, conducting inhuman experiments on them, sending Edith’s mother to the gas chamber, giving Edith the order to dance in front of him. - V.R.). Sometimes in the mornings, entering the factory, I saw my mother next to me, I saw it clearer than clear, I saw how she turned her back and left”<sup>4</sup>.

Let me explain what I mean by reality and patterns. By psychic reality I mean events experienced by an individual, united by convention and logic in the integrity of the life world and consciousness, opposed to other integrity (realities). For example, the events of dream reality are characterized by conventionality and logic, which we recognize as relating specifically to sleep, contrast with the events of waking reality and can be compared with the events of artistic reality (in some parameters, the logic of dreams is similar to the conventionality of art, in others, they differ<sup>6</sup>. Individual trauma can also be understood as a certain reality of the psyche, the events of which, on the one hand, are close to the events of dreams (the so-called

“waking dream” (Ibid.)), for example, Edith sees non-existent people), on the other hand, belong to the class of events of deviant behavior, analyzed in the book “Mental illness as a trend in personality development and the state of culture”<sup>7</sup>.

A.F. Losev shows that the concept of schemes was introduced by Plato, then I. Kant sets and discusses them differently, in our time this concept is being developed in the Moscow Methodological Circle, including by the author<sup>6</sup>. The scheme refers to one of the three main means of cognition of reality: the most ancient, the scheme, the later, knowledge (in Aristotle - this is “episteme”, as a product of thinking), the third - the model. The concept of a scheme can be explained using the example of understanding an eclipse in the history of culture. The original, archaic understanding can be interpreted (reconstruct) as the invention of a certain scheme. “In the Tupi language,” writes E. Taylor, “a solar eclipse is expressed by the words: “the jaguar ate sun”. The full meaning of this phrase is still revealed by some tribes by shooting flaming arrows to drive away the ferocious beast from its prey”<sup>8</sup>. As a schema, the narrative “the jaguar ate the sun” resolved a problematic situation (fear of an incomprehensible phenomenon), set a new reality (the jaguar feeding on the sun or the moon) and indicated the possibility of a new action. Actually, a schema is not the narrative itself, but a structure reconstructed by the researcher.

Aristotle interprets the eclipse already as knowledge: “the cause of the eclipse,” he writes in the “Second Analytics,” - will be “the fact that the Earth is between [the Sun and the Moon]... the eclipse is not the reason that the Earth is between [the Sun and the Moon], but on the contrary, the Earth’s being between [the Sun and the Moon] is the reason for the eclipse - this is obvious” (cit. from<sup>9</sup>). Let’s agree that obtaining this knowledge presupposes thinking. Finally, Newton creates a doctrine that made it possible to arrive at a mathematical model of an eclipse, including in our time a computer model. On its basis (for example, the program of the Japanese Shinobu Takesako EmapWin), solar eclipses are accurately calculated) (Program, 2023).

If a model is built based on the modeled object, then the schema itself sets its object (new reality); the schema is used mainly to solve a problem, providing an understanding of what is happening, opening a new vision (reality), which is a condition for a new action, in contrast to it, the model allows not only to understand, but also to calculate and predict. The concepts of schema and model can be used to describe the reality of psychological trauma. I show that this reality and the associated sensitivity are formed on the basis of certain schemas that block the schemas that ensure life. For example, in the case of Edith in the concentration camp, such schemas were direct threats of reprisals and death. “A sharp voice,” Edith recalls, “immediately throws me back into the past, I again hear the shouts of the German overseer, who liked to remind us that we must work until we die and whoever survives will be killed later (these narratives are reconstructed as diagrams. - V.R.) ... I stole a carrot for Magda and a Wehrmacht soldier put the barrel of a machine gun to my chest. A sticky fear that makes you numb and your temples pound: I am guilty of something, now they will punish me, my life is at stake, death is inevitable.”<sup>4</sup> The schemes and realities assimilated by an individual are interdependent (there are “direct” and “derivative”), for example, the schemes and realities of “life” and “death” can be considered direct, all

the others are derivatives of them. Edith’s experiences and fear of death in Auschwitz were determined by schemes and realities that not only blocked normal life, but also rebuilt the girl’s sensuality (corporeality). The traumatized corporeality acted as a mechanism of the psyche and consciousness, reproducing the experiences and fear of death even after liberation from the camp. If this reconstruction proposed by the author is correct, we can already speak of a model of psychological trauma. Thus, psychological trauma is formed on the basis of certain schemes; the model of psychological trauma assumes a hypothesis about the restructuring of corporeality and sensuality, constantly provoking the actualization of these schemes and the realities determined with their help, in later life.

“Roadmap” for the formation of cultural trauma. Anti-trauma and trauma.

A. Neretin shows that the cultural trauma of the Italian community was formed in two stages. In the first, Mussolini, taking advantage of the problems facing Italy at that time, promising to solve them, gained power. At the same time, on the one hand, he brought order to the country and raised prosperity, on the other hand, he launched structural violence against his enemies (communists and socialists) on the third side and began to introduce the ideals of violence and fascism into the consciousness of Italians with the help of the media and specially created organizations. The integral result of these actions is the formation of the cult of Mussolini.

“After the First World War, many Italians felt resentful, considering it unfair how the world was divided between the victorious countries... People who returned from the war saw liberalism and democracy as the main root of all troubles. The post-war crisis convinced them of this even more. “They saw the solution in a strong hand.”<sup>3</sup> It is unlikely that anyone knows that the fascists, who created their organization in Milan in 1919, “advocated for universal suffrage, guarantees of civil liberties, the abolition of secret diplomacy and general disarmament, a progressive tax on capital, an 8-hour working day and a minimum wage, the nationalization of the military industry, land for the peasants (remember the Bolsheviks. - V.R.), a ban on child labor under 16, universal education, etc. (Ibid., p. 68). However, having gained power, Mussolini forgets most of these demands, closes free newspapers, dissolves opposition parties and subjects’ anti-fascists to repression. On the other hand, “in order to introduce fascism into the minds of Italians, the Duce created special organizations and new fascist traditions,” which provided workers with, those who joined these organizations received a whole range of benefits: “discounts on theater and movie tickets, on consumer goods, on summer vacations and tourism” (Ibid., pp. 80, 128). Of no small importance was a certain economic upswing, naturally attributed to the merits of fascism. “The Italian people were everywhere subjected to the active influence of fascist ideology, ... accompanied by an economic policy that appealed to them at first: “unemployment decreased, bread and rice production grew, there was no endless series of political crises, the country developed and grew rich and expanded its territories” (Ibid., p. 139). For example, Italy declared war on Ethiopia, waged it barbarously and won, which is not surprising, given that “the Italians were armed with tanks, planes, artillery, etc., while the Ethiopians defended themselves with bows and arrows, knives, spears and antediluvian rifles” (Ibid., pp. 83-84). Mussolini personally gave the order to use

prohibited chemical weapons against the Ethiopians, as well as flamethrowers (Ibid., p. 84). The second stage of the formation of cultural trauma in Italian society, in turn, consisted of two parts: a long silence about the difficult-to-explain cruelty during the reprisal against the fascists and the appearance of works, primarily the books of G. Panza, in which this silence and cruelty began to be discussed. As a result, Italians begin to realize the incomprehensibility and monstrosity of their behavior in the past. To realize, in the sense of admitting, but not to change, not to repent, not to reconsider the foundations and values of life. "It is significant," writes A. Neretin, "that during the "black twenty years," Mussolini's quote "It is better to live one day as a lion than a hundred years as a sheep" was engraved on coins of twenty and one hundred lire denominations. After the end of the civil war, many partisans behaved like lions, perceiving the fascists as sheep with whom they could do practically anything they wanted: blackmail, rape, torture and kill, i.e., speaking in the language of psychoanalysis, displacing from the sphere of their perception that which a person wants to forget" (Ibid., p. 200).

The values of violence ("lion life") turned out to be organic for anti-fascists and since even today they have not been condemned or rethought, it is possible that they are latently sleeping in modern Italians until better times, which seem to be coming. This is one explanation, the other is also psychological, based on the idea of revenge. Italian partisans, writes A. Neretin, "are now rightfully considered heroes who saved Italy from fascism. However, the methods of fighting the supporters of Mussolini's regime were brutal and inhuman. This was a kind of revenge on themselves, for the fact that they sacredly believed in a man who is "always right." "Revenge against oneself" was expressed in the intentional infliction of harm with the aim of retribution for trampled dignity, even if the person himself voluntarily or through ignorance accepted the conditions under which this dignity could be trampled... Revenge is considered by psychologists and psychoanalysts as an emotional violent action associated not only with neuroses, but also with mental traumas, which are based on "fixation on the moment of trauma" that changed consciousness and such a change often appears as an "insoluble urgent problem". Revenge is a peculiar and quick solution to it" (Ibid., pp. 114-115).

To the interesting and correct explanations of A. Neretin I will add my own. At the first stage, in my opinion, many Italians develop what I would call "anti-trauma" (by analogy with "antimatter"), at the second stage the actual trauma, individual and cultural. If trauma is formed on the basis of unpleasant, difficult, terrible experiences, then anti-trauma, on the contrary, is based on enthusiastic, positive, ecstatic ones. The cult of personality (for example, Mussolini or Hitler, some Christians have the cult of Christ) is an ideal ground for such experiences. But this is not yet anti-trauma, from a psychological point of view, here, on the basis of the corresponding schemes, a special "pyramid of realities" is formed ("direct" - Mussolini, Hitler, Christ, "derivatives" caused by them). In this case, the pyramid of realities, which is interpreted as contradicting the established one, is completely or partially blocked. Not only the corresponding immediate realities, but also their derivatives are displaced and rethought as false. For example, the poet F. T. Marinetti "back in 1909, in the Parisian newspaper Figaro, published a literary manifesto calling for "rid Italy of all infection - historians,

archaeologists, art historians, antiquarians!", proclaiming war a cleansing force and in 1919 he joined the fascist party, intending to make Italy "more intelligent and prosperous" (Ibid., p. 70). Anti-trauma develops in changed social conditions, when super persons are subject to denial and criticism (in this case, after the collapse of fascism or in the early stages of building socialism in the USSR, accompanied by the destruction of churches and the imprisonment of priests). In this situation, true adherents and fans of the former super persons not only do not accept criticism and denial, but on the contrary, defend their idols and gods, including experiencing inspiration, uplift, positive emotions. Negative emotions also take place, because immediate realities are subject to attack, but still negative ones drown in an ocean of positive emotions. Even facts are denied and interpreted in the opposite way, for example, Stalinists claim that there were no imprisonments and camps at all or an order of magnitude fewer or they were imprisoned correctly, for good reason. One of the explanations for the formation of trauma, according to A. Neretin, is revenge on oneself for accepting an incorrect picture of the world. This is true, but one more circumstance can be pointed out - a socio-psychological one. I recall one of the last novels by the famous Israeli writer Meir Shalev, "Two Bears Came Out of the Forest," which made revenge a plot. In an interview with "Lechaim," Shalev explains: "I have friends who, after the book came out, began to ask if everything was okay with me. Maybe I had gone through some kind of crisis or something bad had happened to me? They didn't understand where it came from.

I took up this novel... Indeed, I included cases of extreme cruelty in it, although it was difficult for me to write about them. But this is not my personal experience that needs to be thrown out. I am very interested in revenge as a literary idea. It excites me. The desire for revenge, in my eyes, is much stronger than jealousy or any religious feelings. Its consequences are tragic. There are three murders in the novel: in 1930, Zeev's grandfather, then still young, kills his wife's lover, then the girl she gives birth to and seventy years later, Eitan, his granddaughter's husband, carries out a blood feud and destroys the bandits who killed Zeev's grandfather. Revenge turns out to be healing for Eitan, it heals him from the mental coma in which he remains for many years after the death of his son. Yes, the only thing that pulls him out of his illness is blood feud. And this angered some of my Israeli readers, they said: it is immoral to write that murder has a therapeutic effect, murder cannot heal! Okay, you say: "impossible". But the fact is that it is possible for certain people, as happened in my novel" (Shalev, 2015).

I tried for a long time to understand what revenge is, so accurately described by Shalev. Perhaps a regression to the biological animal principle? No, it is impossible to imagine the existence of revenge in animals. And it is difficult to agree with Shalev that this is an example of blood feud, because Zeev and Eitan did not belong to a people practicing blood feud. Moreover, such revenge presupposed completely different feelings, if Zeev had acted within the framework of blood feud, he would have simply killed and not arranged a heartbreaking spectacle of torture for his family. Perhaps, I decided, Zeev was thinking in his heart like this: my wife saw me humiliated (Zeev failed on our wedding night) and then cheated on me, I lost face, fell, let her fall even lower, watching me kill their child; then we are equals and I can live with her (which is what Zeev did).



Couldn't we, I thought, extend this procedure of revenge-equalization, understanding it socio-psychologically, to revenge in the Italian style? Indeed, fascists and anti-fascists are Italians, albeit not very united, but still one society. But some Italians left the country when Mussolini took over or were repressed, while others believed him and not just believed him, but were fooled, drawn into the war, into bad, terrible things. But now, the anti-fascists probably thought, we, the partisans, rule the roost and can do whatever we want with them, the fascists. Let's restore justice, equalize, let them be in the worst possible condition, as we are now. But why did it turn out disproportionate? And because Mussolini had the state behind him, it was nevertheless forced to look back at the laws, while the anti-fascists acted in separate groups and laws and courts were absent at that time. Perhaps, psychoanalytically, revenge looks like a defense mechanism, "fixation on the moment of trauma," but socio-psychologically - as the restoration of the social community of Italians by reprisals against the passionate community of fascists who had gained power. Reprisals, as it turned out, were an order of magnitude more inhumane than the fascist ones. Something similar, one can assume, took place during the civil war in Russia: peasants and workers restored and equalized Russian society by destroying the bourgeoisie and kulaks; Marxist theory acted in this case as schemes that set awareness.

## Conclusion

It turns out to be a rather complex picture. Contemporary Italian society includes at least two different groups (two potential communities). The first, a few still living fascists and their supporters, who are quite numerous. Representatives of this group are characterized by anti-trauma. The second group, a few still living anti-fascists and their democratic followers; many of them experience individual trauma. This entire group is also characterized by cultural trauma. Let me explain the latter.

Why, one wonders, was this whole nightmare hushed up for so long in Italy? Were they ashamed of their revenge? Partly, but I think this is not the only reason. Oblivion (amnesia) is most often symbolic: we forget either insignificant information for us or very unpleasant or for which we do not have the semiotic means (schemes) to remember<sup>10</sup>. I suppose that for the Italian anti-fascists who took part in the massacre of the fascists, it was the last two circumstances that determined the symbolic forgetting of the events in which they participated. In my opinion, the absence of schemes (language) that would allow one to understand the unacceptability and horror of one's own actions played a particularly important role here. Of course, this is unpleasant information, but not only that. As a rule, the adoption of new schemes presupposes the construction of others that create a justification and context for the first ones. For example, I confessed that I killed a fascist without looking into it and then it turned out that he was not a fascist, but a random person. For example, 23-year-old Maria Rapozoi "was detained by Asti partisans... The girl was accused of espionage... She was robbed, stripped, then forced to march naked down the street" and executed in Piazza Castello. At the same time, there was no evidence of her involvement in espionage" ... There were cases when people were killed for completely unknown reasons... After the reckoning with the fascists in the city of Imperia, the police began to investigate the reasons for the murders in 1953. "At least four of the murdered people had no connection with either the fascists or the Germans."<sup>3</sup>

So, let's say I confess to killing an innocent person (scheme one). The question arises: why and how could I? And the answer: it turns out that I am no better than the fascists and a murderer (scheme two)<sup>11-13</sup>. And the next question: how to live now (scheme three)? I don't think many Italians were able to unfold these three schemes, it's easier to forget. And they forgot for more than 50 years. During this time, someone died, the Germans repented, everything was overgrown with grass, memories and descriptions of those events appeared and without naming specific people - why not now use the proposed schemes and narratives to remember and be horrified? At the same time, a cultural trauma is formed. The fact is that historians, sociologists and writers talk not only about individual fascists or anti-fascists, but also constantly generalize to all Italians. The object and subject of their reflections are both the consciousness and actions of individual Italians and the Italian civil war, the confrontation of two different communities in its culture. "The journalist and historian Giampaola Panza is an important phenomenon for Italy in this sense, because he showed the different sides of the civil war and especially its seamy side, discovering the existence of a world "on the other side": not only on the side where "patriots" fight the Nazi-fascists..., but on the side where freedom fighters act "as a mirror" of their opponents, showing ruthlessness, exterminating not only their direct enemies and their relatives, but also those who simply came into contact with them" (Ibid., p. 199).

Such a generalized interpretation of identity probably contributes, on the one hand, to the inclusion of many Italians in the conversation and on the other - to the formation of a virtual subject of cultural trauma. I think it is precisely the virtual one presented in texts and studies. It is unlikely that a real subject can be formed on the basis of such a virtual one; for this to happen, it would be necessary for the majority of the representatives of the second group to begin to practice in their lives the schemes presented by J. Pansa and other historians. For this, such schemes must be attractive, not traumatic.

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