



ARTICLE

Political Socialization in a Changing Society: A Crisis of Value Orientations or Asynchronization of National Memories?

Konstantin F. Zavershinskiy

Alexander I. Koryushkin

Saint Petersburg State University, Saint Petersburg, Russia

ABSTRACT

The article examines qualitative changes in the socio-cultural parameters of intergenerational communication that impact social cohesion and civic identification in contemporary society. Diversification of symbol production and an increase in the number of agents of political communications, a greater heterogeneity of political ideologies, and modes of political representation shape political processes. To adequately address these changes, one needs new theoretical models of political socialization. Such models would examine youth political incorporation as a particular form of communication predicated on the spatial and temporal design of political events within national communities. The focus on generational differences in the interpretation of political events helps explain youth positioning vis-à-vis older generations. In this case, political socialization goes beyond the processes of the younger generation's adaptation to institutions and value-normative regimes of the "adult" society. It is a communicative process of establishing generational political expectations. Analysis of the legitimating profiles of national memory—those that include competing symbolic representations of images of the future and the past, typologies of the heroic, concepts of guilt and responsibility—is crucial to studying the political socialization of the younger generation. The authors emphasize the significance of both a theoretical and applied analysis of symbolic structures of political memory and the role of iconic

Received 30 July 2021

Accepted 17 February 2022

Published online 11 April 2022

© 2022 Konstantin F. Zavershinskiy,

Alexander I. Koryushkin

zavershinskiy200@mail.ru

aikor@peterlink.ru

power in understanding intergenerational continuity and change. Drawing on the methods of cultural sociology, the authors outline novel theoretical approaches to studying youth political socialization in today's society.

KEYWORDS

political socialization, symbolic structures, political memory, generations, national memory, profiles of legitimation, iconic power

Introduction

Variability and hybridization of political ideologies and institutions transform value-normative foundations of political socialization in contemporary societies. Changes in political communicative processes dissolve spatial-temporal boundaries of national communities and destroy the intergenerational continuity of identity. As national political systems are evolving, traditional value-normative generational conflicts and issues of succession among political elites become more acute than ever. In this paper, we address the need to analyze and theoretically describe the emerging qualitative changes in the socio-cultural parameters of societal cohesion and civic identification.

Contemporary political-cultural processes generate new marginal political *chronotopes* and exacerbate intergenerational confrontations. As asynchronous social communication is becoming increasingly common and there is a lack of stable correlation between generational changes and transformations in institutional and cultural patterns, “the new generation tends to regard society as too conservative or even repressive” (Giesen, 2004a, p. 31). The rapid destruction of hierarchical distinctions between the world of “the youth” and the world of “the adults” further complicates intergenerational relations and increases the degree of their variability and arbitrariness.

Geopolitical processes and digital innovations in economic and political communications have exacerbated authoritarian tendencies and strengthened anti-democratic, ethno-nationalist, and populist discourses. These processes can partially explain the changing demarcations in political identification and the destruction of value-normative intergenerational cohesion (Fouskas & Gökyay, 2019). Migration, demographic changes, and inefficient state policies further impacted the precarious “balance between generations” (Krastev, 2020b). Younger generations fluctuate between apolitical consumerist survival strategies and occasional flares of violent anarchical protests. As I. Krastev points out, a *fin de siècle generation* is a “google history” generation that “lives outside history” because it does not link the process of historical knowledge acquisition with experiences of previous generations (Krastev, 2016, pp. 58–59). Younger generations’ standardized expectations acquired from older generations through childhood socialization clash with the nonstandard realities of rapid social change. The young generation turns into a precariat class consumed

by “the fear of fear” as it is unable to rely on the experiences of the past generations for guidance (Bude, 2018).

The novel coronavirus pandemic has further aggravated the problem of intergenerational continuity by increasing isolationist tendencies in domestic and international politics and by highlighting the unpredictability of political communications and the emulative nature of current value-normative orientations. More so, the pandemic has led to “ineffective symbolization”, increased the feeling of purposelessness, and destroyed people’s strife for change by emphasizing the imminence of “the new barbarism” (Žižek, 2020). The pandemic exacerbated the crisis in the projects of liberal globalization and in the social construction of cosmopolitan identities by giving rise to ethno-nationalism and populism and blurring the distinctions between democracy and authoritarianism (Krastev, 2020a).

The pandemic has also exposed the limitations of traditional value-normative models of youth political socialization. The young generations can no longer trust the existing political institutions and the value-based rhetoric of political elites. We argue that contemporary problems of political socialization are not only caused by the expected differences in value-normative positioning of the younger and older generations, as it was postulated in the theoretical models of the last century. The qualitative changes in symbolic self-positioning and representation of the younger generation are substantively novel and need to be theoretically and methodologically explicated to adequately address the problem of generational continuity and contemporary political socialization of youth (Zavershinskiy, 2021).

Sociology, psychology, anthropology, international relations, law, pedagogy, and medicine use multiple and often contested versions of terminology and temporal frameworks to describe generational and age-based gradations of their subject populations. This research uses the two key concepts of intergenerational continuity—youth and generation. In this article, we focus on young citizens from mid-teens to mid-twenties because primary active processes of political socialization take place in this age group (cf. Pickard, 2019, pp. 29–30). We base our discussion on Mannheim’s ideas of generational stratification. According to Mannheim and his followers, youth acquire their social sense of generational identity through their involvement in historical events. A generation could encompass multiple antagonistic groups that nevertheless recognize themselves as a particular wholistic entity in space and time (Mannheim, 1952).

The concepts “political generation” and “political generational identity” are used in this article to characterize the political unity of young people who were born within the given temporal interval (about 20 years) and who share a common collective memory. Generations represent a “symbiosis of life and time”, because “history creates generations, and generations create history” (Strauss & Howe, 1997). We argue that the political-cultural generational identity of youth emerges in the process of practical and semantic involvement in collectively meaningful political events that transform a young political generation into an adult generation. We do not attempt an applied analysis of multiple political groups and sub-groups present in contemporary youth movements. Instead, we articulate the theoretical

and methodological priorities of the research on contemporary youth political socialization that emphasizes communicative aspects of the social construction of political memory in political spaces of Europe, Russia, and the United States.

In this article, we address the questions relevant for understanding the specifics of political socialization in the context of contemporary political communicative practices. What theoretical and methodological models of youth socialization do contemporary researchers use? What theoretical conundrums do such models present and what are the strategies for dealing with them? What role do the symbolic structures of contemporary political memory play in the processes of youth political socialization? How do national memory legitimization profiles affect the political socialization of youth and intergenerational political continuity? The lack of theoretical and methodological foundations in answering these questions creates epistemological aporias and engenders the descriptions of youth political orientation that appear in-depth but fall apart when confronted with facts confirming the crisis in political intergenerational continuity. We challenge the assumptions that the loss of the previously effective socialization practices among youth is a result of the temporary recoils of democratization processes.

Political socialization is not only a dependent variable predicated on the degree of effectiveness of institutions controlled by the older (or adult) generations, as the traditional functionalist paradigm postulates. Its contents depend on dynamics of symbolic structures of society's political memory. We argue that the focus on political socialization as an independent variable in generational dynamics provides an opportunity for developing new theoretical and methodological approaches to understanding political socialization as the production of symbols of political identity in the public sphere. This production of symbols has a high degree of autonomy from the purposeful organizational or ideological activity of political elites or social institutions. The symbolic, often spontaneous structuring of the horizons of specific political expectations of generations in the political memory of modern society is increasingly exacerbating the conflicts between age strata, regardless of the achievements in the socio-economic or professional socialization of young people. Moreover, the technological realities of modern communications increase the number of participants in the production of political content and thus become a major source of symbolic inflation that destroys political trust and exacerbates communicative chaos.

Methodological Conundrums of Studying Youth Political Engagement: The Dichotomous Research Paradigms

Since the 1960s, political scientists have examined theoretical and methodological aspects of intergenerational politics. They analyzed the political socialization of youth as a phenomenon associated with potential generational value-normative cleavages within national communities and foreign policy orientation among political elites belonging to different age groups. The seminal work by D. Easton and J. Dennis *Children in the Political System: Origins of Political Legitimacy* (Easton & Dennis, 1969) is particularly interesting as an early attempt to conduct a comprehensive

sociological investigation of political socialization of youth and children. Since then, the theoretical understanding of youth political socialization has undergone multiple critical revisions. The last decade, we argue, has seen an increasing epistemological divergence between the two primary research strategies of this subject.

The first research paradigm, currently dominant in political science, defines youth as “citizens in becoming and in anticipation” who require political enlightenment and should be slowly introduced to political processes before they reach the age of official inclusion in electoral processes at all levels. The second paradigm, in contrast, interprets the political socialization of youth as a dynamic socio-cultural process predicated on the impact of the qualitatively novel communicative phenomena that emerge out of the growing autonomy of symbolic communicative structures. At the same time, both paradigms underline the social significance of youth’s constructive political activity and effective integration of younger generation in political communications. However, despite some important conceptual similarities between the two paradigms, there is an increasing divergence in methodological positioning evident in researchers’ epistemological foundations.

The Politico-Functionalist Paradigm: A Generational Continuity

The first, politico-functionalist theoretical paradigm follows the positivist scientific principles articulated in the early studies of political socialization in political science. As mentioned earlier, even today, studies of youth socialization in politics are built on the theoretical and methodological foundations of early functionalist theories. Politicization, political personalization, idealization, and institutionalization during the course of an individual life remain the primary focus of interdisciplinary research on political socialization in youth politics and political representation of age groups within this generational stratum of society (cf. Sears & Brown, 2013). This research paradigm is premised on the assumption of common institutional parameters of political socialization and postulates the hierarchical structuring of intergenerational relations (via macroeconomic, political, and social institutions). Socio-political institutions define the political orientations and political activities of young people. The goal of political socialization is to ensure stable regulatory attention of the older generations to the younger generations’ political expectations. The destruction of such a hierarchical order of generational relations is perceived as anomalous and unnatural. Young people are incorporated in political life and in the social construction of political culture as future potential citizens through the existing democratic institutions of upbringing and education controlled by older generations. Political cultures in a given society define and shape these institutions. Within this theoretical framework, effective political activities of an older (adult) generation are the cornerstone of youth political socialization and identification.

Politico-psychological studies foreground the view that political socialization in general (and socialization of youth in particular) is a social process shaped by older generations. Political socialization is acquired through education and upbringing as its manageable components. The study of these components requires clarification of the connections between various spheres of life in a given political community.

Analysis of youth politics, in this case, is focused on social politics as a factor of providing youth safety and offers a way to realize their social activities. Political and psychological studies of political socialization aim to combine both research strategies and utilize institutional analysis and axiological modeling while also incorporating cognitive and socio-psychological analysis of how the political is represented in youth consciousness. Within the framework of political psychology, emphasis is often placed on understanding social constructions of youth political identification. Such an approach conflates the processes of political identification and cannot go beyond outlining the value-normative models. The temporal dimensions of this process and communicative thematization of political generational expectations remain peripheral within this line of politico-psychological investigations. In modern studies of intergenerational dynamics, the term “political socialization” now tends to be used less and less often. The study of political socialization is reduced to describing young people’s participation in election campaigns and protest movements, which means that this concept is replaced by the concept of politicization.

The Symbolic-Interactionist Paradigm: An Inter-Generational Solidarity

The second, symbolic-interactionist research paradigm postulates that there are no universal normative characteristics of political youth socialization because those are dependent on specific historical, social, economic, and cultural conditions. The symbolic self-representation of youth in political culture is predicated on the generational perception of the temporal and spatial boundaries of political communications that characterize communities at different stages of their political development.

Youth is not only a socio-biological, psychological, or socio-economic factor of social institutionalization but also a socio-cultural category, which explains why the concepts of political socialization and youth politics vary in their contents and account for communicative autonomy of different age groups (including the young). Such theoretical argument gives young people voices and ability to be actors in the communicative processes that enable them to be incorporated in and/or excluded from political life (Leonard, 2016). While this research paradigm remains somewhat peripheral and declarative, it explains political obedience or the level of protest activities of youth not only as a function of an institutional order or stability of value-based orientations but shifts analytical attention to the spatial-temporal dimensions of this or that political event that defines youth’s actions.

Claims that society needs a new model of relations between generations, mass media and forms of civic engagement frequently lead to fairly traditional judgments typical of the structural and functional analysis of the political socialization of youth (Clark & Marchi, 2017; Zhu et al., 2019). It is stated that young people are more adaptive and creative in relation to the realities of modern mass media and digitalization and therefore are able to overcome the inertial attitudes of the ruling generation, their institutional and cultural dominance. Older generations must contribute to the development of young people’s media literacy and unite with them on the basis of new social movements struggling for civil rights for the sake of the “well-being of future generations” (Chevalier, 2019; Levin, 2016).

This paradigmatic approach examines the young generation's involvement in politics not only as adaptation to values of the adult society but also as active engagement in the transformation of the older generation's understandings of the events that are vital for social consolidation and collective functioning. Within this theoretical model, new political generations emerge not only as local alternative youth subcultures but also as a result of internal generational narratives of political identification that clash with dominant discourses.

Asynchronicity of Political Socialization

In resolving the dichotomies of these two theoretical models, Giesen's methodological approach to the study of contemporary communicative dynamics of social life through the concept of asynchronicity seems particularly helpful (Giesen, 2004a). This approach overcomes the inertia of modernist models that consider society as a system of interconnected sub-systems that should ideally be tightly interlinked to exchange information and systematically overcome imperfections of the past and failures in system coordination. According to Giesen's model, social life functions differently from the functionalist or progressivist scenarios. Asynchronicity of generational differences manifests itself in the perception of social time and the corresponding differences in the interpretations of the significance of social events. The paradigm of asynchronicity is associated with the disjunctions between institutional norms and behavior of different generations and explains change as an outcome of intergenerational communication.

Political discourses regarding people's agency in social, cultural, economic, political, and legal communications are always linked with variable time contexts among the actors of such processes. The desire of political elites to preserve the continuous evolution of social institutions and cultural patterns from the past to the present and the future often clashes with differences in the symbolic perception horizons of the significance of such events among young people. Events that one generation remembers as a victory may be perceived as a defeat or an unimportant event by another generation or a group of people living in a different time horizon. The younger generation can reorient themselves towards the events that are meaningful for them or imagined markers of successful life in the present and the future. This can erode or even destroy the foundation of common understanding within society and cause political conflicts. Moreover, extraordinary political events, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, can rapidly bring young people out of the shadow of the political experience of previous generations and force them to radically reformat the current cultural patterns, institutions, and political narratives. We argue that further development of the theory of political socialization creates the need to define the concept of political socialization as a communicative process of social construction (self-construction) of political expectations among the younger generation, which is categorized and symbolically represented in the national memory of communities as a semantic focus of events significant for the collective memory of generations. National memory as a melting pot of generation-specific political expectations could offer semantic contraction of age-strata's political expectations. It can, however, turn into a nuclear reactor with an uncontrollable chain reaction of conflicting political narratives.

Communicative Dimensions of the Political Socialization of Youth

Political Culture and Political Memory

In the light of the theoretical and methodological challenges discussed above, it is necessary to develop a theoretical and methodological framework for studying political socialization as a specific temporal structuring of the generational political expectations in the political memory of communities. We believe that the concept of political memory allows for a more comprehensive analysis of political socialization, in contrast to traditional interpretations of political culture as a complex of value-normative orientations cultivated in the process of political socialization. As a form of political memory, political culture can be defined as semantic programming of political experience and a set of interconnected mutual expectations, methods, and schemes that bring individuals together as political communities (or exclude them from such communities) through symbolization and typology of political events in space and time. At the same time, expectations do not imply only subjective motivations of political actions, but encompass the structure (configuration of events) and the internal solidarity of expectations, which ensure the likelihood that the required kind of action will be performed (Filippov, 2015, p. 212).

The primary communicative function of political memory is the legitimation and de-legitimation of power in shaping or destroying solidarity in a given society. The symbolic horizons of political memory bring about political expectations that act as generative models of events of political solidarity, providing synchronization/desynchronization of both individual and collective national political memory. The series of events in national political memory is based on the symbolization of the practice of controlling coercion within generally binding decisions, complemented by the symbolization of the bodily sensory perception of the heroic and sacrificial. It is especially important to consider such theoretical premises when implementing public policies orientated towards shaping and directing national memory. This memory based on citizenship codes of solidarity can overcome the differences in the ideation and representation of the significant past, present, and future that are being continuously multiplied and reinterpreted within the realities of modern political communications. Political rights, granted to all socially responsible community members, regardless of their class, ethnicity, or regional affiliation, form the foundation of civil solidarity codes and could facilitate the transition to a more spatially stable level of political solidarity and national identification.

Socialization, Values, and Temporal Structuring

In our interpretation of political and cultural phenomena, we adhere to the conceptual framework that defines political culture as a continually evolving symbolic network of meanings. This approach, in our opinion, counteracts the epistemological limitations of research programs that reduce political socialization only to values, norms, and ideologies derived from the structures of social institutions or behavioral models that do not account for qualitative changes in modern political communications. We follow N. Luhmann's theoretical argument that socialization is always self-

socialization because a person “shapes oneself in such a way that one lives up to the demands of social intercourse, fulfills specific preconditions, or triggers certain reactions, possibly even negative ones” (Luhmann, 2002/2013, p. 97). As “every system develops its structures <of socialization, which> [...] are not predetermined by any cultural prescriptions <or> [...] copying of a trivial and banal program”, it is also true that communications “can always say yet another thing if one gets into trouble” (pp. 97–98). This can increase variability in cultural programs of socialization and unpredictable consequences that can further “formulate a certain modernity and, in comparison to the tradition, a loss of reality” (p. 100). In this context, the success of the political socialization of youth and intergenerational interactions depends not only on the purposeful organizational or ideological youth policy implemented by cultural and political elites but also on the politics of memory aimed at structuring the horizons of societal expectations. The compatibility of socio-economic or socio-political interests of generations does not automatically predetermine the stable political identity of the community. The latter could only arise if the intergenerational consensus is maintained about the common historical fate of both younger and older generations.

Traditional sociological concepts interpret political socialization as a transfer of significant value models from one generation to the next. The success of political socialization is associated with the degree of the younger generations’ acceptance of and assimilation to these models and the degree of its value-normative content representation within youth strata. The social construction of the generational symbolic boundaries, in our opinion, involves going beyond the interpretation of political socialization as the socio-cultural dynamics of value-normative preferences. Without refuting the communicative significance of values that signal social problems, communicative practices encompass more than values, because the latter are too abstract. Values are “nothing other than a highly mobile set of viewpoints, rather than a fixed set of viewpoints. They do not, as ideas once did, resemble fixed stars, but rather balloons kept on hand to be inflated when called for, especially on festive occasions” (Luhmann, 1997/2012, p. 204). As Luhmann notes, value justifications occur through ideologies and argumentation. In this case, “ideology commits the big crimes and argumentation engages in the petty stratagems” (p. 205). Values in modern communication often lack the important qualities inherent in other symbolic carriers, and their significance in decision-making is highly controversial. Being increasingly more diverse and hybrid, modern ideologies offer a clear example of that. Labeled as conservative or progressive, dominant ideologies lose their semantic certainty. For example, the communist ideology in modern Russia has included conservative and religious value orientations in its content. In modern Ukraine and some post-socialist countries, the liberal-democratic rhetoric is combined with the radical-conservative ethno-nationalist discourse of “land and blood”. In the political space of the EU and the United States, both liberal and conservative parties utilize the rhetoric of fake news and tend to make populist claims.

We believe that when modeling a dialogue between generational communities, it is necessary to account for the differences in the interpretation of the past, present, and future. The peculiarities of their communicative binding in the symbolic

structures of diverse collective representations play an important role in structuring intergenerational communication. When describing the dynamics of the generational political identification, it is important to account for the specifics of national memory as a historical form of social memory that arises through the symbolic definition of the spatial and temporal boundaries of individualized communities. Like other forms of social memory, it is a diachronic clash between different interests and meanings, rather than a form of their static expression (Olick, 2016). At the same time, it is important to account for the autonomy and spontaneity of social memory as a dynamic compulsion to action through its complex symbolic configurations that legitimize the struggle for power. The core of this semantic process is the correlation of real facts and events with the systems of symbols that generate sacred objects (Alexander, 2006a, 2012a). Formation of collective ideas about the political past, present and future is always associated with re-writing of the symbolic calendar of collectively significant political events and the associated sacred pantheon of the heroic and criminal. The symbolic constructs created through this process often acquire new meanings, radically different from the original, and begin a life of their own in the activities of political amateurs.

Political Socialization and National Memory Legitimation Profiles

Despite the rise in globalization and the introduction of novel communicative technologies, national identity processes within local communities continue to affect political socialization. In this regard, we find the theoretical models of S. Eisenstadt and B. Giesen particularly useful. They argued that control over the distribution of values and institutionalization is relevant for the study of the historical dynamics of the inter- and intra-group positioning of national communities, along with social differentiation. Thus, the investigation of political socialization needs to give due regard to the symbolic specificity of the spatial and temporal coding of the boundaries of such communities (Eisenstadt, 2002; Eisenstadt & Giesen, 1995). The formation of institutions of national statehood always accompanies and often precedes the qualitative transformations of collective ideas about who has the right to participate in the political changes and what is considered a turning point, thereby establishing a historical event in the political evolution of the nation. The revolutions of the modern era have significantly expanded the space for political participation, spawning new symbols of identity and creating a new symbolic calendar of political events.

While political, economic, and social boundaries in many contemporary national communities could be taken for granted, these communities experience a heightened sense of uncertainty in the symbolic boundaries under the influence of modern communicative practices. Processes in modern social memory do not just reflect the evolution of institutional structures of values preferences of cultural and political elites in the organization of political socialization, childhood politics, and youth policies. These processes are becoming the decisive symbolic triggers of political socialization; they play an important role in production of identities, interests, and meanings over time. The study of the symbolic dynamics of political socialization in the context of modern cultural sociology involves the analysis of temporal regimes and historical forms, levels of national memory, the pragmatics

of its mnemonic practices, and the production of symbolic codes of public spaces (Alexander, 2006a, 2006b, 2012a). This study puts forward a new concept of civil society as a way of life and not just as a set of rational democratic procedures. Since political culture of civil society is formed through symbolic binary coding (denotation) of the existing political institutions and forms of political activity as political evil and good (democratic/non-democratic), civil democratic consolidation of society presupposes an existence of a political conflict. However, the conflict in the civil sphere can be overcome by cultivating forms of solidarity with strangers on the basis of common political expectations in national memory.

To understand the role of national memory in the production and destruction of national identity, it is important to study the specifics of its symbolic figurations that reflect the changes in the past-present relationship. These relations emerge as a result of conflicts between competing memories, different genres and legitimization profiles. Jeffrey Olick introduced the concept of legitimization profile in order

to describe the unique contours—more and less smooth—of political meaning-making in any period of time. Profiles comprise diverse meaning elements, including images of the past, identitarian claims, rhetorical styles, attributions of present responsibility, policy characterizations, types of heroes, styles, sense of inside and outside, moral and practical purposes, and procedures. The notion of profile captures the impossibility of apprehending these meanings as discrete elements, and the necessity of viewing them as wholes greater than the sums of their parts. This is the mundane sense of a profile: an outline visible only as a whole. In this way, profile looks out from the political field to see it as part of a wider cultural moment. (Olick, 2016, p. 62)

An unprecedented increase in the importance of the political present in contemporary politics accompanies the formation of national identity. Such present becomes a symbolic measure of the suitable past and the starting point in designing a proper future. Images of the past, political characteristics of elites, typology of the heroic, ideas of duty, guilt, and responsibility, priority strategies and practices of dealing with enemies open a wide space for legitimization of political order through the competitive dynamics of various semantic components and symbolic contours of national memory or national memory legitimization profiles.

All these elements determine the direction of the political socialization of young people, while the conflict of these elements can stimulate the politicization of young people, focused on the radical reformatting of national memory legitimization profiles. Therefore, to properly describe the political socialization of youth, it is imperative to examine national memory legitimization profiles, as this will allow us to forecast the emergence, the patterns, and proliferation of identity conflicts within local communities.

In his interpretation of the political and cultural foundations of symbolic representations of the boundaries of collective memory and sacralization/de-sacralization in the context of such ideal-typical concepts as triumph and trauma, B. Giesen described four main symbolic figures underlying national identity—the

Triumphant Hero, Tragic Hero, Victim, and Perpetrator (Giesen, 2004b). Developing the theoretical foundations of this phenomenology of heroism and sacrifice for the case of Europe, Giesen analyzes the transition from heroism to sacrifice in collective identity and shows that in the Western civilization, national identification replaces the death of heroism with an increasing influence of a sacrifice (Giesen, 2013). His observation challenges the division of communities into heroic and criminal. Such obfuscation of differences between the sacrificial and criminal leads to discursive splits in political socialization. These theoretical premises, in our opinion, are very important not only for analyzing the national memory legitimization profiles but also for understanding victimization and de-heroization, which younger generations are increasingly embracing. This contributes to the accumulation of protest potential within the national spaces of Europe, Russia, and the United States. Moreover, images of victorious heroes and innocent victims as representations of the younger generation reproduce this model in the cultural production of the political.

Like other forms of collective identity in complex societies in search of generational continuity, national identity is formed through the social construction of the symbolic boundaries of communities based on symbolic inclusion/exclusion of "others". However, in contemporary society, this process takes place in the context of the growing erosion of the symbolic structures of national identity. Therefore, socio-cultural modeling of symbolic structures of national memory and the profiles of its legitimization helps us better describe the evolution of basic political narratives of political memory that affect the political socialization of modern generations in Eurasia. Consequently, we will be able to better predict the risks and dangers arising in the realities of symbolic practices of modern intergenerational communications.

Symbolic Practices of Modern Political Intergenerational Communications

Political Socialization and the Iconic Power

To examine political socialization as a communicative process, it is essential to analyze how effective symbolic structures are at mobilizing groups, expressing and condensing their emotions in a targeted manner. Members of the younger generation are increasingly challenging the symbolic discourse of older generations and creating novel symbolic content aimed exclusively at a young audience. The recent events in the post-Soviet space (Ukraine, Belarus) and protest movements in the United States and EU provide ample examples of this phenomenon. This phenomenon can also be illustrated by the rapid growth of social networks that produce and circulate sensual-imaginative political content, in particular Facebook¹, Twitter², Instagram³,

¹ Facebook™ is a trademark of Facebook Inc., registered in the U.S. and other countries. In the Russian Federation, it is recognised as an extremist organisation and its activity is prohibited.

² Twitter® is a trademark of Twitter Inc., registered in the U.S. and other countries. In the Russian Federation, its activity is prohibited.

³ Instagram™ is a trademark of Instagram Inc., registered in the U.S. and other countries. In the Russian Federation, it is recognised as an extremist organisation and its activity is prohibited.

and YouTube⁴. Political blogs written by young people and for young people and youth networking communities explore diverse forms of self-expression (Rambukkana, 2015). Both producers and consumers of such symbolic products belong to the young generation, which is heterogeneous and consists of qualitatively diverse groups.

Mnemonic actors offer political visualization of the new generation's priorities that become effective political triggers as symbols of sensual-figurative prototypes of novel forms of heroism. By so doing, these symbols clash with images of the older generation's heroic past. Political memes, associated with the deconstruction of the Soviet heroic content by ridiculing the political leaders of this period or transforming their positive images into criminal ones, illustrate this observation. Something similar is found in the media space of the United States and the European Union, where previously heroic images of politicians of the past, who symbolized the idea of the civilizing, democratic mission of the West, began to be presented as carriers of political racist evil. From George Washington and Theodore Roosevelt to John Marshall and Woodrow Wilson, American heroes are currently standing public opinion trial as historians discover new documents and review old evidence. The younger generation's cultures of memory do not exist independently of the adult world, and their symbolic capital can be appropriated and partially mastered by adult political actors. Nevertheless, they do influence the political world of adults. This can be illustrated by the Internet memes that are born within the Internet space and legitimize both constructive and destructive activity of the younger generation towards the existing political institutions and models of political behavior. The widespread media memes about the corruption and venality of state institutions and political parties mostly target the youth audience.

In our opinion, the intergenerational clash can be best described with the help of such sociological concepts as iconic experience, iconic consciousness, social unconscious or sensory consciousness. Iconic forms act as communicative mediators between more abstract symbolic representations and everyday representations of bodily, material experience of existence. Iconic signs display referent concepts as an approximation of their bodily-sensory incarnations. A powerful condensation of meanings of the profane and the sacred amplifies their socio-political significance in the popular imagination. Researchers note that iconic images and symbols have not lost their effectiveness in the contemporary world. On the contrary, thanks to modern communications, their influence has increased. As J. C. Alexander notes, iconic power and iconic images can act without the help of other forces. Once formed, they become independent of the processes that produced them. In modern society, the process of producing iconic images is deeply diversified and therefore escapes the control of official institutions (Alexander, 2012b, pp. 34–35). Political socialization more and more often takes place outside the framework of such previously influential institutions of socialization as the education system, political parties, state political information systems, etc. The emergence of online communities radically expands the circle of participants in the production of political content and behavior models, and involves previously apolitical youth groups in the political process. This enhances

⁴ YouTube™ is a trademark of Google Inc., registered in the U.S. and other countries.

individualization of political communications thus stimulating the replication of superficial, profane ideas about politics (Stiegler, 2016/2019).

C. Bottici draws attention to similar phenomena. Resolving the dichotomy of imagination as a subjective and objective ability of a person in political interactions, she introduces the concepts of political imaginary and imaginal. They are designed to describe the processes associated with the production of collectively significant images and symbols that create a sense of political reality, political corporeality. Political communications, she argues, have reached a critical threshold in their quantitative and qualitative capacity in the production of “imaginal” images. Not only do they mediate political activity but also become rightful actors and take our place (Bottici, 2014, p. 178; cf. Bottici, 2019).

Iconic objects and signs are characterized by a high degree of physical verisimilitude with their signifiers, evoking a collective sensory-emotional response that provides penetration of contents of more abstract symbols of political identification into the everyday life representations. Iconic images and symbols trivialize more rational or abstract sacred forms of symbolic representation of the political. Thus, symbolic representations are transformed into a mythical narrative that binds together the rational and irrational representations in the collective consciousness. At the same time, symbols and more abstract substantiations of the past, present, and future are complemented by the symbolization of the bodily sensory perception of social reality through the symbolization of heroic and sacrificial events. This is central to the political socialization of youth since the sensory-figurative component at this stage of socialization plays a very significant role in cognitive development, inclusion in and exclusion from social communications. The majority of people (especially younger ones) intuitively perceive these symbols as something simple and understandable, which is conducive to the rapid formation of an emotional community. In modern communications such effective use of audiovisual technologies for the creation and replication of iconic symbols, triggers mass political mobilization. There are examples of this in practically all post-Soviet color revolutions or protest actions of new social movements, which engendered numerous traditional and new imaginal symbols, presented in political advertising, art comics, hashtags, flash mobs, etc., evoked a strong emotional response and instigated a tragically dramatic political confrontation.

In the context of socio-cultural concepts and symbolic practices of positioning the modern youth, iconic power can be viewed as an important strategy of political socialization. Its iconic forms increase their influence on the participation of young people in political communications by controlling the sense of political solidarity in national communities and giving rise to new forms of political and cultural hierarchy.

Political Socialization and Dynamics of Legitimation Profiles

Studying the role of symbolic structures and practices of political memory in the political socialization of modern youth allow us to make several practical explications regarding the problems of legitimation and transformation of political socialization of youth in Europe, Russia, and the United States.

Contemporary problems of the political socialization of young people in Europe and Russia are linked with political problems and symbolic inflation of the structures of older generations' political memory. The transformation of the European symbolic space that followed the collapse of the Soviet political space became a catalyst for qualitative changes in the structures of national political memory. The economic and migration crisis in the EU and the coronavirus pandemic have created a heightened potential for conflict inherent in such processes and increased the asynchronization between younger and older generations' ideas about the significance of certain milestone political events of the past. It is obvious that the processes of political socialization of youth in the space of the modern Western world differ in their dynamics and contexts, in the symbolic representation of the place and role of youth in the political space. At the same time, the dynamics of legitimization profiles in different societies exhibit common tendencies in the asynchronization of political identifications of generations. In the context of increasing differentiation and asynchronization of communications, symbolic inflation is growing due to the loss of confidence in the institutions of power, which are proclaiming unrealizable, illusory policies (Luhmann, 1997/2012, pp. 230–231). The proliferation of digital technologies for the replication of symbolic content leads to symbolic poverty—people's loss of ability for sustainable self-identification and the erosion of the spatio-temporal articulation of events, thereby destroying the process of generational continuity (Stiegler, 2004/2014, pp. 10–33).

To analyze the national memory legitimization profiles in modern Russia and their influence on the interaction between political generations, it is important to examine event structures of the generationally specific forms of political socialization. In Russia, national memory is characterized by a conflict between various politics of memory that can be traced to competing narratives of political identification in domestic and foreign policy relations. The processes of political socialization and resocialization of youth symbolically reformatted the spatio-temporal boundaries of the younger generation during the collapse of the Soviet Union; they unraveled and delegitimized the structures of its political memory. The dissolution of the USSR was accompanied by the disintegration of the Soviet political identity in the search of the newly independent states for a new symbolic political calendar and political narratives to legitimate their sovereignty. These events triggered the processes of symbolic coding, brought about an intense competition of generational political narratives and inspired a frantic search for a unifying political narrative that would be adequate to the socio-cultural characteristics of political memory in Russia. Such dynamics of political communications inevitably diversify and misalign generational time horizons and manifest themselves as novel symbolic representations and iconic content. In modern Russia, the political discourses of different generational strata offer qualitatively different interpretations of the founding political events significant for these generations. Some continue to focus on the events of the Soviet Union while others fixate on "New Russia" and the related traumatic events.

The dynamics of the profiles of the legitimization of national memory of modern Russia can be interpreted as an evolution from the grand narrative of new Russia

in the 1990s to the narrative of national consolidation in the 2000s. While the grand narrative was oriented towards Russia's entry into the civilized community and followed the principles of Euro-Atlantic solidarity, the consolidation rhetoric of the early 21st century explored more stable forms of national identity and adhered to the symbolic core of civil patriotism. Focusing on the Russian elites' memory politics, some authors distinguish two large periods characterized by different concepts of the official historical narrative—new Russia and millennial Russia (Malinova, 2019).

Liberal-minded researchers often argue that the narrative turn of the early 2000s, both in Russia and in some Eastern European countries, which led to the development of novel forms of national patriotism, should be considered a particular, isolationist tendency (Koposov, 2018). We, however, subscribe to the view upheld by the scholars who, despite all the critical reservations about the risks of abandoning the paradigm of persistent study of the painful past, note the fundamental importance of consolidating Russian society around positive national symbols (Malinova, 2021, pp. 1001–1002). We believe that such narrative turn in the evolution of Russia's national identity can smooth out the intense conflict of the intergenerational political narratives that emerged after the collapse of the Soviet Union and facilitate compatibility of the ground generational expectations in contemporary Russia.

The temporal differences between generations affected political socialization of the Soviet youth in the late 1980s. In the late USSR, the Soviet heroic meta-narrative was devalued and the iconic images of young people in politics were desacralized. The images of Soviet heroes acquired negative or criminal features, and antiheroes, on the contrary, were endowed with the features of the heroic and sacrificial. These processes concluded the early 2000s with the appearance of new national memory legitimization profiles.

The political and cultural realities in Eastern Europe and post-Soviet Russia show that symbolic representations of heroic fighters from the Soviet legacy did not have an expected socializing effect on youth. After the collapse of the Soviet bloc, the discourse of the heroic within the youth strata began to transform into the discourse of victimization. At present, changes and conflicts in the national memory legitimization profile are quite obvious, due, *inter alia*, to the inconsistency of the temporal horizons of generations. The politicization of racial, gender, social distinctions and, accordingly, the re-definition of such iconic concepts as “victim”, “criminal”, and “external enemy” contribute to increased tensions and fragmentations within and across the generations.

Cases of recent racial unrest in the United States exhibit similar tendencies. Radical reformatting of the images of the heroic, sacrificial, and the criminal, the death of the triumphant hero and the sacralization of the victim overturn the referent symbols used by mass protest movements, whose active participants were representatives of youth strata.

While problems of youth political participation in public life are evident worldwide, we can be cautiously optimistic regarding the adaptation of the younger and older generations to the ongoing communicative turbulences both in their national spaces and in the space of political communities. European social scientists who study youth

political participation as a form of political socialization show that, despite the global wave of youth protests and the growth in repressive practices of state institutions, the political activity of youth, intent on making the world a better place for all, contributes to the democratization of societies and establishes a constructive dialogue with the authorities and older generations (Pickard, 2019; Pickard & Bessant, 2018). Similarly, E.B. Shestopal, an authoritative scholar who has researched the dynamics of political socialization in Russia over the past two decades, points out that the results of the young people's political inclusion and the resocialization of older generations in post-Soviet society were mainly positive (Shestopal, 2019).

At the same time, the research focus on communicative strategies in studies of the intergenerational dynamics of political socialization methodologically captures the high degree of heterogeneity of this process. In the political spaces of Russia and Western countries, the national memory legitimization profiles are radically different. Accordingly, the political socialization of young people with their interpretation of basic constituent events and the conflict of practices of victimization and heroization follow divergent scenarios and engender discursive schisms and memory wars. Thus, there is a need to symbolically reformat the memory of older generations and construct new national memory legitimization profiles of new generations to overcome the growing semantic confrontation caused by the qualitative differences in the political and cultural foundations of political solidarity. As the generational splits in Europe, Russia, and the United States show, the pendulum of youth political anomie and political activism can suddenly turn into intense spontaneous destructive activities of young people to delegitimize the existing social institutions.

The dynamic consensus between generations in modern communications requires not only the development of organizational resources of political socialization, ideological campaigns to maintain the importance of its heroic content or the axioms of political values but it also necessitates the participation of young people in the symbolic construction of the political future and active creation of its event content. This content could be both real and imaginary, and it can bring the expectations of young people from beyond the horizon of the consumerist everyday reality and overcome the radical political rejection of the older generations.

Conclusion

The semantic diversification and moral devaluation of communications in modern communities and the increasing variability and hybridization of political ideologies and institutions that implement policies of generational succession necessitate a significant correction of the research agenda in understanding political socialization and positioning of youth in modern society. In the realities of modern political communications, one needs to account for the risks of increasing asynchrony (different timing) of differences in the perception of social time by generations and the consequent changes in the semantics, axioms, and even aesthetics of formative political events.

The more traditional research agenda deals with the political socialization of youth as politicization of an age-minority (future or novice citizens) that emerges as

an outcome of political activities of the older (adult) generations. In our opinion, it would be more productive to supplement this research agenda with studies that focus on political socialization as a set of socially constructed communicative practices of political expectations among young people as those expectations are categorized and symbolically reflected within the national memory of communities. According to this approach, young people do not just adapt to the institutions and ideological regimes of an adult society, but actively select and challenge political ideas of the older generations by creating their own, often alternative narratives of national identity. Such narratives are ambivalent in a communicative sense and can destroy the dominant ideas, but they can also act as a connecting link between the projections of the past and future and can strengthen civic identity.

This perspective on youth political socialization better captures the dynamics of temporal structuring in the communicative spaces of the contemporary political memory and explains the successes or failures of the political socialization of young people as largely predetermined by intergenerational communicative (mis)understanding. The study of temporal changes in the national memory legitimization profiles sheds light on the dynamics of the conflict between its various competing semantic components (images of the past and the future, political characteristics of elites, typology of the heroic, ideas of duty, guilt, and responsibility, priority strategies and practices of dealing with friends and enemies). All these elements determine the direction of youth political socialization, and their conflict can act as a semantic trigger for reformatting of the existing profiles of political legitimization.

In the context of socio-cultural studies of the pragmatics and symbolic effectiveness of political socialization, the production of sensual images of the political is a primary strategy to implement modern iconic power, whose symbolic forms significantly affect the positioning of young people in political communications by cultivating/suppressing the sense of generational solidarity and generating new forms of political activism/escapism. Iconic images addressed to and produced by young people play a significant role in political and cultural reproduction and modern political socialization. These images are a significant resource for studying the processes of social construction and replication of political values and behavioral models.

The aforementioned theoretical and methodological agenda for the investigation of the political socialization of modern youth and the methods of symbolic representation of its political expectations in national memory through the concept of iconic power explain the struggle between the memories of political generations, the collisions of memory politics of the younger generation with the symbolic structures of the older generation's political memory. Society responds to the fast cultural, political, economic, and technological transformations sweeping the globe by changing national memory legitimization profiles within its constituent strata—images of the past clash with images of the future; the key symbolic figures of the heroic are transformed; young generations radically redefine the notions of duty, guilt, and responsibility for events of the past and of the present. It is in this context that we observe the rise in conflicts between different political generations. A better understanding of these dynamics can help prevent or relieve the intergenerational tensions in contemporary politics.

References

- Alexander, J. C. (2006a). Cultural pragmatics: social performance between ritual and strategy. In J. C. Alexander, B. Giesen, & J. L. Mast (Eds.), *Social performance: Symbolic action, cultural pragmatics, and ritual* (pp. 29–90). Cambridge University Press.
- Alexander, J. C. (2006b). *The civil sphere*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195162509.001.0001>
- Alexander, J. C. (2012a). Iconic power and performance: The role of the critic. In J. C. Alexander, D. Bartmański, & B. Giesen (Eds.), *Iconic power* (pp. 25–35). Palgrave Macmillan US. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137012869_3
- Alexander, J. C. (2012b). *Trauma: A social theory*. Polity Press.
- Bottici, C. (2014). *Imaginal politics: Images beyond imagination and the imaginary*. Columbia University Press.
- Bottici, C. (2019). Imagination, imaginary, imaginal: Towards a new social ontology? *Social Epistemology*, 33(5), 433–441. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02691728.2019.1652861>
- Bude, H. (2018). *Society of fear* (J. Spengler, Trans.). Polity Press.
- Chevalier, T. (2019). Political trust, young people and institutions in Europe. A multilevel analysis. *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 28(4), 418–430. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ijsw.12380>
- Clark, L. S., & Marchi, R. (2017). *Communication, society and politics. Young people and the future of news: Social media and the rise of connective journalism*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108116015>
- Easton, D., & Dennis, J. (1969). *Children in the political system: Origins of political legitimacy*. McGraw-Hill.
- Eisenstadt, S. N. (2001). The continual reconstruction of multiple modern civilizations and collective identities. *ProtoSociology*, 15, 14–25. <https://doi.org/10.5840/protosociology2001152>
- Eisenstadt, S. N., & Giesen, B. (1995). The construction of collective identity. *European Journal of Sociology*, 36(1), 72–102. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003975600007116>
- Filippov, A. (2015). *Sociologia. Nabliudeniia, opyty, perspektivy. Tom 2* [Sociologia. Observations, experiences, perspectives] (Vol. 2). Vladimir Dal'.
- Fouskas, V. K., & Gökey, B. (2019). *The disintegration of Euro-Atlanticism and new authoritarianism: Global power-shift* (1st ed.). Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-96818-6>
- Giesen, B. (2004a). Noncontemporaneity, asynchronicity and divided memories. *Time & Society*, 13(1), 27–40. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0961463X04040741>

Giesen, B. (2004b). *Triumph and trauma*. Paradigm.

Giesen, B. (2013). Ambivalent representations and fragile boundaries: Heroes, victims, perpetrators. In A. Salvatore, O. Schmidtke, & H.-J. Trenz (Eds.), *Rethinking the public sphere through transnationalizing processes: Europe and beyond* (pp. 75–90). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137283207_4

Koposov, N. (2018). *Memory laws, memory wars: The politics of the past in Europe and Russia*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108304047>

Krastev, I. (2016). The crisis: Solidarity, elites, memory, Europe. In J. Koltan (Ed.), *Solidarity and the crisis of trust* (pp. 51–62). Gdańsk: European Solidarity Centre.

Krastev, I. (2020a). *Is it tomorrow yet? Paradoxes of the pandemic*. Penguin.

Krastev, I. (2020b). The fear of shrinking numbers. *Journal of Democracy*, 31(1), 66–74. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2020.0005>

Leonard, M. (2016). *The sociology of children, childhood and generation*. Sage. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781529714494>

Levin, M. R. (2015). *Plunder and deceit: Big government's exploitation of young people and the future*. Threshold Editions.

Luhmann, N. (2012). *Theory of society, Volume 1* (R. Barrett, Trans.). Stanford University Press. (Originally published in German 1997)

Luhmann, N. (2013). *Introduction to systems theory* (P. Gilgen, Trans.). Polity Press. (Originally published in German 2002)

Malinova, O. (2019). Constructing the “Usable Past”: The evolution of the official historical narrative in post-Soviet Russia. In N. Bernsand & B. Törnquist-Plewa (Eds.), *Cultural and political imaginaries in Putin's Russia* (pp. 85–104). Brill. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004366671_006

Malinova, O. (2021). Politics of memory and nationalism. *Nationalities Papers*, 49(6), 997–1007. <https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2020.87>

Mannheim, K. (1952). The problem of generations. In P. Kecskemeti (Ed.), *Essays on the sociology of knowledge. By Karl Mannheim* (pp. 276–320). Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Olick, J. K. (2016). *The sins of the fathers: Germany, memory, method*. The University of Chicago Press. <https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226386522.001.0001>

Pickard, S. (2019). *Politics, protest and young people: Political participation and dissent in 21st century Britain*. Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-57788-7>

Pickard, S., & Bessant, J. (Eds.). (2018). *Young people re-generating politics in times of crises* (1st ed.). Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-58250-4>

Rambukkana, N. (Ed.). (2015). *Hashtag publics: The power and politics of discursive networks*. Peter Lang.

Sears, D.O., & Brown, C. (2013). Childhood and adult political development. In D.O. Sears, L. Huddy, & J.S. Levy (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of political psychology* (2nd ed., pp. 59–95). Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199760107.013.0003>

Shestopal, E.B. (2019). Proekt dlinoiu v chetvert' veka. Issledovanie obrazov vlasti i liderov v postsovetsoi Rossii (1993–2018) [A quarter-century-long project. Research of the images of power and leaders in post-Soviet Russia (1993–2018)]. *Polis. Political Studies*, 2019(1), 9–20. <https://doi.org/10.17976/jpps/2019.01.02>

Stiegler, B. (2014). *Symbolic misery. Volume 1: The hyper-industrial epoch* (B. Norman, Trans.). Polity Press. (Originally published in French 2004)

Stiegler, B. (2019). *The age of disruption: Technology and madness in computational capitalism* (D. Ross, Trans.). Polity Press. (Originally published in French 2016)

Strauss, W., & Howe, N. (1997). *The fourth turning: An American prophecy*. Broadway Books.

Zavershinskiy, K.F. (2021). “Pokoleniia elit” vs “elita pokolenii”: kommunikativnye izmereniia sotsializatsii politicheskikh elit [“Generations of elites” vs elite of generation: communicative dimensions of political elite’s socialization]. *Vlast’ i elity*, 8(1), 123–147. <https://doi.org/10.31119/pe.2021.8.1.5>

Zhu, A. Y. F., Chan, A. L. S., & Chou, K. L. (2019). Creative social media use and political participation in young people: The moderation and mediation role of online political expression. *Journal of Adolescence*, 77(1), 108–117. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2019.10.010>

Žižek, S. (2020). *Pandemic!: COVID-19 shakes the world*. Polity Press.