

UDC 101.1

## PSYCHOLOGICAL CONSEQUENCES OF POST-WAR ISOLATION

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The period between the end of the Second World War and the fall of the Berlin Wall, known as the Cold War, has been and is the subject of numerous political, economic and sociological analyses of the two different and opposing economic and social models that have been confronted in the most disparate fields in that historical period (Applebaum, 2013). Less attention has been paid to the effects on the population of the limitations induced by the opposition between the two blocs. Despite the fact that the area of influence of the Soviet Union was, in terms of territorial surface, larger than the part of the world that gravitated around the United States of America, due to economic retaliation and the perennial state of preparation for a possible conflict, the populations of the Soviet bloc experienced long years of isolation.

We must, first of all, consider the discrepancy between being considered, at the same time, the protagonists of the defeat of Nazi fascism and the main danger to world democracy. The ideological opposition between two very different worldviews interrupted any dialogue, turning the other into a potential enemy and preventing a direct confrontation: the arms race, the space race, the economic, political and military support given to nations born after colonial rule or as a result of revolutions piloted from outside, are some of the manifestations of this clash at a distance.

I will leave it to others to analyse the reasons and outcomes. My focus is on the population who suffered the effects of this encirclement.

What did post-war isolation mean for ordinary people? How did people, returning from the horrors of war, react to finding out that half the world saw them as a danger and not as liberators from Nazi-fascist tyranny?

From a psychological point of view, isolation strengthens internal cohesion, increases the sense of belonging and helps to develop a strong national identity. If we look at the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the feeling of being surrounded, of being alone against the Western world, fostered cohesion between the constituent republics of the Union, which differed in history, traditions and, frequently, ethnicity. The Marxist-Leninist vision of social and labour organisation formed the backbone of the feeling of cohesion in the then Soviet Union, which was trying to set its economic model against the capitalist model. History has shown how prophetic Lenin was when, in 1917, he stated that for the economic and productive system proposed by Marxism-Leninism to survive, it was necessary for the whole world to follow its principles. But, during the Cold War, the realisation of the Soviet socialist model acted as the ideal glue. In the pyramid of needs (Maslow, 1943), the need to belong occupies the third position after physiological needs and the need for security. It is the need to belong that led the human species to organise itself first into small family groups, then into tribes, villages, towns and nations, and within these macro-organisations human beings find comfort, share ideas and passions.

It is the sense of belonging that has contributed to reinforcing the idea of being right, of representing well as opposed to evil: whenever we find ourselves evaluating something we do not know, confronting the unknown, we tend either to overvalue it or demonise it, regardless of the exploitation of political propaganda which, on both fronts, has worked hard to support its own vision of the world. The need to belong pushes us to distinguish between Us and Them, often without subjecting the respective points of view to a critical analysis: from this point of view, it is

easy to attribute only positive aspects to Us, to our ideas and actions, and only negative aspects to the actions, customs and habits of Others. And so strong is the conviction of being right that, throughout history, there are countless examples of the mixing of ideas expressed by a group and fideistic elements through the forced enlistment of divinity: Christians fought the Crusades in the name of God; Muslims fought the Crusaders in the name of Allah; the Nazis were convinced that they had God on their side. Uncritical acceptance of one's own lifestyle produces self-referentiality by not allowing the evaluation of the pros and cons of the proposed models, leading to the opposition rather than confrontation.

The so-called Iron Curtain prevented, at least initially, the Warsaw Pact peoples' knowledge of the Western world, while information on the realisation of Soviet socialism reached Western countries, mainly thanks to the Communist parties active in the Western world, whose officials had the opportunity to visit the USSR and to report and disseminate information on the organisation of work, the distribution of wealth and the everyday life of the people. Many western thinkers were fascinated by the model of a society that seemed to be realised in the communist countries and revolutionary attempts in different parts of the world were inspired by it (Applebaum, 2013). The almost total lack of direct information about the social and labour organisation of Western countries protected the Eastern European populations for a certain period from the attraction of a socio-political model different from their own. The lack of information prevented comparisons with their own model of living and, consequently, did not help to undermine the sense of belonging and trust in the system. If one is not aware of the possibility of living in a society different from the one grew up in, it is more difficult to develop critical thinking towards it and to claim different roles or aspire to different social models. However, thanks also to the phenomenon of the globalisation of information, which has made it almost impossible to control the flow of information, little by little the people of Eastern Europe have been able to get to know the way of life of others, of potential enemies, and to make comparisons between the two opposing political and social models. The Western model, consumerist and individualistic, began to creep in, concealing the contradictory aspects that distinguish it and the pockets of economic and social unease present among the population: the message of a high level of prosperity available to all has certainly contributed to undermining membership of a political, social and economic model that, over the years, has seen its role as antagonist to capitalism reduced. We must consider that information about the Western model was acquired, particularly by those who lived in areas bordering Western countries, through television, not so much through news broadcasts as through the viewing of fiction and advertising. The artificially positive image conveyed by television helped to undermine confidence in the superiority of the socialist economic system, but the results of the spread of the myth from beyond the curtain were only seen with the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the birth of Russia and the various national states.

But let us return to the sense of isolation in the post-war period. The tragedy of the Second World War fostered a feeling of cohesion among the countries of the East, united not only by their political and social model but also by their struggle against Nazi-fascism: the enemy that wrought destruction was replaced by an antagonistic enemy, represented on paper by all the western countries of the NATO area, but identified, in practice, with the United States of America. Despite the moments of tension, which have seen the world on the brink of atomic conflict, the antagonism between the two blocks has manifested itself in the attempt to outdo each other in various fields in order to demonstrate, each time, the superiority of one or the other. Any competition needs adversaries with whom one can measure one's limits and increase one's capabilities, but it is the comparison of processes and not of results that enriches one's knowledge and skills. The long-distance duel has, on the one hand, stimulated the pursuit of particular goals, whether in science or, for example, in sport, but on the other hand, it has not allowed the comparison of those working towards the achievement of those goals. In the scientific field, the lack of comparison between scientists lengthens the time needed to achieve the objectives: the self-referentiality in scientific

research that characterised the first post-war period certainly slowed down the achievement of certain objectives despite the huge investments made. It is in fact from the exchange of information, the sharing of data and the confrontation of ideas that scientific knowledge draws the sap it needs to progress.

However, the isolation, brought about by the attitude of the Atlantic Pact, was instrumental in maintaining the internal cohesion of a country as vast and composite as the Soviet Union in the 1950s and 1960s: the sense of belonging to an idea of state made it possible to overcome, at least temporarily, the nationalisms of the various republics that made up the Union, slowing down the process of progressive fragmentation that it subsequently underwent, culminating in the fall of the Berlin Wall and the dissolution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

As we have already mentioned, the needs for belonging occupy the third position in the classic pyramid of needs, proposed by the American psychologist Maslow (1943). According to Maslow, human beings have the need to satisfy a series of needs organised on a rigidly hierarchical basis: it is not possible to satisfy a need if the needs of the previous level have not been satisfied. Therefore, the needs of belonging can only be satisfied after the physiological, survival and security needs have been satisfied. The fact that, in the post-war period, the populations of the Eastern countries developed a strong sense of belonging to the communist area, indicates that the basic needs and the need for security were satisfied, despite what was claimed at the time by the opposing propaganda.

How did the sense of belonging to a collectivist worldview come to be so lost that the area of influence of the communist ideology was reduced? The failure to achieve the dictatorship of the proletariat and the consequent failure of the whole world to adopt the same economic model are the historical and economic causes of the fall of the Berlin Wall. But also the sense of belonging, so strong in the immediate post-war period and revived in the first decades of the Cold War, has been lost, both because of the progressive disappearance of those who had lived through the war and had overcome it precisely thanks to that sense of identity, and because of the emergence of the new generations, deprived of the memory of the war events, eager to overcome emergency situations and therefore in search of new identities, closer to their own experience.

The shreds of information about the well-being of the western world, which have become increasingly consistent over the years, have influenced the younger generations, who are eager to leave a fundamentally autarkic world and to know how life was lived by those on the other side of the curtain. The difficulty in finding, in the available information, those faults, which the propaganda had, for many years, mentioned emphasising the merits of the communist system, undermined the sense of belonging, the sharing of an ideal and also the perception of the threat from an enemy which, once revealed, no longer appeared so threatening. The psychological warfare carried out without limits by the two sides, fed the fear of the unknown, fed on the lack of concrete elements of knowledge about life on both sides of the wall. However, the perception was different depending on which side of the wall one lived on. The sense of being surrounded was experienced by those who lived within the communist block and perceived themselves as isolated from the rest of the world, helped in this by a very strict policy of control, carried out by the Soviet authorities, of expatriates and contacts with Westerners passing through the Soviet Union. When the control was loosened, when the isolation was interrupted, the confrontation between the two realities favoured the birth of a critical thought, with respect to the system created in the Soviet Union, the diffusion of which contributed, together with political and, above all, economic factors, to the disintegration of the Soviet block, allowing the different national realities to claim their independence as sovereign states.

In the years following the fall of the Berlin Wall, the Western media highlighted the existence, in the former Warsaw Pact countries, of political formations and popular movements referring to the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Although apparently incongruous, this phenomenon is linked to the need not to lose one's identity (Gallagher, 2011), to maintain a sense of belonging to an idea and to the symbols that represented it. It is no coincidence that the states that came into

being after the break-up of the Soviet Union revitalised national history and sentiment, went in search of roots and traditions to develop a strong sense of national identity, thus increasing internal cohesion.

In conclusion, it is my opinion that the forced isolation experienced by the peoples of the East in the post-war period contributed to activating psychological mechanisms that strengthened the political-economic-social system inspired by the Russian revolution rather than weakening it, as desired by those who adopted the strategy of encirclement. The contrast, in fact, favours adherence to one of the proposed systems but, in the absence of information on one of them, people turn towards the system they know and can evaluate, even if unable to make a comparison.

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### MÜHARİBƏDƏN SONRAKI TƏCRİDİN PSIXOLOJİ NƏTİCƏLƏRİ

#### Quido Amoretti

**Xülasə.** Məqalədə İkinci Dünya Müharibəsinin sonu ilə Soyuq Müharibə kimi tanınan Berlin Divarının yıxılması arasındakı dövrün iki fərqli və bir-birinə zidd olan iqtisadi və sosial modelin çoxsaylı siyasi, iqtisadi və sosioloji təhlillərinin mövzusunda bəhs edilmişdir. Müəllif qeyd etmişdir ki, iki blok arasında müxalifətin yaratdığı məhdudiyətlərin əhaliyə təsirlərinə daha az diqqət yetirilmişdir. Baxmayaraq ki, Sovet İttifaqının təsir dairəsi ərazi səthi baxımından dünyanın Amerika Birləşmiş Ştatlarının ətrafında cazibədar olan hissəsindən daha böyük idi və iqtisadi qisas və ehtimal olunan münaqişəyə çoxillik hazırlıq vəziyyətinə görə, Sovet blokunun əhalisi uzun illər təcrid yaşadı. Müəllif "müharibədən sonrakı təcrid adi insanlar üçün nə demək idi?", "müharibənin dəhşətlərindən qayıdan insanlar dünyanın yarısının onları nasist-faşist zülmündən azad edənlər kimi deyil, təhlükə kimi gördüyünü öyrəndikdə necə reaksiya verdilər?" kimi suallara cavabı təhlil etmişdir. Eyni zamanda müharibədən sonrakı dövrdə təcrid olunmanın psixoloji nəticələri tədqiq edilmişdir.

**Açar sözlər:** Sovet imperiyası, postmüharibə, kommunizm, faşizm, psixoloji nəticə, təcrid olunma.

### ПСИХОЛОГИЧЕСКИЕ ПОСЛЕДСТВИЯ ПОСЛЕВОЕННОЙ ИЗОЛЯЦИИ

#### Гвидо Аморецци

**Резюме.** Статья посвящена многочисленным политическим, экономическим и социологическим анализам двух разных (и противоречивых) экономических и социальных моделей, периода между окончанием Второй мировой войны и падением Берлинской стены (сооружение, ставшее главным символом холодной войны). Автор отмечает, что меньше внимания уделялось влиянию ограничений, введенных оппозицией между двумя блоками на население. Хотя сфера влияния Советского Союза была больше, чем самой привлекательной части мира Соединенных Штатов, население советского блока долгие годы жило в изоляции из-за экономического реванша и многолетней готовности к возможному конфликту. Автор спрашивает: «Что значила послевоенная изоляция для простых людей?» проанализированы ответы на такой вопрос: «Как реагировали люди узревшие ужасы войны на происходящее, узнав при этом, что полмира видит в них не освободителей от нацистского гнета, а угрозу?». При этом изучались психологические последствия послевоенной изоляции.

**Ключевые слова:** советская империя, послевоенное время, коммунизм, фашизм, психологические последствия, изоляция.