# Algorithmic Belonging and Historical Memory: Philosophical Foundations of Reflective Patriotic Education of Youth in the Digital Era

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**Abstract.** The paper explores how algorithmic media environments reshape the relationship between historical memory and patriotic identity among young people, and what philosophical foundations patriotic education should have in response. It introduces the concept of *algorithmic belonging* — a form of collective identification produced at the intersection of users' self-presentation and platform recommendation systems. Using conceptual analysis, the philosophy of memory (P. Ricoeur, P. Nora, A. Erll) and the theory of recognition (A. Honneth), the study shows that algorithmic belonging tends to replace the reflective appropriation of the past with the consumption of emotionally charged fragments of history. In contrast to a transmissive model of patriotic education, a reflective model is proposed, based on four competences: historical-mnemonic competence, civic online reasoning, axiological competence and participatory competence. The model is discussed in the context of Uzbekistan, where a young and highly connected population makes the digital dimension of civic education particularly important.

**Keywords:** algorithmic belonging; historical memory; patriotic education; youth; digital media; media literacy; recognition; Uzbekistan

## 1. Introduction

The question of how a society transmits love of the homeland to new generations is as old as philosophy itself. Plato's *Republic* already treated the education of guardians as an education of attachment to the polis, and al-Farabi linked the happiness of the "virtuous city" to the moral and intellectual upbringing of its citizens. What is new today is the medium through which this transmission occurs. Young people encounter the history of their nation less through textbooks and family stories than through short videos, memes, posts and recommendation feeds (boyd, 2014; Hoskins, 2018).

Uzbekistan offers a telling example. With a median age of about 27 years and 83.3 % of the population online in early 2024 (DataReportal, 2024), the country's youth live in a deeply digitalized environment. National policy, from the Law "On State Youth Policy" (2016) to the "Uzbekistan — 2030" Strategy (President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 2023), sets the goal of raising an educated, patriotic and socially active generation. Yet the philosophical question of what kind of patriotism is formed in

algorithmic environments — and what kind should be formed — remains insufficiently explored.

**The aim** of the paper is to conceptualize the phenomenon of algorithmic belonging, to analyze its impact on the relationship between historical memory and patriotic identity, and to substantiate philosophical foundations of a reflective model of patriotic education.

## 2. Materials and Methods

The study is theoretical and relies on three groups of sources: (1) philosophical works on memory, history and identity (Ricoeur, 2004; Nora, 1989; Erll, 2011; Honneth, 1995); (2) research on algorithms, platforms and media literacy (Gillespie, 2014; Bucher, 2018; Wineburg, McGrew, Breakstone, & Ortega, 2016); and (3) studies of patriotism and civic education (Schatz, Staub, & Lavine, 1999; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004), together with normative documents of Uzbekistan. The methods include conceptual analysis (clarification and construction of concepts), the hermeneutics of memory, comparative analysis of educational models and the modeling of competences.

## 3. Results and Discussion

### 3.1. The concept of algorithmic belonging

Classical theories describe the nation as an "imagined community" sustained by shared media (Anderson, 2006) and by everyday "banal" reminders of nationhood (Billig, 1995). In the digital environment both processes are mediated by algorithms — computational procedures that select, rank and recommend content according to predicted user engagement. As T. Gillespie (2014) argues, algorithms are not neutral tools but "public relevance" machines that shape what a society considers important. T. Bucher (2018) shows that users, in turn, adapt their behavior to what they believe algorithms will reward.

We propose the term **algorithmic belonging** to denote a form of collective identification that emerges from the interaction of two processes: the user's performance of identity (posting national symbols, reacting to patriotic content, joining trends) and the platform's recommendation of content that maximizes engagement. Algorithmic belonging has three characteristic features:

- **Affective intensity.** Content that provokes strong emotions — pride, anger, nostalgia — spreads faster and therefore dominates the patriotic repertoire available to youth.
- **Fragmentation.** National history appears as a stream of disconnected episodes, quotations and images detached from their historical context.

- **Feedback circularity.** Users who engage with a certain type of patriotic content receive more of the same, which may consolidate a narrow and uncritical version of national identity.

Algorithmic belonging is not inherently negative. It can bring forgotten pages of national heritage to wide audiences, unite compatriots abroad and stimulate interest in history. The problem arises when it becomes the *only* mode of belonging, replacing reflective relationships with the past and real participation in community life.

### 3.2. Historical memory between appropriation and consumption

P. Ricoeur (2004) distinguished between "manipulated memory", "obligated memory" and the critical work of history that allows a just relationship to the past. P. Nora (1989) described the transformation of living memory into *lieux de mémoire* — sites where memory is preserved once living tradition weakens. A. Erll (2011) emphasized that cultural memory is always mediated and that media do not merely store but actively construct the past.

In algorithmic environments these insights acquire practical significance. Two modes of relating to the past can be distinguished. In the mode of **appropriation**, a young person engages with historical sources, compares interpretations, connects past events with present responsibilities and integrates them into a coherent personal and civic identity. In the mode of **consumption**, the past is experienced as a series of attractive or shocking fragments that produce immediate emotional reactions but do not require understanding. Algorithmic belonging structurally favors consumption.

This distinction corresponds to the difference between blind and constructive patriotism established in political psychology (Schatz et al., 1999). Blind patriotism relies on idealized, selective images of the past and rejects criticism; constructive patriotism is based on knowledge of the whole of history, including its tragic pages, and on the desire to improve one's country. For Uzbekistan, whose history includes both the achievements of the scholars of the Eastern Renaissance and the Timurid era and the tragedy of the repressions of the twentieth century, the mode of appropriation is essential: patriotic consciousness grounded in the full and truthful memory of the nation is more resilient than one based on selected heroic images.

The theory of recognition adds an important dimension. According to A. Honneth (1995), identity is formed through relations of love, respect and social esteem. Platforms offer quick and quantifiable recognition — likes, shares, followers — which may lead young people to express patriotism in forms that maximize approval rather than in forms that reflect genuine commitment. Patriotic education should therefore

provide alternative and deeper sources of recognition: appreciation of real contributions to the community, scholarship and creative work.

### 3.3. From transmissive to reflective patriotic education

Traditional patriotic education is largely *transmissive*: it aims to transfer a set of ready-made knowledge, symbols and attitudes from authority to students. In an algorithmic environment this model faces two problems. First, it competes with a much more attractive and fast-moving flow of digital content. Second, it does not equip young people to evaluate this flow critically. As Westheimer and Kahne (2004) showed, different programs of civic education produce different kinds of citizens — personally responsible, participatory or justice-oriented — and the choice of model is ultimately a philosophical one. We therefore propose a *reflective* model (Table 1).

**Table 1. Transmissive and reflective models of patriotic education**

| Criterion | Transmissive model | Reflective model |
|---|---|---|
| Philosophical basis | Authority and tradition | Dialogue, critical reason, responsibility |
| Image of the student | Recipient of values | Active subject of value choice |
| Relation to history | Selected heroic narrative | Whole history, including complex pages; work with sources |
| Relation to digital media | Ignoring or prohibition | Critical use and creation of digital content |
| Main methods | Lectures, ceremonies, memorization | Discussion, projects, source analysis, fact-checking, volunteering |
| Expected outcome | Loyalty | Reflective (constructive) patriotism and civic participation |

The reflective model is based on four interconnected competences (Figure 1).

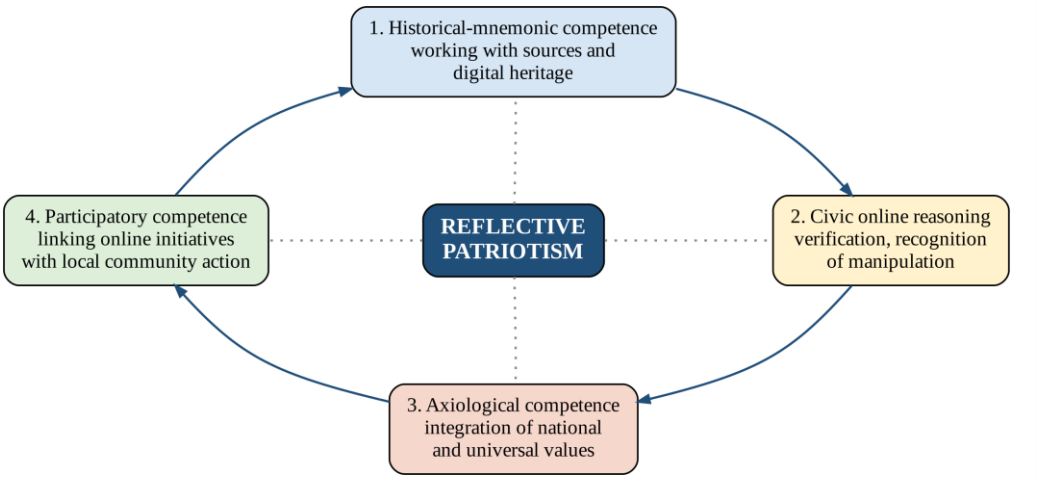



*Figure 1. Competence model of reflective patriotic education (author's elaboration)*

1. **Historical-mnemonic competence** — the ability to work with historical sources, including digital archives and virtual museums, to distinguish historical facts from interpretations and myths, and to relate the past to present responsibilities.
2. **Civic online reasoning** — the ability to evaluate the reliability of online information, to identify its source and purpose, and to recognize manipulation and disinformation (Wineburg et al., 2016). This competence is a direct response to the circularity and affective bias of algorithmic belonging.
3. **Axiological competence** — the ability to integrate national values (respect for elders, mutual aid, the culture of the mahalla, the enlightenment heritage of the Jadids) with universal values of human dignity, freedom and tolerance.
4. **Participatory competence** — the ability to translate patriotic feeling into concrete actions: volunteering, local initiatives, socially useful digital projects. It connects online engagement with offline responsibility for the community.

These competences form a cycle: knowledge of history provides material for critical evaluation; critical evaluation supports value choice; value choice motivates participation; and participation generates new questions about history and society. Their common center is reflective patriotism — love of the homeland that is informed, critical and active.

The practical implementation of the model in Uzbekistan can build on existing institutions and initiatives. Philosophy and history courses at universities can include modules on media literacy and source analysis; student projects can create digital resources on local history; the mahalla system can serve as a platform for linking youth online initiatives with community needs; and national programs promoting reading and

digital literacy among youth can be complemented by a philosophical component focused on critical thinking and values.

### 3.4. Ethical limits of patriotic education in the digital space

The reflective model also implies ethical limits. Patriotic education that uses the same techniques as the attention economy — emotional manipulation, simplification, the construction of enemy images — may achieve short-term mobilization but undermines the very autonomy it should cultivate. From a Kantian perspective, the student must be treated as an end and not as a means: patriotism can be proposed and justified, but not imposed through manipulation. Second, love of one's own country should not be opposed to respect for other nations. M. Nussbaum (1996) warned that a patriotism closed to the world risks turning into chauvinism, while J. Habermas (1998) showed that attachment to shared civic principles can integrate pluralistic societies. For a multinational and multiconfessional society such as Uzbekistan, an open patriotism that unites citizens of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds around common values of statehood, peace and enlightenment is especially relevant. Third, patriotic education must remain truthful. A one-sided or embellished picture of the past may be persuasive in the short run, but it makes young people vulnerable when they encounter contradictory information online. Truthfulness, autonomy and openness thus constitute the ethical framework within which reflective patriotic education should operate in the digital era.

## 4. Conclusion

Digital platforms generate a new form of collective identification — algorithmic belonging — characterized by affective intensity, fragmentation and feedback circularity. It tends to shift the relationship with historical memory from appropriation to consumption, thereby favoring blind rather than constructive patriotism. The response to this challenge cannot be a simple intensification of transmissive patriotic education. A reflective model is required, grounded in the philosophy of memory, the theory of recognition and the ideals of critical reason, and implemented through four competences: historical-mnemonic competence, civic online reasoning, axiological competence and participatory competence. Such a model allows patriotism to become not merely an emotion amplified by algorithms, but a conscious, responsible and open relation to the homeland. Further research should operationalize the proposed competences and test their effect on the patriotic orientations of students empirically.

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