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A Study of the Representation of Individual and Collective Trauma Resulting from Two World Wars in Art with a Look at the Works of Two German Painters

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Abstract

Since the 20th century and following the experience of two world wars and other human catastrophes, the concept of trauma, as an individual and collective phenomenon, has been widely discussed in both scientific and public spheres. Although it is difficult to determine clear boundaries for the categorization of factors causing individual and collective trauma, war can be regarded as a traumatic phenomenon and the concept of trauma resulting from war trauma can be thus advanced.

● Problem Statement and Key Questions

The present research focuses on the representation of individual and collective war trauma in works of art with a look at the paintings of two German artists in the years following World War I and World War II. This study aims to trace and study the interactional relationship of these works with individual and collective trauma in the cultural and social context of the post-war society in the defeated country. In fact, this study tries to answer these questions: how does the representation of individual war trauma in these paintings interact with collective trauma in the setting of the post-war society? How can the representation of collective trauma in works of art by different post-war generations be explained by Freudian and post-Freudian psychoanalytical theories?

● Research Methodology

To answer the research questions, first psychoanalytical theories about trauma (especially war trauma), with an emphasis on the ideas of Freud, will be discussed. In the course of the content analysis of the works of art, this psychoanalytical approach will serve as a departure point in relation to which the assessment of cultural and social conditions and the biography of the artists will be undertaken. Thus, this study shows that works of art can serve as a means of representation of the memories of individual and collective trauma. For a better understanding of the different individual and collective aspects of war trauma, two German artists from two different generations have been selected for the case study. The fact that one of them belongs to a generation that has experienced war and the other is from a generation that inherited the consequences of war from the generation of their parents, provides us with a better opportunity to study the representation of trauma as an individual or collective experience.

● Research Objective

The present study tries to identify the signs and features determined in psychoanalysis to diagnose trauma in the works of two German painters from the era following the two world wars as a representation of individual and collective war trauma and explain the content of these works through a psychoanalytic reading. This study provides for a better understanding of the analyzed works and develops a model for the study of the representation of war trauma in similar works in other societies and historical eras following different wars.

Keywords

Individual trauma, Collective trauma, World wars, Otto Dix, Georg Baselitz.

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Introduction and Problem Statement

Wars have always been disastrous. Before the 20th century, many scholars in medicine, psychology and psychoanalysis were engaged in the study of trauma, as a psychological injury resulting from an event or situation that is so unpleasant that cannot be psychologically tolerated by the individual. The most notable of them were Sigmund Freud and his friend Joseph Breuer, who published articles on hysteria in the final decades of the 19th century.

Nevertheless, it should be recognized that the 20th century, with two world wars, which are unmatched by anything human being has witnessed in terms of their scale, violence and damage, created a situation that, especially in the West, called for a more comprehensive study of trauma and methods for treating different degrees of trauma in people. A look at the post-war years in Europe reveals that there are numerous cases of war trauma in these countries, both the victors and the defeated. However, in the defeated countries, like Germany, trauma has been more widespread in the aftermath of both wars. The study of collective trauma became more popular in the post-war years and later terms such as cultural trauma, historical trauma and transgenerational trauma were introduced into this discourse. Nowadays, trauma studies specifically focus on the individual and collective aspects of this phenomenon, the causes of its development, its characteristics and its effects on different aspect of the lives of individuals and the society. One of these individual and social aspects is art, which as a part of the culture of every society, in interaction with individual and collective trauma, acts as a setting for the manifestation of different aspects of trauma and paves the way for a better understanding of its different facets.

Based on this interaction, the present research seeks to examine the representation of individual and collective war trauma in German painting following two world wars. To this end, the works of two painters from two different generations – one that has experienced war and one that has spent its childhood

in war without directly experiencing it – have been analyzed.

Literature Review

Numerous books and articles have dealt with the analysis of the ideas of Freud about trauma, many of which have been written by professional psychoanalysts and followers of Freud or other schools of psychoanalysis. Among these writings On Freud's "The Unconscious" (2011) edited by Salman Akhtar and Mary Kay O'Neil can be pointed out, which have studied different aspects of the application of Freud's ideas to death and trauma in different fields.

Other than in psychoanalysis, trauma has been studied in interdisciplinary fields associated with sociology, social psychology, cultural studies, narratology and literature. One of the most important works on trauma in literature and cinema is Cathy Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma and the Possibility of History* (1996), whose method for tracing trauma in literary and cinematic works can be of great help in the analysis of visual arts works.

Books and articles that have studied the works of Otto Dix and Georg Baselitz, exclusively or along with works of others, are relatively numerous. These studies have dealt with the life and artistic activities of these two German artists from different aspects using various approaches, and have been mostly accompanied by analyses in historical, social, political and cultural settings. However, only in a few cases trauma has been analyzed in the paintings of Dix using a psychoanalytical approach. Among them are the article 'Confronting postwar shame in Weimar Germany: trauma, heroism and the war art of Otto Dix', *Oxford Art Journal* (2006) by Paul Fox and *Bitter Witness: Otto Dix and the Great War* (2003) by Linda McGreevy. In both of these, World War I trauma is explained in relation to the discourse of masculinity and heroism prevalent in Weimar Republic. Although the present study has not considered the masculinity discourse in the analysis of the individual trauma of Dix (and a large number

of World War I veterans) and the post-war collective trauma, it has drawn on the achievements of these two studies in the adoption of the psychoanalytical approach in the analysis of Dix's works.

To the best of the author's knowledge, no study has been carried out to analyze the works of Baselitz using a psychoanalytical approach.

Methodology

The methodology of this study is of qualitative type and some selected works by these two painters are psychoanalytically analyzed and the content of these works in interaction with individual and collective trauma in the context of two world wars is studied. For this purpose, first, trauma is defined from the perspective of psychoanalysis and then the selected works are examined using the historical-interpretative method against the defined characteristics so that a meaningful interpretation of these works, as historical-cultural phenomena, is developed.

To collect data, documentary methodology is employed, and finally through the analysis of each work of art and advancing arguments, its interaction with the theories put forward here is analyzed. Thus, based on psychoanalysis and an interpretative approach, the content of these works of art is explained and a final conclusion is drawn.

Theoretical Bases

• Trauma

In 1920 in his *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud discusses war trauma. He writes that traumatic neurosis is applied to a condition following severe mechanical blows or other events that involve a danger to life. He, who himself had suffered from the disturbing effects of World War I, observed and studied neurotics of the war and developed his theories about the mechanism of the psyche and mind, anxiety disorders and trauma. The approach adopted in this study to deal with the concept of trauma heavily draws on the studies by Freud and writings by him, published in the years 1918 to 1920.

Individual Trauma

In his *Selected Papers on Hysteria and Other Psychoneuroses*, Freud identifies the similarities between the causes and symptoms of hysteria and trauma and develops the new concept of "traumatic hysteria" and later introduces the concept trauma. In defining the causes of trauma, he highlights the painful and upsetting effects of terror, anxiety, shame or any other painful psychological feelings associated with the event as an effective and constant traumatic psychological factor, and, unlike the popular belief, he attaches little importance to physical injury (Freud, 1912: 3).

A few years later in his *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, once again Freud stressed that in war trauma, symptoms sometimes appear without the involvement of any special mechanical force and the symptoms of mental and psychological illnesses do not necessarily emerge following physical injuries (Ibid: 30). When a war breaks out, its extent and intensity, no matter how prepared people are for an imminent war, can take individuals and the society by surprise and it can, along with anxiety, result in a psychological feeling that Freud calls "fright". The fright resulting from the conditions of war, often involving physical threats and psychological suffering resulting from the violence of the war, casualties caused by it and the social and economic impacts of military conflict (and even occupation), causes a feeling of insecurity, lack of safety, shame or anger; consequently, it can cause a trauma in soldiers and civilians, without any physical injury being inflicted.

Freud believed that psychological damage creates a memory of the traumatic event that acts as a strange phenomenon and for a long time after the event it repeatedly affects the psyche as a new stimulating factor. In other words, reminiscences of the event, which are associated with fright and other psychological feelings and impacts, stimulate these unpleasant effects repeatedly in the form of a new factor and the remembrance of these reminiscences and understanding their stimulating power through

relocating them in the context of an event from which they derive, can neutralize the traumatic function of these reminiscences. Freud defined this mechanism in a way as if the recalling of reminiscences is like recreating a scene through which an opportunity can be made to talk about the psychological blow and thus “the psychic process originally rebuffed must be reproduced as vividly as possible so as to bring it back into the *statum nascendi* and then be thoroughly ‘talked over.’ At the same time if we deal with such exciting manifestations as convulsions, neuralgias and hallucinations they appear once more with their full intensity and then vanish forever.” (Ibid: 4).

In his *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, in order to test the theory “hysterics suffer mostly from reminiscences” (Ibid: 5), Freud opts for the study of dreams. His observations show that in the traumatic neuroses the dream life “continually takes the patient back to the situation of his disaster, from which he awakens in renewed terror.” (Freud, 1920: 115). These observations are especially in contrast with process of wish-fulfilling, which has been predicted in psychoanalysis for dreams. According to Freud, the repetition compulsion in dreams that recreate the frightful situation of an unpleasant dream is an attempt on the part of the mind to pull out of a passive and overwhelmed state. Although dreams are a different form of memories in a new scene of the unpleasant event and each time they result in the re-living of the same fright and sensational effects, sometimes through this recreation the individual has the chance to take on a more active role in the new account and thus he can dominate the overwhelming state in the realm of dreams.

This repetition compulsion, which is a feature of traumatic neurosis, should be employed to return the suppressed psychological process to the initial state, i.e. the occurrence of the event and the development of the damage, so that it can “be talked over”. In the process of psychoanalysis, the psychoanalyst tries to break the resistance of the patient and transfer what has been suppressed in the past from the unconscious to the conscience by encouraging the patient to give

up resistance. Freud explains that in this process the patient “is driven to repeat the repressed matter as an experience in the present.” (Ibid: 36).

A few decades after Freud, Ira Brenner, working as a professional psychoanalyst, observed and analyzed repetition compulsion in dreams in the people suffering from trauma and hysteria. Along with repeated nightmares, she identified another trait in these patients (especially in those who had a traumatic experience in their childhood), which, according to her, appears in these nightmares: dissociations, as altered states of consciousness (Brenner, 2011: 111). Based on the observations of Brenner, after experiencing a reminiscence/dream whose unpleasant impacts put the neurotic in a state of shock¹, the individual might manifest a condition of personality “transformation”. In this situation of identity analysis, the transformed personality puts forward an account as a memory from the past, which contains the same traumatic event previously avoided by the conscious “self” (in the form of the personality with the original identity of the individual). Resistances that are the origin of this avoidance in the form of oblivion or unawareness protect the individual against confrontation with the truth that in a situation similar to the one he has experienced in his dream, he has lived the fright, suffering, shame or any other unpleasant feeling that has upset his psyche. Dissociations and multiple personalities use scenes from everyday life to thrust memories that have found a way to the surface through repetition compulsion into an account and represent them. These accounts are replete with symbols, substitutions and displacements that have a meaningful connection with the memory of the trauma in the consciousness of the transformed personality and provide him with the possibility of a form of representation to talk about the trauma (even if is apparently attributed to another person in the account). The suppressed issue finds a way of representation through this personification and symbolism, without which the psyche and mind cannot express it (Ibid: 112–118). This state of “self

and non-self", different states of consciousness, a false displacement into an external entity in the forms of an invented identity, anthropomorphism, and the narrative and symbolic manifestation in sleep and wakefulness are all methods for transference through the layers of resistance between the suppressed issue and consciousness. Thus, the dark core in the form of old specters come to the scene in a new construct and in the process of psychoanalysis, through the analysis of the relationship between these accounts, the individual finds the clarity needed to encounter his trauma. In most cases, the memory of the traumatic event continues to exist, but in a way that, without any resistance, is accessible to the consciousness. Occasional evocations of these memories will result in psychological suffering; however, the intensity and duration of these feelings, unlike in the past, will not result in disorder.

Collective Trauma

Collective trauma, or cultural trauma, occurs when the members of a community feel they are experiencing a catastrophic event in a way that it can have unforgettable and lasting effects on their collective consciousness, impact their individual and collective memories forever and fundamentally damage their identity (for generations) in an irreversible way. The study of collective trauma reveals a significant causal association between the past events and the future structure, perceptions and behaviors of societies (Alexander, 2004: 1–2). During the 20th century, people in the Western societies, and before long all over the world, repeatedly talked about their affliction with the trauma of experiences such as accidents and catastrophes (resulting from human and natural causes), violence and injuries, social changes or even merely unexpected, disastrous events and changes. The discourse of trauma has enabled individuals to articulate what they and their society have been through.

Jeffrey Alexander believes that in collective trauma it is not the event that is per se traumatic at the social level, but it is its social construct in the form of

collective memory that should be blamed. Therefore, the damage of the event is not naturally inherited by a generation from the previous generations. Collective trauma is a quality that is socially developed and transferred. The social construct of trauma can move along with the event or follow it (Ibid: 8). In his Totem and Taboo, Freud argues that psychological processes are transferred from generation to generation and no generation is able to conceal its psychological impulses from the next generation (Freud 2004: 84). This claim is true about collective trauma, and as Alexander has pointed out, the social processing of collective trauma transfers it to the next generation. Thus, the unpleasant experiences and the psychological sufferings that social groups go through in collective trauma have psychological consequences for future generation; a generation that is inevitably charged with the responsibility of discovering (or creating) the meaning of a trauma occurred before its birth (Mucci, 2003: 135).

In collective trauma, like in individual trauma, psychological peace is only regained and the truth about the traumatic event is only understood when the memories are recalled and the individual and society come to terms with these memories (Friedländer, 1979). A large part of the remnants of memories come to the surface through free association in individual psychoanalysis and through the creation of artistic and literary works in the social sphere. These works eventually recreate the collective psychological health by going through social resistance and reviving memories (Alexander, 2004: 6–7). Here, like in individual psychoanalysis, society should be able to overcome denial and resistance in its encounter with the remnants of memories – which we deal with their artistic examples in this study – and keep its distance from the feelings and impacts (including feelings of collective inferiority, shame and guilt, historical suffering and oppression, victimization, anger, violence, and revenge) that are stimulated through the representation of the past. It is in such a situation that the truth about damage, which is in fact constructed by society itself and is kept,

sometimes for generations, in the unconsciousness of the members of community, becomes clear and, in the words of Freud "talked over".

● War and Trauma

The contemporary approaches to war and its survivors are affected by two (distinct and yet dependent) concepts: trauma and heroism (Fox, 2006: 251). These two concepts provide frames for sharing the experiences of war and make the representation of the experience of war in individual and collective accounts possible. The interaction between these two influenced the formation of discourses following the two world wars in both the victorious and defeated countries. These discourses resulted in strengthening feelings of collective pride and shame in the generation that had directly experienced the wars and also in the next generations. Collective memories of the war have developed around wars, around regimes that generate memories and determine what should be remembered or forgotten (Radstone and Hodgkin, 2003: 2). The regimes of collective memories, in interaction with cultural and political structures, determine in what collective narrative (or narratives) war should be put and transferred to the future generations.

A study of the art and literature of post-war societies indicates that in the victorious countries, artists who have experienced war usually refrain from providing a clear narrative and presenting their first-hand observations and experiences of war in favor of the discourse of heroism, which is developed in the post-war society; such a discourse defines social and political values based on victory in the war (Fox, 2006: 247). In other words, in victorious countries, war trauma is not presented under the discourse of victory and heroism, but is mostly represented only in the works of artists who has probably been involved with the analysis of their personal trauma.

On the other hand, in the post-war atmosphere of the defeated countries, individual and collective trauma is represented more in literature and art. A look at art in Germany, Japan and Italy after World War II

backs up this claim. The books of Tomas Mann and Günter Grass, the installations by Joseph Beuys, and numerous cinematic works such as the "08/15" trilogy by Paul May in Germany (Hake, 2008), Roberto Rossellini's post-war trilogy in Italy, the photographs of the Nagasaki catastrophe by Yosuke Yamahata, the books by Rinzo Shiina and Medoruma Shun and cinematic works such as *Graves of the Fire Flies* (1988) (Stahl and Williams, 2010) are all examples of collective trauma in the post-war art of these defeated countries.

Analysis of the Works

● World War I

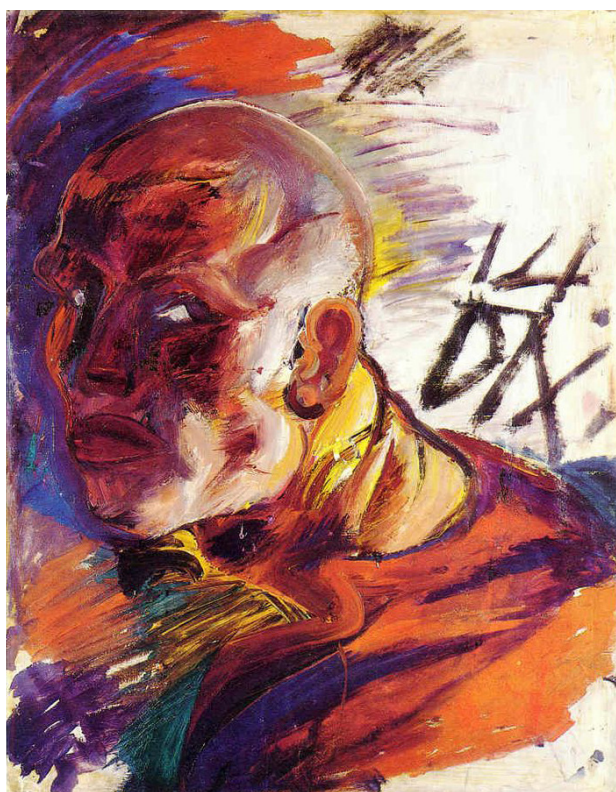
World War I (1914-1918) is one of the most catastrophic wars in the history of mankind, with one of the largest number of casualties. In this war chemical weapons were used for the first time. The bombardment of cities and civilian areas resulted in the indiscriminate massacre of civilians. Also, World War I paved the way for ethnic genocides. This war marked the catastrophic start of a century in which violence and bloodshed reached an unprecedented level. The psychological shock of this catastrophe caused trauma in many survivors, from Freud, who was encouraged to analyze this kind of trauma, to writers and artists who were, one way or another, affected by this event.

- Otto Dix

Among the painters who directly experienced war and its physical and psychological pains were some second-generation German Expressionists, most of whose active years of artistic works were spent under the Neue Sachlichkeit School. Otto Dix, George Grosz and Max Beckman, who all worked in this school, entered the German army, being influenced by the nationalistic and patriotic slogans of the Second Reich.

At the age of 22, immediately after the war, Otto Dix joined the army. He was wounded several times in the Western front but returned to the battlefield soon after recovery. This characteristic can be explained through Freud's belief that in traumatic hysteria the

individual, under repetition compulsion, remains in a situation that seems to be his inevitable, ineluctable fate (Freud, 1920: 128-130). In an interview with *Stuttgarter Zeitung*² in his late life, Dix said that "The war was a hideous thing," he remarked years later, "but there was something tremendous about it, too. I couldn't afford to miss it." (Biro, 2009: 179). In a painting called *Self-portrait as a Soldier* (Fig. 1), the representation of this internal conflict and unrest can be seen in the expressionistic portrayal of his face and the predominance of the color red. Above his left shoulder an animal has raised its head and it looks as if it is spurting fire through its mouth. Dix's white eyes seem to be mesmerized by the fire, which has cast a red shadow on his face, as if beyond the



OTTO DIX: "SELBSTBILDNIS ALS SOLDAT", 1914/15, Öl a. Papier, 68 x 53 cm

Fig. 1. Self-portrait as a Soldier 1914. 68 x 53.5 cm, Oil on Paper, Galerie der Stadt Stuttgart Source: Barron, 1988: 19.

canvas (out of our sight) he is staring at hell. In the Western front, he made drawings of war scenes, many of which were later used in his works of the post-war years.

After the military service, Dix returned to the Dresden Academy of Art to resume his studies, which he had left when he went to war. He was trained in the landscape painting workshop and in many of his paintings he depicted landscapes and ruins in battle fronts.

His art after the war was heavily inspired by the traumatic experience of the war, which had given him a long-lasting trauma. The works he created by direct reference to his experiences of war in the period between the two world wars reveals his constant, compulsive repetition of "going on the ground again" (Fox, 2006: 249). The compulsion to repeat the traumatic scenes of war in the form of pictures that expressionistically narrated the experienced catastrophe was both the individual encounter of Dix with this trauma and a scene that once again makes the crisis-stricken society face the dark ghosts of the past. In an interview³ in 1965, he talks about to his repetitive nightmares: "For years, at least ten years, I kept having these dreams in which I would have to crawl through demolished houses, through corridors that barely permitted me to pass. The ruins were constantly in my dreams." (Biro, 2009: 179). The scene that can be seen in the middle of the triptych "The War" (Fig. 2) can be the recreation of one of these nightmares, in which a soldier, wearing a mask, walks through the ruins following a chemical bombardment.

The central panel of this triptych had been previously painted as a separate work under the title "Trench Warfare" (1920-1923). This painting (Fig. 3) was his largest work until then and its purchase in 1923 by The Wallraf-Richartz-Museum in Cologne greatly added to his reputation. This scene of nocturnal artillery attack on the German military trenches in the Western front was inspired by Dix's similar experiences in Western front. Walter Schmits⁴, a critic of this painting, wrote at the time that "a poisonous, sulfur yellow pool glistens in the depths like a smirk from hell. Otherwise the trench is filled up with hideously mutilated bodies and human fragments." (Crockett, 1999: 94). About the social situation



Fig. 2. The War, Otto Dix, 1929-1932. The central panel 204 x 204 cm; the lateral panels 204 x 102 cm. Tempera on wood, Galerie Neue Meister, Dresden. Source: <http://www.skd.museum/en/special-exhibitions/archive/otto-dix-der-krieg-war>

of that time in Weimar, David Crockett writes that “many, if not most, of those who saw this painting in Cologne and Berlin during 1923-24 knew nothing about this aspect of the war” (Crockett, 1999: 94). The reason for unawareness of the German society after World War I can be examined in a comprehensive study Fehle mann and Löffelbein carried out on the trauma resulting from this war in the European societies. Their analysis indicated that the politics of collective memory in Weimar Republic about war was developed by millions of veterans (mostly disabled in war) (Fehle mann and Löffelbein 2016). The political and social analyses in newspapers and other sources from that time bring us to the conclusion that the politics of war memory in Weimar was a subordinate to the military hierarchy; this was because high-ranking officers and war commanders, as heroes coming back from the war, were the source of directing memories of a war that

had resulted in the defeat of the German; and yet their politics toward memories of war was merely silence. However, this silence could be primarily seen in the films recorded by psychiatrists featuring veterans in rehabilitation centers and in reports of the process of diagnosis and treatment of the veterans (Köhne, 2016: 49-74).

Thus, the audiences of the works of Dix encountered these pictures in a special social situation, to which Mark Seltzer refers to as “wound culture” (Seltzer, 1997). This wound refers to the trauma woven into the public sphere; and silence has been the suppression and denial of this wound. The post-war society was in a difficult social and economic situation and was filled with the shame of defeat (which had created a form of collective denial of the guilt of starting the war and admitting the military defeat) and a feeling of humiliation resulting from the conditions of the Treaty of Versailles. However, the politics of memory



Fig. 3. Trench Warfare Otto Dix, 1920-1923. 250 x 250. Oil on Wood – storage place unknown. Source: Reinisches Bild Archiv, Fox, 2006: 257.

in Weimar Republic was based on forgetting war and its misfortunes, in the hope that Germany would very soon, like a phoenix, rise from its own ashes. In such a situation, many of the Germans perceived the paintings of Dix as nightmares coming back to them, and under the psychological pressure of war memories (which were supposed to be forgotten), they went through a feeling of turmoil, terror and disgust, while many were unaware of its reason. Conflict over this painting escalated to a point that Hans Secker, the museum director, took it off public display and later resigned. Trench Warfare, as

unfortunate as it was, was eventually put on display by the Nazis in the Entartete Kunst (Degenerate Art) show in 1933 and was probably destroyed by them afterwards (Caen Memorial Museum, 1998).

Dix's art of representing war can be regarded, more than anything else, as autobiographic, and at the same time, can be the account of any veteran of the battlefields. His collection of prints, *Der Krieg*, which he created in 1924 based on his drawings of the battle fronts, is a visual narrative of the years of battle fronts, a collection of 50 documentary pictures that, using a Post-expressionistic approach, provides

the audience with the non-heroic aspects of war and the ever-painful wound of the trauma of an eye witness. In the Germany of between the two world wars, the first-hand-experience-based works of Dix served as a scene that drew the audience into itself and by referring to the collective memory, which was replete with images of war and narratives of human crimes, they awakened the fright and fear that functioned as the foundation of individual and collective trauma in the minds of people.

About the representation of war in his works, Dix says "all art is exorcism... I painted many things, war too, nightmares too, horrible things... Painting is the effort to produce order; order in yourself. There is much chaos in me." (McGreevy, 2003: 201 in Fox, 2006: 256). The turmoil inside Dix is represented in the repetition of "nightmare" in these works; and his aim was to alleviate this turmoil, as was the Weimar society's wish. However, before these repeated nightmares could be directed toward a narrative that could provide an opportunity for showing sympathy, expressing feelings, dominating the memories of the catastrophe and creating peace for the collective psyche, the Third Reich was developed, fanning the flames of World War II and finally resulting in the actual re-living of another horrifying nightmare.

● World War II

Compared to World War I, World War II was far larger in scale and much more destructive. For example, the Allied forces carried out strategic air raids as a result of which many of the important cities of Germany were razed to the ground. The most extreme case of these air raids was the atomic bombardment of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, carried out to force Japan to surrender.

On May 8, 1945 when Berlin was occupied by the Red Army, Germany surrendered unconditionally. Some parts of the country (especially in the east) were separated and attached to Poland, as a result of which many Germans were forced to immigrate to the western parts. The occupying countries divided Germany into four sections to prevent the development of warlike and fascist inclinations.

However, with the rise of the Cold War, the country was divided into two eastern and western parts, with each section being inclined to either the Eastern or the Western block. Presence in the front line of the Cold War, collective humiliation resulting from the occupation, the division of the country and the shadow of the crimes by the Third Reich are among the important causes of the formation of collective trauma in West Germany.

- Georg Baselitz

Georg Baselitz was born, as Hans-Georg Bruno Kern, in Deutschbaselitz, Saxony in Germany, in a peasant family. The first seven years of his life were spent before and at the time of World War II, about which he writes "I was born into a destroyed order, a destroyed landscape, a destroyed people, a destroyed society." (Wilmes, 2014: 60). In 1956 he moved from Saxony (East Germany) to East Berlin to study at the city's academy of arts. But he was very soon dismissed from school because of "lack of social and political maturity". Then he went to West Berlin and attended the art school there. He found the atmosphere of West Germany like that of a foreign land. He believed that this lack of stability and belonging was a compensation for his parents' sins: "I lived through seven years of war. After 1945, the part of Germany I grew up in was occupied by the Russians; then I was sent to the part that was occupied by the Americans. It was as though the children were being punished for the stupidities of the fathers." (Ibid: 67).

After the war, the regimes of memories of World War II (especially in West Germany) were divided into two main sides: the first side was formed by intellectuals and politicians who, in their evaluation of the Nazi past, followed the politics of remorse for the crimes of the Germans. National shame and guilt, highlighted in this politics of memories, give broader aspects to the collective trauma resulting from war. This was the basic politics of the period of occupation and denazification and the early governments of West Germany. The outcome of this politics for the following generations (including

that of Baselitz) was the dark shadow of parents' sin that did not seem to leave their children. In the other party, there were intellectuals, historians and writers who, along with admitting the crimes of the Third Reich, also emphasized on the misfortunes of Germany in the final years of and after the war: events such as the destruction of German cities because of the strategic air raids, the killing of civilians in the months leading to the defeat of Germany and even following it, and more importantly the detachment of a part of eastern Germany and finally the division of Germany into two countries during the Cold War. The second and third generations of the post-war period focused on this part of collective misfortunes and damages of Germany, especially in the protests of the 1960s and 1970s. Among the writers who dealt with this aspect of collective trauma in their works are Günter Grass and Winfried Georg Sebald (Fuchs 2008 and Langenbacher, 2010). The artistic activities of Baselitz in the 1960s and 1970s started and developed at the time of these conflicts between the regimes of memory in Germany.

In the setting of a society that, in its attempt to overcome collective trauma, had to review and evaluate the guilt of Germany, on the one hand, and the victimization of the German nation, on the other hand, landscapes from Baselitz's birthplace, in the farmlands of which he had spent his childhood, repeatedly appeared in his works in the 1960s and 1970s. However, his hometown was destroyed after the war and he had to abandon it. In these years, he created the collections *Heroes*, *Rebels* and *New Type*, all of which depicted men with ragged clothes in abandoned or destroyed places. Symbols such as traps, crosses, animals and mutilated bodies are constantly present in these works. These ragged-clothed men, unlike what the title of the collection denotes, seem to be non-heroes rather than heroes. They are rebels and heroes in the middle of the ruins with no tools to gain victory, and with their limbs being caught in traps or wounded they are not expected to improve the situation. They are sometimes wounded and barefoot and are often carrying heavy backpacks,

usually with houses burning or burnt landscapes in the background. These men can be regarded as symbols of the veterans whose participation in the war was not an honor to them but the shame of being an accomplice of the Third Reich in their crimes. They can also be considered as symbolizing the post-war generation that cannot find any tools in the ruins they have inherited for healing their wounds, a hero who is trapped and blood is flowing from his wounds.

In *Picture for the Fathers*, from the *Heroes* collection, a woman is seen sitting on the ruins of a burnt city, protecting two misshapen creatures with shapeless bodies and only eyes and mouth. An umbilical cord has attached them to the woman and the ground. These shapeless monsters are the children of the woman, i.e. the post-war generation. The woman can symbolize Germany, the motherland, with a dagger in its side. She can also be the symbol of the widowed women who have lost their soldier husbands in the war.

The shapeless monster, the generation of the 20 to 30-year-olds, to which Baselitz himself belonged, began to ask the contemporary history of their country questions, in a situation in which the politics of memory of the past was vacillating between the two struggling poles. This history included World War II, genocides and Nazism, which were missing in the previous textbooks; as if "German history did not start until after 1945." (Gillen, 1997: 120). This generation asked questions about the role of their parents in the crimes of the Nazis; crimes that were punished by the division of Germany and some other catastrophes. According to this generation, the imposition of these punishments on Germany signified that this nation deserved to change its status from the criminal to the victim and from the accused to the claimant.

The heroes and rebels of Baselitz belong to the generation confused by these two narratives of the trauma of the past. This generation grew up on the ruins of the war, and throughout the Cold War it found itself suffering from punishment for a past in



Fig. 4. Picture for the Fathers Georg Baselitz, 1965 - 50x65 cm. Oil on Canvas, Moderna Museet & Stockholm.
Source: <https://www.artsy.net/artwork/georg-baselitz-bild-fur-die-vater>

whose formation it had not played a role. The burnt lands, ruins, the barefoot, ragged-clothed heroes and the wounds they are suffering from symbolize a generation that is suffering from a cultural trauma, a trauma whose signs in the everyday life appear like ghosts in psychoanalysis rooms.

Discussion and Findings

By analyzing a selection of works by Dix and Baselitz created in the post-war years, a representation of war trauma can be identified in these works.

Dix, as a veteran, experienced war directly. He used these experiences and also the drawings he made of the battlefields to produce an exact representation of what he had perceived as the reality of war.

Dix himself suffered from war trauma, which took him back to war scenes in the form of repeated nightmares. Thus, in his dealing with the memories of war, he adopted an autobiographical approach and his paintings are a representation of individual trauma more than anything else. However, in the post-Weimar War society in which the politics of oblivion and forgetting had been adopted, his works, like nightmares displaying signs of collective trauma, dismissed silence and denial in favor of recalling memories. In reactions to the recalling of war memories, the presence of signs of collective trauma like anger, national humiliation, shame and collective guilt, which were hidden in society, were quite clear.

Unlike Dix, Baselitz, who was a young child at the time of war, did not have exact and coherent memories of the war. His generation mostly had blurred images of the ruins and occupation of the final days of the war. This generation has primarily suffered from the consequence of the war than from the war itself. However, the damages the post-war generation suffered from can be perceived only in relation to the war itself. Questions addressed to those responsible for starting the war, the supporters and accomplices of the Third Reich, parents' sin, the punishment of occupation and division for Germany, being located at the front line of the Cold War were all sings of the cultural trauma of a society that had tried to put its past behind through

democracy and economic development without trying to provide a coherent, agreed-upon narrative of the past.

By relying on the images of war he has from his childhood and post-war years, Baselitz employs symbolism as a method that makes reference to the cultural trauma possible. Unlike Dix, Baselitz lacks the direct experience of war. His approach is similar to what Ira Brenner refers to as personification or symbolism. The heroes of his works are disguised characters that appear in the void of the consciousness of the main character (society) and each hero narrates a specific part of the dark core of the hidden trauma.

Conclusion

Based on our study and analysis of a selection of the works by two German painters from two different generations, one of whom created his works after World War I and the other after World War II, it can be said that the representation of war trauma in these works can be traced through the application of psychoanalytical theories about trauma.

It can be thus concluded that artworks can be a means of representing individual and collective trauma. In these works, depending on the experiences of the artist of encounter with war, the approach can be autobiographical, based on his exact memories (however nightmarish), or symbolic. Where the artist does not have first-hand experiences of war, he will focus on combining images and narratives he has received from other sources, usually accompanied by symbolism – as the borrowed images turn into symbols.

Artworks that contain representations of war trauma are affected by the politics of memory and affect it in turn. This interaction means that the preservation of war memories, along with feelings such as collective self-confidence, anger, revenge, national pride or shame, heroism or victimization, denial and oblivion or determination to pass them on to the future generations, can influence the creation of artworks and the feedback of society. On the other hand, artists and artworks can confront the society with the reality of the damage by revealing signs of collective trauma. Also, by participating in putting memories back in their original place, they can pave the way for negotiation about the collective wound in the social context. Thus, society will place memory in a narrative that will help it overcome the trauma it has suffered.

Endnote

1. This state of shock and helplessness is because the conscious "self" refuses to recall the memory of the traumatic event or because, as a result of the resistance of the suppressed issue, it is unable to access the core of the memory.
2. An article by Hans Kinkel, November 30, 1961.
3. An interview with Maria Wetzels, published as an article entitled "Professor Otto Dix. Ein harter Mann, dieser Maler" in Diplomatische Kurier, 18.
4. This artistic critic published his article "Ein Bild des Krieges" on December 1923 in Kölnischer Zeitung in Cologne.

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