



Images of the Soviet Era in the Perception of the Student Youth of the Post-Soviet Caspian Region

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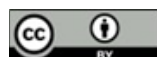
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Abstract

The article presents the results of a study of the perception of the Soviet era images by the student youth of the Caspian region (Russia, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan). The main goal of the study is to identify the specifics of the attitude to the images of the Soviet era among Russian students and their peers from the post-Soviet Caspian states. The author proves that the images of the Soviet era among the students of the Caspian region were formed under the influence of natural circumstances and factors – family, education and, less often, politics. It is confirmed that the intercultural dialogue in the territory of the Caspian macro-region is rarely reduced to a simplified “We-They” (Ours – Alien) dichotomy and more often forms complex constructs. The results of the study show that the images of the Soviet era in the minds of the students of the Caspian region are of residual character, where the degree of intensity of memorizing the true meaning of the image is different: Russian students in comparison to foreign but Russian-speaking ones, showed a better knowledge of the connotation of images. The focus of nostalgic moods which were noted in our previous works remains characteristic of the older generation, whose youth falls on the Soviet era. The practical impact of the article is in proving that, when building the concept of a safe intercultural dialogue in the Caspian region, it is necessary to take into account not the common Soviet basis of the states, but the new discursive practices of the Caspian macro-region. The conclusions of this work can be used in general courses on social philosophy and philosophy of culture, anthropology and sociology of culture, as well as for the development of courses on semiotics of culture, visual culture, theory of intercultural communications. The systematized material, as well as the conclusions obtained during the analysis, can become the basis for further research work.

Keywords

Cultural Security; Intercultural Dialogue; Images of the Soviet Past; the Soviet Era; Students; Their Own; the Other; the Caspian Macro-Region



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Образы советской эпохи в восприятии студенческой молодежи Прикаспия

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Аннотация

В статье представлены результаты исследования восприятия образов советской эпохи студенческой молодежью Прикаспия (Россия, Казахстан, Азербайджан, Туркменистан). Основная цель исследования выявить специфику отношения к образам советской эпохи у российских студентов и их сверстников из Прикаспийских государств. Автор доказывает, что образы советской эпохи у студенческой молодежи Прикаспия сложились под влиянием естественных обстоятельств и факторов – семья, образование и реже политическая конъюнктура. Подтверждается, что межкультурный диалог на территории Каспийского макрорегиона редко сводится к упрощённой дихотомии «Свой-Чужой» и чаще формирует более сложные по составу конструкты. Результаты исследования показывают, что образы советской эпохи в сознании студенческой молодежи Прикаспия носят остаточный характер, где степень интенсивности запоминания истинного значения образа отличается: российские студенты по отношению к иностранным, но русскоговорящим студентам, показали лучшее знание коннотации образов. Фокус ностальгических настроений, которые были отмечены исследователем в предыдущих работах, остается характерным для старшего поколения, чья молодость приходится на советскую эпоху. Практическое значение статьи заключается в доказательстве того, что при построении концепции безопасного межкультурного диалога в Прикаспия следует учитывать не общий советский базис государств, а новые дискурсивные практики Каспийского макрорегиона. Выводы данной работы могут быть использованы в общих курсах по социальной философии и философии культуры, антропологии и социологии культуры, а также для разработки курсов по семиотике культуры, визуальной культуре, теории межкультурных коммуникаций. Систематизированный материал, а также полученные в ходе анализа выводы могут стать базой для дальнейшей научно-исследовательской работы.

Ключевые слова

культурная безопасность; межкультурный диалог; образы советского прошлого; Советская эпоха; студенты; Свои; Другие; Каспийский макрорегион



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Introduction

The change in the geopolitical situation in the Caspian territory was caused by the collapse of the USSR, which resulted among other things in the emergence of three independent Caspian states – Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan. The recent period of history was marked by an increasing role of the interconnection of states at the political, economic and socio-cultural levels. The unique geopolitical position of the Caspian Sea has become a special factor of influence on the intercultural dialogue. The subsequent processes of changing the vector of perception of the Alien, the transformation of its images, where the attitude towards it is a “litmus test”, allow us to determine the state of society and the level of its security (Romanova et al., 2013; Aliev, 2018). The cultural area of the Caspian region is not homogeneous since the factors of its formation are initially ambivalent, and at the moment it is a synthesis of the “Soviet” and modern trends.

The subject of the analysis is the images of the Soviet era in the perception of the students of the post-Soviet Caspian region. It is assumed that the factors influencing the perception of Soviet cultural symbols are the conditions of everyday life, socio-cultural contacts and ideological impact of the education system, political apparatus and mass culture. It is based on the thesis about the heterogeneity of modern culture in the territory of the Caspian Sea, which synthesizes Soviet, post-Soviet and unique internal state discourses (Russian, Kazakh, Turkmenian, Azerbaijani). In this case the question is what is more “own” and close, and what is alien and hostile in view of the youth of the post-Soviet Caspian region.

Within the framework of this article, the opposition “We-They” is understood as social groups that differ from each other by the experience of everyday life. The “we-they” relationship develops at different levels. The younger generation born in the post-Soviet period, has no emotional connection and personal experience associated with the Soviet era, and the process of its self-identification takes place in the context of digitalization and globalization (Mayatskaya, 2017; Asipova & Mamyrova, 2018; Shapoval, 2018; Baeva, 2019; Brodovskaya et al., 2019; Romanova, 2020, 2018). The complex of images of the “Alien” of the Soviet era differs from the images that appeared in the post-Soviet space, and it has its own specifics in the Caspian region, which has a significant impact on the construction of a model of “We-They” relations. Russian and foreign scientific literature only studies certain aspects of the “We-They” opposition. Having analyzed the concepts used by foreign and Russian researchers, we come to the conclusion that in most of them the opposition “We-They” is considered as the main factor of contradictions and confrontations existing in society and in the discourse of identity (Yakimovich, 2003; Ricoeur, 2008; Jackson & Hogg, 2010). The new social reality closely borders on the adopted Soviet principles and ways of understanding the world for the senior generation. The “restored fragments” of the Soviet past compensate for the lack of ideological foundations for contemporary Russia. The usual Soviet definitions of the images of

“We” and “They” (Aliens) are moving into a new ideological system being included in new discursive practices (Shulgina, 2009; Chikisheva, 2010; Andronova, 2012; Khlyshcheva, 2017). Russian researchers, cultural scientists, philosophers, political analysts and philologists write about the existence and semantic meaning, the relevance of Soviet images, nostalgic moods in the cultural space of the perestroika and modern Russia (Kaminskaya, 2008; Krylova, 2012; Sikevich, 2014; Ershov, 2015; Kauneneko, 2019; Kholova, 2020).

Materials and methods

The goal of the study is to identify the most striking images of the Soviet era and their current connotations among young students of the post-Soviet Caspian region (based on the materials of focus group interviews). Focus groups were composed of the citizens of Russia, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan studying at Astrakhan State University. The principal achievements of this goal is resolving the following tasks: determining the main channels for transmitting images of the Soviet era among university students; identifying the degree of difference in ascertaining the connotations of images and their perception from the point of view of “alienness” among the student youth of Russia and the post-Soviet Caspian countries.

The changes in the perception of images of the Soviet era come in parallel with the lasting importance of the Caspian region from the viewpoint of natural resources, as well as a zone for creation and formation of common economic, political and cultural system. The post-Soviet Caspian region was chosen for the study, for after the collapse of the Soviet Union the common collective identity – “soviet people” – started to be replaced by national identities, and the images of the Soviet era were pushed out by the new national symbols and mythologems. The tendency to displace the patterns of Soviet and Russian cultures in post-Soviet countries may have a destructive impact on intercultural communication, historical consciousness and societal security in the region. However, a certain macro-regional community remained due to the common water area, hydrocarbon reserves, transport corridors, etc. For this reason, successful intercultural communications in this region are largely enhanced by formation of the cultural memory of the younger generation, including preservation of common patterns rooting in Soviet culture. The main hypothesis of this article is the unequal perception and preservation of the basic Soviet images in collective memory of the post-Soviet youth in the Caspian region.

To determine the trends in the perception and connotation of images of the Soviet era, six focus group interviews were conducted (a qualitative method). The scenario was developed and the questions of the interview guide were formed, which were divided into thematic blocks that meet the requirements of the research objectives. The method is used when it is necessary to make out the attitude of participants to a certain problem, to get information about the motivation of infor-



ments in a particular situation suggested by the moderator, their perception of various movements, and events. After transcribing the interviews, full-format text transcripts were compiled. To implement the objectives of the study, a purposeful selection of respondents who live in one of the post-Soviet Caspian states was used. Representatives of students' communities from post-Soviet countries involuntarily perform the function of *opinion bearers*, in which they convey the patterns received from the older generation and their own perception. During the selection of respondents and the preparation of the interview guide, the following methodological limitations were taken into account: applicability of the method to the events that reside in the memory of one or two generations; subjectivity and selectivity of the perception of informants; the complexity of processing a large number of inconsistently presented data.

In order to generalize the findings, it is necessary to use quantitative research methods in the future. The topic guide (discussion plan) was divided into two parts. In the first part, the respondents were asked questions about the attitude to the Soviet era in different generations of informants' families. The second part was devoted to the images and associations stated by the informants during the focus group.

The interview participants are students from Russia, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan, studying at Astrakhan State University under student exchange programs. The average duration of each focused interview was about 90 minutes. Each interview involved 6 people, taking into account the gender component.

Results

To estimate the images of the Soviet era in the perception of the students of the Caspian region, young people aged from 18 to 23 years studying at Astrakhan State University – one of the largest universities of the Caspian region – were chosen as the research object. This choice proves to be illustrative, since representatives of almost all countries of the Caspian region study at this university. In the course of the research and analysis of the data obtained, we took into account the psychological aspects of the process under study, but primarily we considered the connotations given by the respondents in relation to the Soviet era images proposed by the moderator. The questions allowed us to get not just one-word responses, but detailed explanations of the respondents concerning intercultural communication. Based on the results of the analysis of a series of interviews, we have identified the most relevant up-to-day trends in relation to the Soviet images and the degree of their relevance for the students of the Caspian region.

In the course of the interview, we took into account the basic requirements to forming up a conversation scenario. At the beginning, there were general questions concerning the life of family members in the USSR era, their nostalgic moods

and possible transmission of information about the USSR in everyday conversations. Informants from all the countries note that among their relatives, parents (average years of birth – 70-75th) and grandparents lived in the Soviet Union. When asked about the nostalgic sentiments, the respondents noted the principle of constant comparison of reality with the past, where “it was better before, almost everything: medicine, education (informant 2, Russia);

“grandpa just often compares modern Russian equipment and the old-fashioned one, because today's often breaks” (informant 1, Russia);

“my dad always talks about the Soviet Union, and he says that the way of life was better, as well as the attitude towards people, people were kinder, he often turns to this” (informant 4, Russia);

“It was a big, great country. Potato cost 20 kopecks (informant 3, Kazakhstan);

“In general, the impression is actually dual, the country was good in some respects, that is, for example, that a human was sent into outer space, the science was at high level, the sports were well developed, on the other hand, well, there were drawbacks as different repressions, as grandmother and grandfather told me, the shelves in supermarkets were empty, the choice of food stuff was poor, stuff like that (informant 1, Kazakhstan).

Communication about the Soviet Union usually occurs with the older generation:

“Yes, mostly only with the older generation, because they know better” (informant 3, Russia),

where the older generation is the initiator:

“Basically, they themselves recollect some things, if they see some unfairness of reality” (informant 4, Russia);

“We have quite an interesting system – as for remembering something negative, it is grandpa's responsibility, while grandmother is in charge of remembering something positive, and mother usually recalls some interesting stories” (informant 1, Russia);

“my parents were moving at that time when there still was... first, to one district, and then to another, they told us how they lived there, like mom's going to kindergarten, about little things, just about life (informant 3, Kazakhstan);

“Well, my parents say that is due to the fact that they faced the collapse, their childhood was strange, completely lost” (informant 2, Kazakhstan);

“No, I won't say that everything was the best in the Soviet Union... We had conversations, for example, when my mother was studying at the university, there was some shortage, a deficit. That kind of things, there was nothing categorical like “Wow, I want to return to the Soviet Union and all that”. To be honest, I really haven't heard anything like this. Well, we didn't have that in the family, talks that in the Soviet Union everything was fine and they want to return to the Soviet Union and all that” (informant 1, Turkmenistan);

“Well, they rather miss their youth because they were young in those years” (informant 6, Azerbaijan).



In each target group, there were informants who noted that, in their families, conversations about the Soviet Union, its everyday and cultural aspects, are very rare for various reasons:

“No, it's not because someone is not interested, it's not that Grandma is not interested. The fact is that, firstly, I do not have enough free time, and secondly, my grandmother lives far away, she is also busy sometimes” (informant 6, Russia);

“Yes, you know, this is such a topic that arises fleetingly, at some family feast. Earlier, for example, when I was still at school, I was an activist and participated in the Russian movement of schoolchildren, and sometimes they could compare me with the young pioneers, this movement, with the Komsomol. Sometimes they remember how interesting it was to them when they participated in these movements, well, my mother usually talked about it because she saw both of them. But we don't speak much” (informant 1, Russia).

“Well, my parents did not see [that period], they were born in 1980. They were 10 years old, so they have no particular memories. No, I'm telling you, we don't talk much about the Soviet Union. Well, just to remember some history and that's it” (informant 1, Kazakhstan).

The students focused on the cheerful and friendly atmosphere, which, according to their parents and relatives, reigned in the USSR:

“I don't know, but according to, for example, my grandmother, speaking about our relatives again, in terms of what suited her, there was everything. I mean that children could go to kindergarten, she could go to work, they went to school after kindergarten. That is, everything seemed to be better... (informant 2, Kazakhstan)”

“Yes, they miss the times when there was a superpower, so to speak, and the friendship of peoples, and a common language, so to speak. Well, the culture, of course, differed, but the language was civil, in general everything was wonderful, not counting the pitfalls, of course (informant 1, Azerbaijan).

Then, according to the scenario of the conversation, the informants were presented in turn with the main images of the Soviet era concerning the society organization and the main cultural symbols: a young pioneer (pioner – member of pioneer movement), a communist, a Bolshevik, a Komsomol member, socialism, the proletariat, a matryoshka, a communalka (communal apartment shared by different families), a worker and a collective farm girl (kolkhoznitsa). The participants were asked to use the first verbal and figurative associations that came to mind.

Note: The following are the answers of the informants separated by semicolons, grouped by country. It should be also noted that, when comparing the responses of informants, there is a strong difference in the responses of Russian informants and foreign ones, where the latter have a pronounced ignorance and confusion. All the answers are presented without changes, with the fixing of slips of the tongue. The answers of students from Turkmenistan are mostly one-word, not very detailed, which is due to a considerable language barrier.

Russia, young pioneer:

"A pupil, a student; Disciplined, straight back, neat, clean, probably smart; this is an organization, a cohort that accepted smart, good and excellent pupils; A real citizen of his state who performs a certain social role <...> Sets an example to the younger generation; I have two associations, first, these are these boy and girl wearing red ties, white shirts marching with a teacher and holding a portrait of Lenin. Well, and the second one is Yuri Gagarin because he is always a "pioneer in space".

Kazakhstan, young pioneer:

"Children of workers; but somehow there is no specific definition; some kind of youth organization, some activist one; oh, I don't remember anymore; they earned badges. Participation in all events, that is, sports, public, staff like this".

Turkmenistan, young pioneer:

"Well, I associate young pioneers only with these neckerchiefs, my mother said. Young pioneer, these red neckerchiefs, there were a Komsomol member, a young pioneer. Well, they were also given some titles for merits, for something, but... as soldiers, probably, if they are little boys, then soldiers who serve their country, Homeland; Or maybe like the YunArmia?"

Azerbaijan, young pioneer:

"Young pioneer, my mother was a young pioneer. Who is she associated with? Camp; Like Scouts in America; As my mother told me too, a red tie".

Russia, Communist:

"A person who adheres to the political ideology of the party; the person who believes in something and goes for it; a communist is a person of older age, well, more than 18 years, which went through all the stages from the Little Octobrist to the young pioneer and follows his way of life, believing in the party, believing in the principles and serving them; Again, a Communist is a person who adheres to the Communist ideology, and how I imagine him to be? Well, an ordinary person who strives for self-development, communist ideals".

Kazakhstan, communist:

"Bad words come to me at once for some reason; well, the same communists, like all sorts of commies; I don't have any opinion on this at all; I don't know where it came from; Eh, a communist is like a Jew. Because he would like to take more for himself, well, and steal it somewhere else; Well, just a person who lives under the communist regime and just, well, supports it, roots for it".

Turkmenistan, communist: All the informants replied that they did not know the meaning of the word.

Azerbaijan, communist:

"Bad person; Bad qualities. He is against politics; For some reason, some posters with repairmen pop up in my head; Well, communism is all such a negative thing. An evil person. With thick eyebrows. Wearing a bonnie hat, a fat one. Well, against the authorities; As if a person organizes rallies; Communists. The very idea of communism is associated with Freemasons, namely, I will explain. This is unity, that is, labor, labor, May, and all the rest. Not to steal, work honestly, work for the benefit of the state. Well, for



some reason I associate it with a positive image. That is, corruption cannot be present there in any way, I mean, they could have been imprisoned or sent into exile, shot on the spot. That is, I support communism”.

Russia, Bolshevik:

“A Bolshevik, well, yes, it turns out that this is a member of the Bolshevik party. As I understand it this is a much older person who has some experience and can present it to other people; A radical, perhaps, some kind against the majority”.

Kazakhstan, Bolshevik:

“The Bolsheviks are... I even knew something about them, I don't know now; Well, something was not particularly bad, as if yes, something... Nothing at all; Some kind of worker; I don't know who they are at all. As if I had heard about them somewhere, somewhere once I should have studied them, but I didn't; I don't know, I immediately imagine some kind of a guy with a big head”.

Turkmenistan, Bolshevik:

“I associate the Bolshevik only with Lenin; the Red Army”.

Azerbaijan, a Bolshevik:

“Just a man wearing uniform, who protects the state from ordinary people; Like some kind of vigilante. Yes, who, how to say, is like in the Rosgvardiya; A tall, strong man; I don't know, a man on a tank; A Bolshevik, it's more like a soldier who spreads and transmits the idea of communism. And, the Bolshevik, he, now, just a minute, I will outline... well, of course, with his ideas, who imposes his ideas”.

In the course of the conversation on the marker images of the Soviet era – a young pioneer, a communist, a Bolshevik, a Komsomol member – informants note a certain connection of the concepts, where most frequently the distinguishing factor is age:

“You know, there is a certain connection here, namely, a young pioneer, a communist and a Bolshevik. A young pioneer is about 16 to 18 years old, almost every resident of the Soviet Union is considered a communist, and the Bolsheviks, in my opinion... a typical portrait of a Bolshevik looks like this, as follows. First of all, this is an elderly, older person who may even have caught the times of Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, and then even, perhaps, took an active part in the formation of the Soviet state, who, perhaps, although quite unlikely ... zealously believes in the ideology of communism” (informant 6, Russia); In my opinion, they are like young pioneers, but older, also people with such an active life position, that is, they are... it has slipped my mind... like volunteers help at some events, here” (informant 1, Kazakhstan).

There are dismissive characteristics in the respondents' answers; the guys note some negative attitude on an intuitive, subconscious level, when they can not give a definition, but they feel the attitude. The answers of the informants from Russia were completer and more accurate in terms of the connotation of the images, but there is also bewilderment and some confusion. Additional questions

from the moderator did not always enable to expand the answers of the informants, which means that the informants do not have comprehensive knowledge.

Russia, Komsomol member:

"Member of the Komsomol Party. The associations are a newspaper; if I am not mistaken, this is the prototype of our trade union. Here, that is, they asserted the rights of students in relation to the administration of the univ... well, there were institutes, and teachers; I immediately remember the song Komsomol'tsy-dobrovol'tsy (komsomol members-volunteers), etc. Well, it turns out that they are already quite mature people who have already formed some kind of thinking and who are ready to work for their state".

Kazakhstan, Komsomol member:

"Well, Komsomol members, almost everyone, as I understand it, was a Komsomol member, all wore kerchief; as for me, this is just a Soviet community. The age range doesn't matter. Well, of course, there will not be such absolutely elderly people, but the middle-aged should probably be up to 40 years old, maybe. Well, there were, for example, those who supervised the yards, an orderly, you can say, like a chief of the house, did they also belong to them? Well, so to say, to ensure everything was quiet, so that everything was calm".

Turkmenistan, Komsomol member: The informants made a reference to the young pioneers, calling the Komsomol member and the Bolshevik similar concepts.

Azerbaijan, Komsomol member:

"Volunteer; Well, it's a volunteer who tries to to participate in Saturday cleanups, etc., goes to collective potato harvesting; Again, the image of a poster in my head like this, a man wearing socks, with flags, happy, cheerful: "Yes, I'm ready to help"; A young boy; also a poster boy wearing... a young pioneer scarf stands with a flag, hand in hand with a girl, and they are all so friendly, workaholics, volunteers, here, as it was already said".

Russia, socialism:

"Essentially, some political ideology, here, let me gather wits... assuming this stage before communism, that is, when a united people committed to a common idea and working on it; socialism, I think it is more strict than communism and it should have a similar ideology, but a little different; socialism is a sort of stage to communism, with the only difference that the first one actually exists, and the second is likely to remain a kind of a dream, a fantasy, something not feasible <...> illusory brighter future; the idea is that socialism is one big factory producing prospective Communists. Socialism cultivates those moral values that communists should have".

Kazakhstan, socialism:

"I don't know, a field, that's all. With grain; nothing at all, my sheet is blank. I do not know, in principle... I seem to know this word, it was included in the expansion of the USSR, but what it means, I have no idea. Well, this is the social system that existed under the Soviet Union, where the emphasis was placed directly on the needs of the working population".

Turkmenistan, socialism:



"Social equality; Socialism is associated with perestroika, I don't know; A social affair".

Azerbaijan, socialism:

"No idea; I would just ... well, there were some buildings, houses... Grey ones. Because many houses are still preserved, Stalinist ones, etc. They even survived the earthquake and people still live there; Socialism is when several states are united, this is how I imagine it, and they have a common infrastructure, that is, someone has better oil, someone has better fields, they plant a vegetable garden there, etc. Well, we will support each other. Economics is mixed with politics; Socialism? Well, the same thing, I have the same thoughts, that is, that all countries cooperate, help each other, support each other. That is, help is being rendered and this is like buildings are held on pillars, only instead of these pillars, these are all the countries of the Soviet Union, and the building itself is socialism".

Russia, the proletariat:

"The proletariat is the people who live in the state and are its top, not administrative top, but slightly inferior than the controlling staff; Well, most likely this is workers; as now we have service personnel, only more complicated; The proletariat, well, in the Soviet Union, all workers who work in the factories, who... well, yes, in the factories, the proletariat originates from there".

Kazakhstan, the proletariat:

"Some kind of regime, I don't know, this regime; I have a blank sheet, I basically don't understand what it is; I can't even draw it; the proletariat is the working stratum of the population, that is, well, ordinary people who don't hold leadership positions, who do ordinary work there".

Turkmenistan, the proletariat: there were no answers from the respondents. Neither verbal nor figurative associations were given.

Azerbaijan, the proletariat:

"Nothing comes to mind at all. Rich segment... This is for the first time I hear the word. No, I heard it, but... I don't know. Well, rather, like an upperclass society, in Europe. When superior society gathers, such as Bill Gates, Rockefeller. It's like a community, a high society".

Russia, matryoshka:

"This is a doll that has another doll inside, and this doll has another doll, and so many ones inside; A national symbol of the Soviet Union, a balalaika and bears; Well, the bottom line is that it came to our country from China, so it's strange that we associate it with the Soviet Union, because it's from China; I just associate it with the past; Well, first of all, it's a symbol of the state in general. Secondly, a matryoshka doll is, on this basis, a souvenir for foreigners, for those who are interested in Russia itself. Thirdly, it is a cultural asset, a symbol of Russian culture and identity".

Kazakhstan, matryoshka:

"It's a doll. Ah no, this is a tumbler, but a matryoshka consists of different ones inside it; Well, a matryoshka is the USSR, I would say because there are so many cities united.

It's the same as a matryoshka doll, one is small, but there are a lot in it; Yes, it's just a toy with a lot of dolls".

Turkmenistan, matryoshka:

"A toy. A toy and a souvenir".

Azerbaijan, matryoshka:

"Some kind of doll; Well, such a big doll, small ones inside, and that's all, nothing else; The same thing, we still have it somewhere in our chests. A Russian doll. Wearing a kerchief. With ruddy cheeks; Well, a Russian woman, with a scarf, her cheeks are red; Well, here is a matryoshka, a tumbler – these are children's toys that are on the shelves now. It is one in another, one in another".

Russia, comunalka (communal apartment):

"Now we associate comunalka with dormitories, which are divided by corridors, and there are apartments where people live. Earlier, it seems to me, this had a slightly different character, I mean these are houses, dwellings for people who have little money to purchase a good one; A comunalka? You see, where I live now, a hostel, to some extent can also be considered a comunalka, since there are also long corridors and a lot of apartments and that sort of things. At least I have an association with this; well, from what has been said, it seems to me that this is some kind of fun, a certain spirit, when everyone is around. It's one thing when you live in a house where there's nobody except your family, but this is when everyone is together, just like a honeycomb. That is, it is a large building where there are a lot of people, and perhaps in the evenings they gather to talk. Just such a spirit of friendship, as it were; well, for me it's poverty. In Soviet times, people did not live very well; well, like a modern three-room apartment, but not only one family lives in it, but a dozen, and each has its own bedroom and bathroom, and they all share a kitchen. This is a comunalka".

Kazakhstan, comunalka:

"An apartment that is divided into rooms in which different people live separately; this is an apartment divided into rooms, sometimes even into corners. My grandmother told me, that could be a room, roughly speaking, two corners belonged to one family, two other corners – to another family. This is too much".

Turkmenistan, comunalka:

"This is payment for an apartment. Maybe it's an apartment that... although, everyone did pay. Well, there are two options. For this apartment, you need to pay the utility bills, the second option is you don't pay the utility bills".

Azerbaijan, comunalka:

"An apartment. For the gas, the light. Like a dorm. Where several families live. For some reason, the dormitory is my first idea. More people, less oxygen. The fewer, the better cheer. Yes, several families, someone had a fight, someone heard that, and reported [to the police]".

Russia, a worker and a collective farm girl (kolkhoznitsa):



“Well, this is a monument in Moscow. Well, in general, as the main population strata, well, as a symbol of the USSR. That is, those working at the factory and working in the field. if we abstract our mind from the monument, then the worker and the collective farmer are not only a symbol of the USSR, but also the main class, the stratum of the population that the state pays attention to; In addition to the monument – they are a symbol of the main classes; Well, a collective farm girl and a worker, I don't know. I have such an idea that this is a husband and wife, that a worker is a proletarian who is engaged in heavy industry of some kind, well, at factories and so on. A collective farm girl-she harvests grain and millet in the fields”.

Kazakhstan, a worker and a collective farm girl:

“Well, these are these statuettes, she is holding a sickle, and he is with a hammer; I also remember this emblem on the flag of the USSR; No, it was... what was its name, but there was a yellow emblem on a red background; It was the coat of arms. Coat of Arms of the USSR. Planets, flags, which are everywhere, wherever it was possible, just like now. The coat of arms of Russia, too, is everywhere; Well, the same as the symbol of the USSR, only I also remembered about Mosfilm company, they seemed to have them on their logo. Soyuzfilm company seems to have them too”.

Turkmenistan, a worker and a collective farm girl:

“Who works in the field. The one who works in the field, in the gardens, they have their own rent. And the working class is probably a factory. Yes, we use “kolkhoz” (collective farm). Kolkhoz- it's like a village. It's about agriculture, they grow something, they have rent there, cotton, everything like that. We have a village, here, they are mainly engaged in this stuff”.

Azerbaijan, a worker and a collective farm girl:

“I don't know, a worker and a collective farm girl, the first thing that comes to me is ... bills, I did something about a collective farm girl. She arrives from the village, I don't even know, wearing a smart dress, something else. A worker who worked at a factory, and a collective farm girl is a villager – having her own vegetable garden, a milkmaid, etc. Agricultural industry. Well, a collective farm girl is responsible for an agricultural farm, and a worker, a person who works, for example, at a factory, that is, conducts the same everyday work that is used in agriculture. That is, they have a connection in some sense; a worker- an agricultural farm”.

Despite the sympathies expressed towards the multinational Soviet Union, in their responses xenophobia was present, due to political and ideological influences in the state:

“Well, the fact is that in some parts of Kazakhstan, there is a little bit like this... the expulsion of the Russians, let's say. <They> are not on their own land” (Kazakhstan).

Conclusion

Ideas of one's own past are an integral part of culture. Awareness of common historical roots is especially important in the context of globalization and digitalization. The common Soviet history could become the basis for the citizens of the post-Soviet Caspian states to realize their common identity and cultural

memory. However, as the Soviet model of culture has ceased to exist as a single entity, it is gradually blurring for the younger generation. It should be noted that the materials obtained through the use of a qualitative method – a focused group interview, will be further expanded using quantitative methods. This is necessary for the quantitative verification of data and the exclusion of a subjective approach to the research problem. The study proved that the most significant sources of constructing images of the Soviet era among young students were everyday interests and nostalgic memories of the older generation, which was actually brought up and lived its adult life under the Soviet ideology. There is a gradual traditional transition from one cultural paradigm, the Soviet one, to the modern one. This factor should be taken into account when planning strategies for constructing and spreading images of the Soviet era, as a connecting element for the neighboring states of the post-Soviet Caspian region. Due to such qualitative and subsequently quantitative studies we can record significant changes in the value sphere and the system of socially significant images. Soviet images-pillars of social and cultural significance – “young pioneers”, “Komsomol members”, “communists” – are receding into the past, remaining in the memory of the younger generation in the form of associative rows that bear references to contemporary phenomena: “YunArmia” (Young Army), “Rosgvardiya” (Federal National Guard Troops Service), “volunteers”. Comparative constructions are a clear indication that determines the peculiarities of mentality of native speakers, reflecting the state and dynamics of changes in public consciousness. The speech behavior recorded during the focus group interviews was manifested through the informants’ automatic and unconscious choice of a comparative construction, and reflects the cultural characteristics of the individual. The appeal to the personalities of the Soviet era indicates that they are the main symbols associated with the images of the Soviet era. The answers of the informants combine a positive and negative attitude to the objects associated with the Soviet era.

The study recorded the historical transition, where nostalgic moods for the Soviet era are no longer characteristic of the younger generation. These provisions allow us to recognize that the formation of a new identity for the Russian population and the population of the Caspian states is possible with the record and acceptance of the Soviet experience as the common past, a completed stage of history and the subsequent well-defined creation of new cultural models and their own images of culture and epoch. In the current social reality, Soviet images do not appear unified and integral, but rather ambivalent and contradictory, which puts uncertainty and instability in the national identity of Caspian students. Each of the focus groups highlighted the common qualities for the proposed Soviet images, namely diligence, talent in work, patience, collective forms of work and property, a tendency to obey the authorities. The material culture of the USSR is represented minimally in the respondents' minds, and it is associated with similar symbols



in modern popular culture, with frequent reference to visualization and verbal description of the image.

Soviet images in the minds of the students of post-Soviet states are primarily visualized: either through vestigial markers, for example, a young pioneer is associated with a red tie, sometimes with it only, or through associations with modern institutions – YunArmia and American Scouts, or through caricature characters: “a communist – a man with a big head”. Russian students are much more fully and clearly informed about communists, Bolsheviks and other images and symbols of the Soviet era. Representatives of Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan more often use a negative connotation in the description. At the same time, their visual images and verbal descriptions are quite diverse, which may be due to good command of the Russian language.

Respondents from Turkmenistan most often refuse to answer questions due to complete ignorance of the meanings of symbols and absence of any associations. The respondents speak Russian well, but perhaps not at a sufficient level to express associations. Besides, the laconic nature of the answers may be a consequence of the cultural closeness of Turkmenistan since the beginning of Perestroika, when Turkmenistan restricted contacts with the outside world. Turkmenistan's domestic cultural policy is dominated by Turkmen discourse, while Russian and even more so Soviet discourses are minimized, despite active economic contacts with Russia. In spite of the fact that almost all respondents from the post-Soviet Caspian region note the mainstream trend towards decommunization of their states, the level and nature of the perception of Soviet images in these countries are uneven, which confirms the hypothesis we suggested earlier.

Interpretation of the historical past is an important tool transforming mass consciousness. According to the results of qualitative research, the images of the Soviet era are interpreted as dual. Positive socio-cultural trends associated with the mentioned images are not emphasized enough, while the main channel of transmitting is family and family traditions, stories of close relatives who want to return to the past and immerse in the world of their childhood.

The answers of respondents in the first block of the topic guide about the nostalgic moods of the older generation indicate the predominance of restorative nostalgia, which obscures the problems of the past and offers a tempting, but extremely dangerous view of such a smoothed past. Senior generation conveys a romanticized image of the Soviet era, focusing not on the meaning of individual symbols, but on the general perception of the USSR. This trend suggests creation of favorable ground for mythologization of historical consciousness and threat to cultural security in the case of substitution of concepts and distortion of historical truth. Nevertheless, a common historical memory and a wise and balanced memory policy can act as soft power resources for cultural rapprochement in the post-Soviet Caspian region and formation of a positive model of intercultural interaction.

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