INTERFACE
–JOURNAL OF EUROPEAN LANGUAGES AND LITERATURES
ISSN: 2519-1268

Issue 23 (Spring 2024), pp. 17-44
DOI: 10.6667/interface.23.2024.225

Mass Empathy in New Deal and Stalinist Propaganda: The Path to Victimhood Culture

MASUMI KAMEDA
Chukyo University

Abstract

This paper attempts to provide the cultural history of the "victimhood culture". This paper proposes that the subjective turn of suffering that begot today's victimhood culture can be traced back to the 1920s U.S. At that time, empathy-based strategy of attracting people have emerged in the sphere of advertising and movie industry. This strategy was employed also in the state propaganda starting in the 1930s, amid an unprecedented social, economic, and political crisis. In the U.S. and the Soviet Union, the authorities often tried to arouse reciprocal empathy among their people, thus, mass empathy became salient in state propaganda.

This paper then demonstrates how the U.S. and the Soviet Union began creating the emotional norm specifically designed for the age of social crisis with examples of propaganda that are parallelly seen in both countries; the projects to enhance annual celebrations and leisure time enjoyment and the projects to collect the oral life histories of the socially vulnerable people. Through the analysis of case studies of both countries, this paper attempts to contextualize today's victimhood culture by suggesting that it is an extension of this specifically historic emotional norm promulgated in the late 1930s, which defines that emotions can be, or rather, should be, shared in large unit groups such as a nation.

Keywords: Emotion; Mass Empathy; Propaganda; Stalinism; New Deal Policy

Mass Empathy in New Deal and Stalinist Propaganda: The Path to Victimhood Culture

The term "Victimhood Culture" was coined by Bradley Campbell and Jason Manning, insisting that the enormous success of the microaggression program starting in the late 2000s, led people to want to identify themselves as victims. According to Campbell and Manning, people of victimhood culture are tend to "combine the sensitivity to slight […] with the willingness to appeal to authorities […] highlighting rather than downplaying the complaints' victimhood" (Campbell & Manning, 2018, p. 16).[1] This phenomenon is closely connected with the one that psychologist Nick Haslam called "Concept Creep." Concept Creep refers to the semantic expansion of psychological negative concepts – abuse, bullying, trauma, mental disorder, and prejudice – showing a consistent pattern that "negative aspects of human experience and behavior have expanded their meanings so that they now encompass a much broader range of phenomena than before" (Haslam, 2016, p. 1)." For instance, although the concept of abuse was classically recognized as physical harm or inappropriate sexual contact, it incorporated emotional abuse and neglect throughout the 1990s, and now it has become "overinclusive" (Haslam, 2016, p. 3). Haslam also indicated that "the conceptual expansion is asymmetrical, evident only for negative concepts" (Haslam, 2016, p. 11) and "concept creep runs the risk of pathologizing everyday experience and encouraging a sense of virtuous but impotent victimhood" (Haslam, 2016, p. 1). In other words, psychological concepts tend to become overinclusive when related to suffering.

Paul Farmer, a physician and medical anthropologist (who spent about 30 years in rural Haiti to provide medical care to the world's poorest people), kept insisting on the need to elucidate the dynamics and distribution of suffering because some individuals and groups are more vul-

1 See also Lukianoff & Haidt (2018).

nerable to extreme human suffering than other individuals and groups[2]. According to Farmer, "The capacity to suffer is, clearly, part of being human. But not all suffering is equal. In spite of pernicious and often self-serving identity politics that suggest otherwise. One of the unfortunate sequelae of identity politics has been the obscuring of structural violence, which metes out injuries of vastly different severity" Farmer, P. (1997, p. 279)." However, it is often the case that assigning a hierarchy to suffering itself is considered ethically unacceptable. As medical anthropologist Arthur Kleinman and others criticized Farmer, stating that "(t)he principle of suffering that counts for less can be a slippery slope that, even when it results from a deep commitment to social justice, creates inadvertent yet nonetheless dangerous moral slides" (Kleinman et. al., 1997, p. xxii), the very idea that suffering can be triaged is likely to generate rejection because it conflicts with the idea that we should not ignore anyone's any kinds suffering. This can be regarded as a "subjective turn" of suffering.

This paper attempts to provide the cultural history of this tendency. Although some accounts relate the creeping of harm-related concepts to the rising psychologization of experience specific to postwar society, Haslam implies that a broader cultural shift should have caused this phenomenon. This paper proposes that the subjective turn of suffering that begot today's victimhood culture can be traced back to the 1920s U.S. At that time, empathy-based strategy of attracting people have emerged in the sphere of advertising and movie industry. (I use the term "mass empathy" as the empathetic response felt collectively via images and stories through various media platforms, distinguished from personal empathy felt individually in everyday interactions.) This strategy was employed also in the state propaganda starting in the 1930s, amid an unprecedented social, economic, and political crisis. In the U.S. and the Soviet Union, the authorities often tried to arouse reciprocal empathy among their people, saying something like: "We all suffer the same way" and "We are all happy the same way," thus, mass empathy became salient in state propaganda. This paper then demonstrates how the U.S. and the Soviet Union began creating the emotional norm specifically

2 See Farmer (2005).

designed for the age of social crisis with examples of propaganda that are parallelly seen in both countries; the projects to enhance annual celebrations and leisure time enjoyment and the projects to collect the oral life histories of the socially vulnerable people. Through the analysis of case studies of both countries, this paper attempts to contextualize today's victimhood culture by suggesting that it is an extension of this specifically historic emotional norm promulgated in the late 1930s, which defines that emotions can be, or rather, should be, shared in large unit groups such as a nation.

1 Creating Mass Empathy in the 1920s: Edward Bernays and Abraham Brill

The concept "empathy" can be traced back to the study of aesthetics by art historian and writer Vernon Lee in the 1890s, who employed the concept "Einfühlung ('in-feeling') to indicate the bodily adjustments and kinetic synchronization experienced when an observer perceives the forms and shapes of the art objects. Since the 1900s, some psychologists started to use "Einfühlung" to mean the relationship among people, and psychoanalysts began mentioning empathetic reaction, introducing the empathic index, which was used to help diagnose mental disorder that is today called schizophrenia (Lanzoni, 2018, pp. 101-125).

Sigmund Freud, in his *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, indicated that what brings people together was "emotional ties" (Freud, 1949, p. 46),[3] that was, empathy. According to Freud, "the mutual tie between members of a group is in the nature of an identification of this kind, based upon an important emotional common quality […] we are faced by the process which psychology calls 'empathy [Einfühlung]' and which plays the largest part in our understanding of what is inherently foreign to our ego in other people" (Freud, 1949, p. 66).[4] This was

3 In original: "Gefühlsbindung" (Freud, 1921, p.51).

4 In original: "Wir ahnen bereits, daß die gegenseitige Bindung der Massenindividuen von der Natur einer solchen Identifizierung durch eine wichtige affektive Gemeinsamkeit ist, und können vermuten, diese Gemeinsamkeit liege in der Art der Bindung an den Führer. Eine andere Ahnung kann uns sagen, daß wir weit davon entfernt sind, das Problem der Identifizierung erschöpft zu haben, daß wir vor dem Vorgang stehen, den die Psychologie »Einfühlung« heißt, und der den größten Anteil an unserem Verständnis für das Ichfremde anderer Personen hat." (Freud, 1921, p. 72.)

an outright rejection of the previous theories that explained the nature of crowds as inherently irrational and easily manipulated from above. Freud believed that groups are formed by mutual identification, saying, "A path leads from identification by way of imitation to empathy, that is, to the comprehension of the mechanism by means of which we are enabled to take up any attitude at all towards another mental life" (Freud, 1949, p. 70)."[5] Freud himself did not discuss this further, as it is an area that awaits further research. Psychoanalyst Abraham A. Brill who carried on this theme.

Austria-born Brill was known for his earliest English translations of Freud's major works and for becoming one of the earliest practitioners of psychoanalysis in the U.S. Brill proposed his own "empathy index" in 1920. Brill asked his patients: "What personage from history or legend do you admire most, or whom would you consider your ideal?" (Brill, 1920, p. 132), and then the answer to the question denotes the person's empathy index. "The empathy index definitely shows the trend of the person's adjustment to the world" (Brill, 1920, p. 133), because people almost daily identify themselves with someone who appeals to them and through Brill's empathy index, he said that it was possible to observe the person's mode of adjustment.

At the same time, Walter Lippmann, in his well-known book *Public Opinion* (1922), noted the importance of "The identification, or what Vernon Lee has called empathy" (Lippmann 1922, p. 163) in journalism since "In popular representation the handles for identification are almost always marked. You know who the hero is at once" (Lippmann 1922, p. 163). In other words, the period in which the nature of the collective came to be associated with empathy coincides almost precisely with the period in which empathy was regarded to play a significant role in creating public opinion and thus conducting public relations activity. We must remember here that Brill was a hidden but one of the significant contributors to the formation of public relations today. In 1919, Freud introduced Brill to his young nephew Edward Bernays, who founded

5 In original: "Von der Identifizierung führt ein Weg über die Nachahmung zur Einfühlung, d. h. zum Verständnis des Mechanismus, durch den uns überhaupt eine Stellungnahme zu einem anderen Seelenleben ermöglicht wird." (Freud, 1921, p. 77.)

the firm Counsel on Public Relations in New York in the same year in response to Bernays' request for an introduction to a psychoanalyst for his public relations strategy.[6]

By hiring Brill as the brains, Bernays launched a new public relations campaign in the 1920s to make people admire certain others, desire to identify with them – in other words, to empathize with them - and purchase related products. Advertisement campaigns such as the ones to make women want to smoke cigarettes and to encourage men to buy new cars were conducted by creating and spreading the image that women who walk around smoking were fashionable and urbanely sophisticated, and the image of dignified fathers were driving new expensive cars, respectively.

In 1926, Brill introduced the concept of empathy when he was interviewed by the New York Times about "current question-and-answer craze" (Ware, 1927) as follows: "Here Dr. Brill introduced one of the newest pet words of psychology –empathy. Empathy is sympathy carried a step further. Sympathy is feeling for a thing, whereas empathy is feeling into the thing to such an extent that you become part of that thing yourself" (Ware, 1927)." According to Brill, "The average man who works on these quizzes and ferrets out the answers feels for the time being that he, too, is one of the best minds, a great thinker. That's empathy" (Ware, 1927)." If we apply other advertisement campaigns – let's say the one to make women smoke - to Brill's formula, "the average woman who smokes cigarettes feels for the time being that she, too, is one of the most elegant and sophisticated urban women."

The tag team of Bernays and Brill transformed the whole picture of advertisement. Advertising underwent a significant transformation in the 1920s, characterized by the fact that photographs and illustrations of products were removed from the center of advertisement posters, and instead, it began to focus on ordinary people everywhere who were worried about their reputation and reactions from people around them

6 Freud wrote to Bernays in the letter (September 27, 1919) that he told Brill about Bernays. The letter from Freud to Bernays is cited in Bernays (1965, p. 254)

or on the contrary rejoicing in social victories (Marchand, R.,1986, p. 11). This tendency was, supposedly, caused by the fact that the method to attract empathy for characters in the advertisements has become central.

Advertisements that employed empathy-based techniques met a harsh backlash. At that time, many had "reinforced anxieties about the surfeit of advertising", (Marchand, R.,1986, p. 95) which were "most conspicuous in the print media, but they were also influential in the evolution of radio advertising" (Marchand, R.,1986, p. 95). There were growing concern on how advertising intrude into the intimacy of the possible consumers. Many warned "against any commercial 'intruder' into the sanctity of the home" (Marchand, R.,1986, p. 89) where people are more relaxed and tend to be more emotionally unprotected.

Also in the 1920s, the custom of going out to the movie theaters became common in the U.S., and as film critic James Monaco noted that "Star cinema – Hollywood style – depends on creating a strong identification between hero and audience" (Monaco, 1977. p. 296), there is no doubt that the Hollywood movie industry has centered on audience's identification with characters on the screen. During this period, there were growing calls for censorship of movies on the grounds that they had a negative impact, especially on youth, not only because they were often morally repugnant but also because there were concerns that their emotional manipulation would lead to social unrest in the first place. The Paine Foundation's research project included a series of surveys that raised the issue that audiences tend to empathize too much with the characters on the screen. In this survey, for example, the interviewee asked about romantic scenes, answered: "I've been thrilled and deeply stirred by love pictures and love scenes. Usually when I see them, it seems that I'm a looker-on and one of the lovers at the same time. I don't know how to describe it" (Blumer, 1933, p. 109) and noted that she was naturally assimilated into the characters. Herbert Blumer, the author of the final report, warned that while emotional possession is less of a problem if it is only for a short period, the intense emotional experience of a movie can have long-term effects on the audience's life, causing

more people to live according to a different set of behavioral norms (Blumer, 1933, pp. 126-127).

2 Mass Empathy for Leaders

When advertising and other cultural practices, such as movie industry, began employing collective empathy in the 1920s, it was faced with concerns about its negative and dangerous influences. However, in times of political, economic, and psychological crisis throughout the world (such as the hyperinflation in Nazi Germany, the devastation of the Soviet Union due to the civil war and the collectivization of agriculture that began in 1929, and the repression during the Stalinist period, and the Great Depression of 1929 and the massive farm displacements caused by Dust Bowl in the U.S.), many nations began to pivot their propaganda on the collective sharing of emotions.

2.1 Mass Empathy for FDR

F. D. Roosevelt, in his first radio program, Fireside Chat, delivered eight days before his inauguration, said, "Let us unite in banishing fear!" (Buhite & Levy, 1992, p. 17). This was followed by his inaugural address, conducted in March 1933, in which he famously said, "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself" (Zevin, 1946, p. 13). This means that from the moment he took office, FDR had determined and ordered Americans what kind of feelings they should or should not have. FDR also often emphasized that he could understand the emotions of the people. In his twelfth Fireside Chat aired on April 14, 1938, he said "I can hear your unspoken wonder as to where we are headed in this troubled world. I cannot expect all of the people to understand all of the people's problems; but it is my job to try to understand all of the problems" (Zevin, 1946, p. 123). Expressing that he senses not only the problems that people desperately want to address but also the aspirations and anxieties that have yet to be articulated, FDR staged himself as omnipotent and omniscient. This narrative was a great success. As

a citizen's diary of the time stated, "President Roosevelt was the idol of the people and his smile and pleasant radio voice captivated everybody" (Roth, 2009, p. 160), FDR created an intimate relationship with the people and made them believe that he shared their feelings through his radio program. FDR frequently used the phrase "you and me" in his radio speech to create a sense of closeness with the people. As was ridiculed by the writer Dos Passos, who wrote that "(t)hen there is a man leaning across his desk, speaking clearly and cordially to youandme […] so that youandme shall completely understand" (Dos Passos, 1934, p. 17), this kinds of phrasing and narrative manufactured a disguised emotional oneness with the leader.

At the same time, Hollywood studios, either as a part of state propaganda (such as the case of Warner Brothers) or not connected to the authority, started to employ mass empathy to spread optimism and hope, as film historian Robert Sklar noted that the Hollywood producers at that time "recognized how much their audience longed to be released from its tension, fear and insecurity" (Sklar, 1994, p. 175).

2.2 Mass Empathy for Stalin

To share complex emotions collectively, it is necessary to shed the spotlight on any one particular person. Yet the Soviet Union was quite cautious about introducing propaganda that spotlighted the individual since glorifying one specific person is at odds with collectivism, the basis of communist ideology. For instance, worker-correspondent movements in the 1920s and a shock worker movement launched in 1927 were both designed to motivate workers, but the authority had never single out one particular individuals. As a result, the number of shock workers swelled, and by 1930, 40% of all workers were certified as shock workers.

But around the time of the completion of the First Five Year Plan in 1932, Soviet propaganda gradually shifted from collectivism propaganda to a personality cult propaganda. In 1933, the Party decided that living heroes could be subject to commemoration, and they started to

construct giant statues of Lenin and Stalin. Since then, Stalin became an enormous figure, looking down on people from directly above.

In 1932, at the age of thirty, Sergei Dinamov, an American literary scholar, took the position of head of the Communist Party Central Committee's Art Sector. Dinamov, who had earned a doctorate for his dissertation on Edgar Allan Poe and had a close relationship with American culture since he was involved in translating and publishing American literature, was to be at the helm of Soviet cultural policy around 1934. Dinamov was also a close friend of the writer Theodore Dreiser and others in both public and private life. Dinamov and Dreiser, despite their thirty-year age difference and ideological differences, were supposed to have exchanged a total of 170 letters of correspondence.[7]

In March 1934, a meeting was held between Dinamov and Boris Shumyatsky, the head of the cinema administration and the person know for attempting to directly import Hollywood system from the U.S. As a result, on April 16, 1934, Dinamov published an editorial titled "Toward the Plot-based Art"[8] in central party newspaper *Pravda* and ordered the production of plot-oriented works. Dinamov said that the protagonists of Soviet films "must be the heroes of the people, and their thoughts and feelings must excite and influence the masses",[9] and that the party's new policy was to place the heroic hero at the center and to depict the hero's emotions in a way that many people could share.[10]

According to Dinamov, Soviet cinema "should generate happiness and enjoyment, give the audience optimism, and help them to desire to fight with confidence".[11] This statement resulted in Shumyatsky's famous phrase, "The victorious class wants a good laugh" (Taylor, 1986, p. 55). Like many Hollywood films during the Great Depression Era, making the audience empathize with the cheerful and joyful protagonists was

7 The author could view a total of 168 letters from the University of Pennsylvania's collection, and 28 from Cornell University's collection, and 26 letters are duplicates.

8 С. Динамов, «За сюжетное искусство». Правда, 16 апреля 1934 г. 105., С.2.

9 «Они - народные герои, их мысли и чувства волнуют и заражают широкие массы.» Там же.

10 See also Belodubrovskaya (2017).

11 «картина вышла радостной и бодрой она дает зрителю оптимистическую зарядку, помогает ему увереннее бороться.» Там же.

recommended. In August of the same year, the First Congress of Soviet Writers, in which Dinamov was deeply involved from the preparatory stages, was held. Socialist realism was proposed as the only officially recognized art policy in the Soviet Union.

In August 1935, when coal miner Alexei Stakhanov had drilled 14 times his quota, the records rush created hero workers, called Stakhanov workers. Stakhanov workers were also promised a wealthy life with various privileges, including cheap shopping in luxury stores. Stakhanovite movement was quite different from past similar movements in a way they focused on one worker and on empathy among workers and among a nation. Soviet writer Sergei Tretyakov, a member of the First Congress of Soviet Writers, published an interview-based article "Nine Girls" in 1935, written in the style of an interview with a female Stakhanov worker, Pasha Angelina. Angelina was a tractor driver who would become one of the icons of the Stalin era. In an interview, Angelina talks about her miserable past, when she was once despised and abused because she was a woman. However, she overcame many difficulties and became the leader of a work group of female tractor drivers (Третьяков, 1960). Angelina recalls the time when she completed 20 consecutive hours of work: "It was not easy to work 20 hours straight, but the whole country was watching. But it was also fun to work because the whole country was watching! I was happy to work" she says.[12] Although "the whole country was watching" is only a figurative expression, since the actual progress of the labor was not broadcast live, it reflects the propaganda that labor can be associated with the feeling of "fun" if one works while feeling a sense of unity with the whole nation.

In the 1930s, the people were presented as a close familial group, with Stalin as their ultimate father and there was a growing emphasis on people sharing their intimate love for Stalin and other political leaders. The 1936 propaganda song "Life has become better, life has become more joyous," that quoted Stalin's famous speech at the First All-Union Meeting of the Stakhanovites on November 17, 1935, expresses that "the

12 In original: «Двадцать часов подряд было нелегко. Но работать было весело, потому что на работу эту смотрела вся страна.» (Третьяков, 1960, С. 315).

whole country" shared the same emotion toward Stalin as follows; "Let the whole gigantic country/ Shout to Stalin: 'Thank you, our man, / Live long, prosper, never fail ill' / 'Life's getting better /And happier too'" (von Geldern & Stites, 1995, p. 238).[13]

In the U.S. during the Great Depression and Stalinist Russia (and Nazi Germany was no exception), emotional unity among the people became a central element of propaganda to overcome social crises. The impression of a collective sharing of emotions – "everyone feels the same way" - is the exact opposite of the idea of emotional triage, and emotional norms today can be a direct extension of mass empathy propaganda in the 1930s U.S. and Soviet Union.

3 Celebrating Happiness

Throughout the 1930s, U.S. and Soviet propaganda attempted to intervene in the private life of individuals, especially in intimate spheres related to annual celebrations and leisure time. This section discusses how collective happiness propaganda attempted to provide shared feelings of love, joy, and happiness with those around them, thus gave people the feeling of "becoming a part of it," as Brill mentioned.

3.1. The 1930s U.S.: Romantic Gathering

FDR is known to have extended the period between Thanksgiving and Christmas to maximize the festive atmosphere. Thanksgiving and Christmas, the two major holidays in the U.S., are traditionally spent with family and are times of increased consumption. In 1939, FDR proposed fixing the date of Thanksgiving to November 23 and making it celebrated earlier than the traditional date, which was the last Thursday. After being opposed by many as a disrespect for tradition, rescheduling Thanksgiving was compromised by setting the date to the fourth

13 In original: «Хочется всей необъятной страной, Сталину крикнуть: Спасибо, Родной! Долгие годы живи, не болей» cited in Третьяков, (1960, С. 315)

Thursday in November, as is celebrated today in the U.S. (Leuchtenberg, 1963, pp.176-177).

The very idea of "group eating" was popularized at that time. Group eating, either with family members or with many people living around the neighborhood, strengthens the sense of belonging to a certain community and bonding to get through the Depression. As depicted in "Freedom from Want," one of Norman Rockwell's "Four Freedoms" series (a visualization of FDR's slogan), family or community gathering at the table became a symbol of the American tradition. The group eating in communal units was seen as a nostalgic custom, seen as a part of antebellum-like "romantic pastoral dreams" (Levenstein, 2003, 38). Many people envisioned life in small rural towns in the U.S. as a romantic scene of communal gatherings and meals. Harvest dinners, church dinners, cemetery cleanups, neighborhood barbecues, ethnic feasts, and joint holiday picnics were all associated with regional culinary traditions that reinforced a sense of community belonging[14].

In an attempt to redefine American food culture through various forms of group eating, the Federal Writers' Project (FWP) launched "America Eats!" project in 1937.[15] The plan was to compile a cross-sectional compilation of the group eating cultures in small towns and rural communities, each in the form of an independent essay. For instance, the following is written about barbecue in South Carolina, focusing on a man named Zack.

Oh, he's one 'o the low-downdest men that ever hopped up, Zack Long is! Zack was aimin on havin a barbecue like folks will do to kinda cele-

14 School lunches are another type of group eating. The effects of the Depression were immediately felt in schools, where an increasing number of children were absent from school due to poor health caused by lack of nutrition. In 1930, a decision was made to introduce an expanded school lunch system to provide students with nutritious food at school, thus for many students, school lunch became their only meal of the day. The children were also encouraged to deepen their understanding of food in the classroom by cooking by themselves and making posters, drawing, and singing songs about nutrition. School lunches were also seen as an opportunity to teach immigrant children about what American food were. During this period, immigrant children came to believe that eating "like an American" was the right thing to do as a result of nutrition education in the schools. See: Ziegelman & Coe (2016, pp. 77-84); Levenstein (2003, pp. 27-29).

15 On WPA's art projects, see: O'Connor (1973); Bustard (1997); Mangione (1983, p. 42).

brate when they tobacco's done cured and graded and tied and sold. If a man ever does feel plumb rich, then' the time. And Zack he beat around askin everybody he seen at the store and post-office and them he met on the road to come to his barbecue. (Wilcox Chandler, 2009, p. 136).

The "America Eats!" project, documenting the traditions that remain in rural America and small towns, searched for the ideal of the American way of life in local group eating culture and replaced American affluence with a diversity of regional characteristics.

Other than group eating tradition, spending leisure time with family or community members is also a major element of collective happiness propaganda. Under the New Deal, recreation facilities were built as a part of construction projects to hire the unemployed. The Works Progress Administration, established in 1935, employed 350,000 people in two years, many of them in jobs related to recreational facilities such as parks, playgrounds, swimming pools, and classrooms (Federal Works Agency, 1940, pp. 6-7). According to historian Jeff Wirtz, the most iconic recreational facilities built during this period were public swimming pools because "The pools served as symbolic antidotes to the dust storms and dry soil. They were psychological and social oases. Throughout the country, New Deal pools offered millions of Americans immediate relief from the heat, boredom, and anxiety of the depression years" (Wiltse 2007, p. 94). And the pools provided pleasant experiences of rest along with neighbors, often in the thousands at a time.

Between 1933 and 1938, 750 new swimming pools were built, and hundreds were repaired in the U.S. (Wiltse 2007, p. 93). The New Deal pools were characterized by their enormous size (several thousand people could swim in them simultaneously) and their elaborate design. The New Deal Pool dispelled the image of public facilities as second-class, although the admission fee to the New Deal pools was unbelievably low. S sandy beach was attached in some pools, where people could lie down and relax. Photographs of the New Deal pools show more people lounging or relaxing and talking by the poolside than swimming. What these New Deal pools made possible was a collective way of spending

leisure time, with adults and children, men and women alike, coming together to enjoy the community. Wiltz noted that "Municipal pools became such vital community institutions in large part because they were uniquely intimate and sociable places. Hundreds and often thousands of people gathered together at municipal pools. They changed clothes next to one another, showered together, negotiated crowded spaces, and lay put side by side on sandy beaches" (Wiltse 2007, p. 94). The collective experience of men and women mingling, showing off their swimsuits, and spending time together at rest provided a sense of connection for people living in times of crisis. Doing so turned the private gathering or private leisure time into a stage for the collective happiness.

3.2. The 1930s Soviet Union: Nighttime Delight

According to a survey of interviews with people who spent their childhood in the Soviet Union in the 1930s, many of them cited New Year's celebrations as their happiest memory (Kelly, 2011, p. 15). The Orthodox Christmas custom, which had been banned since religious rituals were regarded as not being fit with Communism, was revived as a New Year celebration in 1936.[16] The opening scene of the first Soviet color feature film, *Nightingale* (1936), depicts a girl in a blue one-piece dress singing happily, decorating a fir tree with many ornaments. The animated children's film *Grandpa Moroz and the Gray Wolf - A New Year's Story* (1937) also demonstrates the newly established New Year's party tradition to show the idea of how to celebrate. Old Man Moroz begins the film by singing the following song.

Today my old forest is lively
I'll bring presents for everyone to celebrate the New Year!
And the fir trees are making a lot of noise; now, it's time to get going!
Let's decorate the New Year tree for children![17]

16 Since Orthodox Christmas is celebrated on January 7, the newly established New Year's celebration was moved up a week.

17 «В старом моем лесу весело сегодня, / Я игрушек всем несу к елке новогодней. / Елки радостно шумят, ждать уже недолго, / Скоро я для ребят сам украшу елку.» From the film Grandpa Moroz and the Gray Wolf - A New Year's Story (1937).

As the custom of decorating fir trees revived, department stores began to stock up on decorative braid, lights, and ornaments. For most Soviet people, celebrating the New Year became a most important annual event since luxury foods and drinks such as chocolates and champagnes were sold at discount prices in December. At this time, the Red October Chocolate Factory, the first model factory for the food industry, was embarking on a radical reform for its chocolate production plant and began selling chocolates on a large scale for decorating fir trees. Most of the new chocolate confections marketed that year were ornament-shaped chocolates in colorful wrappings for decorating fir trees. For many children, chocolate became a symbol of a lively and happy occasion that could only be especially enjoyed during the New Year.

Historian Catriona Kelly summarized the results of interviews with people about their childhoods during the Stalin years, noting that many people "believed themselves to have been happy" (Kelly, 2011, p. 17), although it is impossible to determine whether they were happy or not. The sense of a shared experience of happiness was such a strong enough collective emotion for many that it remained long after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The creation of the "happy childhood" may, in part, have infantilized the Soviet public as a whole. However, compared to the period when the streets were filled with street children, the above examples also show that many people felt a sense of relief that they were able to make children, a vulnerable group, happy and that they were able to share in the joy of children's happiness even in these harsh times.

Around the same time in the Soviet Union, the custom of spending healthy leisure time at recreational facilities became popular, too. The first phase of the Moscow Metro line, which opened in 1935, connected the city center with Sokolniki and Park Kultury (Park of Culture) stations. Sokolniki station was directly connected to Sokolniki Park, while the Park Kultury station was directly connected to Gorky Memorial Park, providing ordinary citizens much better access to leisure facilities. Particularly famous is the Gorky Memorial Park in Moscow. Opened in 1928 as the "Park of Culture and Rest," the park underwent an expansion in 1934 as part of Moscow Reconstruction Plan, with an

outdoor theater, sports fields, a sky sports tower, and a swimming pool. American writer Edmund Wilson, who was visiting Moscow at the time, said of the Gorky Memorial Park: "the Russians never squeal or shriek as we do at Coney Island […] people allowed to do as they please – not checked up by petty officials as in Germany and America – feeling of freedom, lack of self-consciousness – nobody is ever disagreeable or rude, only person I have seen who was since I came to the Soviet Union was an American" (Wilson 1980, pp. 559-560). In the mid-1930s, the Soviet Union began to encourage sky sports as a recreational activity, and large parks offered parachuting and gliding from sky sports towers.

The Soviet Union also began to use romance for propaganda purposes. In the late 1930s, images of young men and women sunbathing by the pool or on the beach began to appear in newspapers, magazines, and other propaganda media. In July 1936, a large-scale carnival (open-air masked ball at night) was held to commemorate the enactment of the Stalin Constitution. On the day of the carnival, corners were set up throughout the park to show the improved production of consumer goods and stalls selling wine, beer, ice cream, cakes, pies, etc. All of this was done at the behest of the Party and was intended to create the impression of the Soviet Union as the country overflowed with goods. Carnivals were held in places other than Gorky Memorial Park every month during the summer from July 1936 onward, and the Party had instructed that men and women form proper pairs when dancing, and in this sense, the carnival was a state project to create a meeting place for men and women (Petrone, 2000, pp.100-102). Soviet propaganda, which had urged Soviet people to sacrifice themselves for the sake of the state, now began to encourage young men and women to fall in love. At this time, skating rinks were set up in many squares in the winter and were portrayed in propaganda films as dating spots for lovers.[18]

18 Leonid Potyomkin, a university student, wrote in his diary in 1935 as follows: "Right outside my window is a skate rink with slides made of wood and painted with the colors of joyfulness cheerfulness and health; the dexterity and beauty of the youth, both workers and students and adults too, right up to aged workers regaining the youth they never experienced. And above the slate rink the marvelous, tender

4 Recovery from Suffering

Psychologist Paul Bloom (2016) argued that empathy tends to lead to unethical and irrational judgments, and therefore, "On balance, empathy is a negative in human affairs" (Bloom, 2016, p. 13). According to Bloom, empathy tends to reflect preconceived notions and lacks a sense of quantity, so it tends to focus on a limited number of objects, such as a spotlight, thus creating a bias toward helping. The spotlight of empathy tends to shine not only on people who share the same attributes as oneself but also on people who have become victims.[19] In times of national crisis, the best way to strengthen national solidarity is to make people empathize with the socially vulnerable. In both the U.S. during the New Deal and in the Soviet Union during Stalinism, the poor, who were seen as victims of structural violence, could most powerfully generate empathy among people.

4.1. The 1930s U.S.: Rewriting America's Past

When the government founded FWP in July 1935, they appointed Henry Alsberg as its head. Alsberg was a journalist who had been staying in several locations in Russia and Ukraine between 1920 and 1921, and he was moved by the participation of the non-elite in artistic activities in the Soviet Union.[20] Alsberg also established The International Committee for Political Prisoners to save Soviet political prisoners and devoted his effort to publish their letters as *Letters from Russian Prisons* in 1925. One of the FWP's main focuses was to give a voice to the socially vulnerable. Because Alsberg was at the helm of the FWP, it was able to shine a light on people who had not been in the spotlight before.

Perhaps the most well-known of the FWP's oral history collections was

elegant melodies of the best music ever created by mankind and the charmingly beautiful sounds of the voices of Soviet singers flow out of an enormous loudspeaker and billow in the air. How I would love to spend time in the theater in the company of an interesting girl, a pleasant person to talk to, a friend to whom I would express my whole soul and ennoble with seething feelings of a tender refined love." Cited in: Garros, Korenevskaya, & Lahusen (1995, p.261).

19 See: Bloom (2016); Battaly, H.D. (2011); Prinz (2011).

20 See: DeMasi (2016).

the project to collect life histories of formerly enslaved people. The Slave Narrative Collection, the most famous result of the Negro Affairs Office, is a collection of interviews with more than 2,000 formerly enslaved people in 17 states about their enslaved pasts.[21] By capturing the words of former slaves who were still alive at the time of the interviews as verbatim as possible, "the narrative was to effectively convey the feeling of 'what it was like to be a slave'" (Yetman, 2000, p. 5). Some were owned with about 1,000 other formerly enslaved people, while others were the only slaves. Others were treated so inhumanly that "If I had my life to live again, I would die fighting rather than be a slave" (Yetman, 2000, p. 116), while others said, "One thing dat made our marse and mistis so good was de way dey brought up us niggers. We was called to de Big House and taught de Bible and dey was Bible readin's everyday. We was taught to be good men and women and to be honest" (Yetman, 2000, p. 119). Many remember Emancipation Day "just like yesterday" (Yetman, 2000, p. 90) and describe how they felt at the time. There may be nothing new to discover in the events they recount themselves. What was important, however, was that the focus was on how they felt.

The project to collect the life histories in the South was launched in 1938, and FWP workers interviewed peasants, factory workers, and others from various occupations in six Southern states. *These Are Our Lives* is a collection of thirty-seven transcripts from over four hundred interviews.[22] In the opening interview, "You're Gonna Have Lace Curtains",[23] a white tobacco farmer couple with five children speak alternately. The two interviewees express their gratitude to the government for helping them make a minimum living, saying, "We've never had more than about twelve dollars a week to live on except in wartime and you know the high prices of everything then. I think we could do good on fifteen dollars a week and pay our bills good, don't you, Sarah?," (Couch, 1939, pp. 16) even though their economic situation is worsening (Couch, 1939, pp. 16-17). In an interview titled "Last Chance to Own a Farm" (Couch, 1939, p. 64), a widow with four children, saying, "I lost

21 See: Botkin (1961); Yetman (2000).
22 Couch (1939).
23 Written by Mary A. Hicks and Willis S. Harrison. In Couch (1939, pp. 3-17).

my husband. But I keep hopin' for better days" (Couch, 1939, p. 64), speaks of her daily efforts to keep the land she purchased during her husband's lifetime and also to give her children small Christmas gifts. In an interview titled "I Couldn't Be What I Wanted to Be",[24] a man born to peasant parents reflects on his tumultuous life. He talks about his life of moving from job to job and being arrested for his involvement in the labor movement. Lastly, he says that he really wanted to be a writer: "I've always had an ambition to save the world. Maybe it's a – what do you call it? – yeah, a Messianic complex. My real ambition is to be a writer and show people what's right. Give 'em truth" (Couch 1939, p. 407).

The interviews included in *These Are Our Lives* were all about how the people - in dire financial straits due to circumstances over which they had little or no control - still managed to maintain their steadfast efforts and the spirit of never losing hope. However, according to Leonard Rapport, *These Are Our Lives* was heavily edited, and some episodes were quite close to fiction. Rather than a collection of oral histories based on accurate records, *These Are Our Lives* should be seen as an attempt to create the image of victims of structural violence who never gave up their hope. The FWP's oral history collections were meant to rewrite America's past and present as a symbol of the country's recovery from the Depression by shining an empathetic spotlight on people's hardships.

4.2. The 1930s Soviet Union: Reforging Prisoners

In the early 1930s, the Soviet Union used prisoners for large-scale construction projects, and this was touted as the perfect opportunity for prisoners to reforge themselves through labor. One of the most notorious examples of particularly harsh prison labor was the White Sea-Baltic Canal, built between 1931 and 1933 to connect the Baltic Sea with the White Sea in northern Russia.[25] The number of deaths from acci-

24 Written by Maurice Russell. In Couch (1939, pp. 380-410).
25 See: Ruder (1998); Draskoczy (2004); Draskoczy (2012).

dents, starvation, and disease is still unknown. *White Sea-Baltic Canal: The Story of the Construction* was a result of the book project proposed in 1932 at a meeting in Maxim Gorky's residence, where Stalin was also present.[26] This book is a compilation of the life histories of those involved in the construction of the Canal, recorded by a team of thirty-six writers, such as Valentin Kataev, Alexei Tolstoy, Victor Shklovsky, and Mikhail Zoshchenko under the direction of Maxim Gorky.

In August 1933, a delegation of about 120 writers traveled to the construction site of the Canal. Their trip was made under the strict supervision of the Main Directorate of State Security, and the delegates could visit only the sites that had been prepared for them in advance in an attempt to give the writers the impression that the camps were clean and far from food insecurity (Ruder, *1998*, pp. 47-70). The resulting book, *White Sea-Baltic Canal*, which includes a section on figures from the Main Directorate of State Security, is basically a collection of life stories of prisoners who achieved "reforging (perekovka)" through the construction of the Canal.

Many of the prisoners in this book were orphans or left home at an early age, so many life histories in this book tell how street children in the early 1920s became adults by the 1930s and got involved in crimes. The common thread that runs through most of the episodes in *White Sea-Baltic Canal* is that these prisoners, who had no hope for the future, are inspired by their encounters at the construction site and by the prisoners around them and begin to have hope again when they realize that Soviet society is prepared for them to be active regardless of their criminal record.[27]

For instance, "The Story of One Reforging"[28] tells the story of an international thief named Abram Rottenberg. Raised in Tbilisi by a gambling-addicted father, Rottenberg learned to steal out of poverty and

26 Беломорско-Балтийский канал имени Сталина. История строительства. М., Государственное издательство «История Фабрик и Заводов», 1934.

27 See also: Draskoczy (2012)

28 «История одной перековки». Written by Mikhail Zoshchenko. Беломорско-Балтийский канал имени Сталина, С.324-342.

was arrested several times for selling fake ornaments. After marrying a female shoplifter he met in prison, he continued his criminal activities, traveling to Turkey, Bulgaria, Egypt, and Greece. However, he was stopped by the police in Jaffa and deported to the Soviet Union on suspicion of espionage and was sent to the Canal construction site. What awaited him at the construction site was a gentle persuasion; he was told that in a socialist country, fraud and theft would no longer be viable occupations because the gap between rich and poor would disappear soon and that it was better for his benefit to work. Rottenberg was convinced and reluctantly decided to go to work at the construction site because he understood that he could no longer make a living by committing crimes in the Soviet Union. Rottenberg says, "I started working. As I did so, I began to think about my former life and how I was. I am not ashamed of being a thief. Yes, I am a thief. My life had made me that way. […] This is not my crime. If I had another life and continued to steal, then it would have been my crime",[29] which is a typical narrative of "reforging" ideology.

In reality, prisoners were forced to work in extremely harsh conditions at the construction sites, and the descriptions in this book hide the cruel facts.[30]. However, when viewed as a story, it vividly shows how poverty in childhood inevitably led them down the path of crime, and it evokes empathy because it tells readers that if they were had been born into such circumstances, they would have become criminals themselves. Thus, the prisoners who committed crimes such as theft and murder were no longer aliens who should be excluded from society but were transformed into victims who should be empathized with.

5 Conclusion

The moral danger of empathy was a concern from the beginning since in the situation of being ordered to feel a certain emotion that "everyone

29 «Я начал работать. И потом думал о своей прежней жизни и о том, что я представлю из себя. Нет, мне не было совестно, что я вор. Ну, я вор. Меня так направила жизнь. […] И значит я буду виноват, если другая жизнь, а я ворую.» **Там же**. С.338.

30 See: Applebaum (2003).

feels," the certain emotion may become the single basis for any judgment. In this case, both rational decisions depending on a solid sense of morality and the responsibility that goes with it may be suspended. In the U.S., advertising and movie industries that used mass empathy were met with great backlash in the 1920s, while the Soviet Union, authorities had also been very cautious about introducing mass empathy propaganda until 1934. Then in the late 1930s, both in the U.S. and in the Soviet Union, affecting one another, state propaganda changed its previous direction. They suddenly began to urge people to share emotions with their fellow citizens or to feel empathy, especially for those who were easy to empathize or sympathize with and tried to give people a sense of becoming part of the nation. This was supposedly an exceptional decision they had to make to combat an unpreceded crisis.

The empathetic response—as seen in a common expression such as "we all suffer the same way"—is convenient for a country in crisis because authorities can embellish as if the distribution of suffering were equal for all people. Thus, this emotional norm, which employed empathy at a massive level, had transcended national boundaries. Adolf Hitler was appealing to people since he was commonly considered to have been suffered just like ordinary German citizens. George Orwell, in his 1940 essay, wrote about Hitler that "there is something deeply appealing about him. […] It is a pathetic, doglike face" Orwell (2002, p. 251). This emotional norm that focused on mass empathy has also spread beyond the boundaries of time and has continued to strengthen its inducement to the present day.

Mass empathy propaganda in the late 1930s US and Soviet Union paved the road to today's emotional norm in which empathetic response plays an excessively significant role in decision-making, thus suspending rational judgments. This emotional norm can support having hope against hope when a person is in exceptional danger since in this kind of abnormal situation, happiness is rare to achieve and thus tends to be imagined as romantic, as was the case in the late 1930s US and Soviet propaganda. On the other hand, the same emotional norm prepared the road for the victimhood culture. Today, people have started to try to behave as if

they were victims, especially (not despite, but) because they live without problems. Craving to be a victim to gain a privileged standpoint to push his or her opinion and identifying himself or herself as a romantic protagonist who suffers under intolerable wrongs resulted in the popularization of the idea that emotions should not be objectively weighed. Thus, it supposedly led to the spread of ethical norms that made it taboo to "triage" the importance of an issue in general.

References

Applebaum, A. (2003). *GULAG: A History*. Doubleday.

Battaly, H.D. (2011). "Is Empathy a Virtue?" In Coplan, A. & Goldies, P. (eds.), *Empathy: Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives*. Oxford University Press, 2011, pp. 278-301.

Belodubrovskaya, M. (2017). "Plotlessness: Soviet Cinema, Socialist Realism, and Nonclassical Storytelling", *Film History*, vol. 29, no.3, pp.169-192.

Bernays, E. L. (1965) *Biography of an Idea: Memoirs of Public Relations Counsel Edward L. Bernays*. Simon and Shuster.

Bloom, P. (2016) *Against Empathy: The Case for Rational Compassion*. Harper Collins Publishers.

Blumer, H. (1933). *Movies and Conduct*. The Macmillan Company.

Botkin, B. A. (1961). *Lay My Burden Down: A Folk History of Slavery*. University of Chicago Press.

Brill, A. A. (1920) "The Empathic Index and Personality". *Medical Record: A Weekly Journal of Medicine and Surgery,* January 24 (Vol. 97, No. 4, Whole No. 2568).

Buhite, R. D. and Levy, D. W. (eds.). (1992). *FDR's Fireside Chats*. University of Oklahoma Press.

Bustard, B. I. (1997). *A New Deal for the Arts*. National Archives and Records Administration.

Campbell, B. & Manning, J. (2018). *The Rise of Victimhood Culture: Microaggressions, Safe Spaces, and the New Culture Wars.* Palgrave Macmillan.

Couch, W. T. (1939). These Are Our Lives: As Told by the People and Written by Members of the Federal Writers' Project of the Works Progress Administration in North Carolina, Tennessee, and Georgia. W. W. Norton & Company. Inc.

DeMasi, S.R. (2016) *Henry Alsberg: The Driving Force of the New Deal Federal Writers' Project*. McFarland & Company, Inc.

Dos Passos, J. (1934). "The Radio Voice". *Common Sense* (February),

Draskoczy, J. (2004). *Belomor: Criminality and Creativity in Stalin's Gulag.* Academic Studies Press,

———. (2012) "The Put' of Perekovka: Transforming Lives at Sta-

lin's White Sea-Baltic Canal". *The Russian Review,* 71(1), 30-48.
Farmer, P. (1997). "On Suffering and Structural Violence: A View from Below". In Kleinman, Arthur, Veena Das, Margaret Lock (eds.), *Social Suffering*. University of California Press.
———. (2005) *Pathologies of Power: Health, Human Rights, and the New War on the Poor*. California University Press.
Federal Works Agency. (1940). "Work Projects Administration, Community Recreation Programs: A Study of WPA Recreation Projects", Washington, D.C., February.
Freud, S. (1921). *Massenpsychologie und Ich-Analyse*. Internationaler Psychoanalytischer Verlag.
———. *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego.* The Hogarth Press.
Garros, V.; Korenevskaya, N.; & Lahusen T. (eds.), Carol A. Flath (transl.). (1995). *Intimacy and Terror: Soviet Diaries of the 1930s.* New Press.
Haslam, N. (2016) "Concept Creep: Psychology's Expanding Concepts of Harm and Pathology". *Psychological Inquiry* 27 (1), 1-17.
Kelly, C. (2011). "A Joyful Soviet Childhood: Licensed Happiness for Little Ones." In Balina, M. and Dobrenko, E. (eds.), *Petrified Utopia: Happiness Soviet Style*. Anthem Press.
Kleinman, Arthur, Veena Das, Margaret Lock (eds.). (1997) *Social Suffering*. University of California Press.
Lanzoni, S. (2018). Em*pathy: A History.* Yale University Press.
Leuchtenberg, W. E. (1963) *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal, 1932-1940*. HarperCollins Publishers.
Levenstein, H. (2203) *Paradox of Plenty: A Social History of Eating in Modern America*. University of California Press.
Lippmann, W. (1922) *Public Opinion.* Macmillan.
Lukianoff, G. & Haidt, J. (2018). *The Coddling of the American Mind: How Good Intentions and Bad Ideas Are Setting up a Generation for Failure*. Penguin Press.
Mangione, J. (1983). *The Dream and the Deal: The Federal Writer's Project 1935-1943*. University of Pennsylvania Press.
Marchand, R. (1986) *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity, 1920-1940*. University of California Press.

Monaco, J. (1977). *How to Read a Film: Movies, Media, and Beyond*. Oxford University Press.

O'Connor, F.V. (ed.). (1973) *Art for the Millions: Essays from the 1930s by Artists and Administrators of the WPA Federal Art Project*. New York Graphic Society, 1973.

Orwell, G. (2002) *Essays.* Everyman's Library / Alfred A. Knopf.

Petrone, K. (2000). *Life Has Become More Joyous, Comrades: Celebrations in the Time of Stalin*. Indiana University Press.

Prinz, J. J. (2011) "Is Empathy Necessary for Morality?" In Coplan, A. & Goldies, P. (eds.), *Empathy: Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives*. Oxford University Press, 2011, pp. 211-229.

Roth, B. (James Ledbetter and Daniel B. Roth eds.,). (2009). *The Great Depression: A Diary*. Public Affairs.

Ruder, C. A. (1998) *Making History for Stalin: The Story of the Belomor Canal*.University Press of Florida.

Sklar, R. (1994). *Movie-made America: A Cultural History of American Movies*. Vintage Books, 1994.

Taylor, R. (1986). "Boris Shumyatsky and the Soviet Cinema in the 1930s: Ideology as Mass Entertainment". *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 6:1, 43-64.

Ware, F. (1927). "THE ANSWER TO THOSE WHO ASK ANOTHER: Psychologists Say the Craze Is Part of Life in the Strident Machine Age". *New York Times*, May 1.

Wilcox Chandler, G. (2009). "South Carolina Backwoods Barbecue". In: Kurlansky. M. (ed.), *The Food of a Younger Land: A Portrait of American Food--Before the National Highway System, Before Chain Restaurants, and Before Frozen Food, When the Nation's Food Was Seasonal*. Riverhead.

Wilson, E. (1980). *The Thirties.* Ferrar, Straus and Giroux.

Wiltse, J. (2007). *Contested Waters: A Social History of Swimming Pools in America*. The University of North Carolina Press.

Yetman, N. R. (ed.). (2000). *Voices from Slavery: 100 Authentic Slave Narratives*. Dover Publications.

Zevin, B. C. (ed.). (1946). *Nothing to Fear: The Selected Addresses of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, 1932-1945*. Riverside Press.

Jane Ziegelman, J. & Coe, A. (2016). *A Square Meal: A Culinary History of the Great Depression*. HarperCollins.

Третьяков, С. (1960). Девять девушек. В: Вчера и сегодня: очерки русских советских писателей, 1, Гос. изд-во худож. лит-ры, 1960, С.305-316. English translation: Von Geldern, J., & Stites,R. (eds.). (1995) *Mass Culture in Soviet Russia: Tales, Poems, Songs, Movies, Plays, and Folklore, 1917–1953*, pp. 216-227. Indiana University Press.

[received January 14, 2024
accepted March 25, 2024]