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Self-identity in post-Soviet immigrants' narratives

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Abstract

The Soviet Union established a specific culture, imposingly uniting representatives of diverse nations around strictly defined values. The closed borders kept the outside world unknown for Soviet citizens. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the majority of people from post-Soviet Republics faced the difficult necessity of a reassessment of their values. The confusion was even more severe for the people who immigrated to Western countries. The present article discusses self-narratives written by post-Soviet immigrant authors with a focus on cultural differences that they describe in their works. The stability and security of the previous times are contrasted to the dynamics and aspirations of the present reality. The authors' interpretation of the cultural differences reveals interesting details of post-Soviet identity.

KEYWORDS: post-Soviet, identity, culture, narrative, culture shock, immigration

Introduction

A Soviet citizen was a specific identity that included a huge number of attributes and also excluded many other features. Despite the huge diversity in historical background, all 15 republics had similar school programs, types of activities, furniture in the homes, and TV broadcasts. We felt no cognitive dissonance when ideology shouted from everywhere that we were Soviet citizens and also did not feel isolated from our historical roots as introduced to us by the Soviet books. We were safely isolated from the "evils of the imperialist West", we ignored diversity, and were loyally guarded by our powerful Soviet Union that set our identity clearly.

That union came to an end in 1990, leaving millions of people wrenched from the solid unquestionable identity they used to embrace throughout their lifetime. The economic crisis and safety issues drove the identity question to the back seat for a certain time. In Russia, which was the political, ideological and cultural centre of the union, people had tiny but still some access to the real Western world thanks to the rare tourists and even rarer touristic travels to Eastern European countries; immigration was an alternative to the living in the chaos. The information from scarce sources was promising; however, terrifying Soviet propaganda about inevitable encountering the situations depicted in gangster movies predicted that the expected price would be insurmountable.

After becoming independent, the former Soviet republics demonstrated different tendencies in connection to immigration: people of Jewish origin frequently migrated to Israel in the early 1990s and later to the USA and Germany; people from the Caucasus and Central Asia moved to Russia with the sole aim of earning a living, which was a labour migration.

Migration and personal narratives.

Migration is a process that inevitably evokes changes in identity. This dynamic is better traced in personal narratives in which the authors describe reactions to the reflections of the new culture, frequently contrasting it to the culture from which they came. In a personal narrative, the reader and researcher can trace economic and political situations in the personal interpretation of individuals. Individual stories reveal common features and tendencies of different aspects of migration and open ways for analysis and generalisation. Studying the common aspects of immigration processes and specific peculiarities for individual cultures opens new interdisciplinary perspectives for understanding adaptability, the acceptance-rejection level of people from diverse cultures, integration and retrospection, the intensity of comparative analysis of cultural values, self-identity.

Each individual's life uniquely reveals the themes that emerge as shared experiences. People from different historical backgrounds, ages, and social classes share remarkable similarities, sometimes not explicitly stated but revealed through the discourse analysis of immigrants' self-narratives

Resettlement involves a new perspective on peoples' negotiation with diverse social institutions. As Espin (1999) says:

> When migrants cross borders, they also cross emotional and behavioural boundaries. Becoming a member of a new society stretches the boundaries of what is possible in several ways. One's life and roles change. With them, identities change as well. The identities expected and permitted in the home culture are frequently no longer expected or permitted in the host society. (pp. 19-20)

The dynamics of the process of identity search has studied by social anthropologists with the focus of people's perception of their new roles and identity compared to retrospective analyses of the authors' previous culture. As the corresponding inseparable challenge of the immigration process, according to Espin (1999), people go through initial joy and relief, disillusionment with the new country, and, finally, acceptance of the good and the bad in the host country. Berry (1986) classifies the dynamics of identity processes into four forms or stages: 1) assimilation; 2) integration, 3) rejection, and 4) deculturation. Most studies find commonness and more or less standardised path of the immigrants' identity orientation. Assimilation, acceptance, rejection, in-between position, adaptation, and integration are considered to be common stages of identity formation in the place of resettlement. There are also researches focusing on individual ways of acculturation (Zhou & Bankston, 1998) or community ways, choosing to follow their community traditions. Recently, when immigration became an inseparable part of the increasingly globalised world, narrative stories of individuals who are undergoing immigration and experiencing identity changes are studied as a quality method (Berger, 2004; Espin, 1999). This method that implies that analysis of immigrants' narratives has a specific significance due to its role in learning about other people's experiences, about their authentic feelings and values and based on stimulated identity to understand their perceptions of cultural issues. It serves to overcome barriers to integration and to avoid culture shock. The barriers only can be overcome if they are well-defined. Culture shock is now understood much better than it was 15 years ago, due to 'theories taken from various areas of psychology—social, developmental, personality, cross-cultural and health.'

Some scholars have offered auto-biographical methods as a means of providing the opportunity to recognise the multiple and changing cultural contexts of migration as developed over the life course (Findlay & Li, 1997).

Gerber (2015), for example, emphasised letter-writing as an individual immigrant's need for stability and continuity during the radical changes in circumstances prompted by emigration and resettlement. Letters and emails are forms of self-narrative, and their analysis can reveal the author's perception of the new culture, can shed light on psychological and epistemological issues that are not well-recognised even by the author.

Personal narratives illustrate subtle details of acculturation processes, challenges of emigration, and adjustment to new places. This ever-changing process differs from person to person depending on their perceptions of the previous culture, acceptance in the new environment, and many other individual psychological factors. However, there are common identity issues experienced by the majority during the process of resettlement and acculturation. Adjusting to a new culture is a multidimensional process closely related to family relationships and social roles. Acculturation can be easy for some family members and painful for others, because of individual perceptions of their previous identity in the homeland and attitudes to the conventional value system in the receiving country. The theories of culture shock (Ward, Bochner & Furnham, 2001) discuss the challenges caused by invisible gaps between the immigrants' background and the culture of the receiving country.

People interpret material, interpersonal, institutional, existential and spiritual events as cultural manifestations, and these vary across cultures. When cultures come into contact, such established *verities* lose their apparent inevitability. For instance, when persons from a male-dominated culture find themselves in a society that practices gender equality, the conflict between these two irreconcilable positions spills over into the cognitive workings of both visitors and hosts. It affects how the participants see each other, how they regard themselves, and whether either party will be influenced to change their views as a consequence of the contact. In our analysis of this issue, we have concentrated on the interpersonal beliefs and perceptions that culture contact evokes and on the changes or resistance to change in the participants' self-construals (Ward, Bochner & Furnham, 2001).

The role of family and society in creating a multifaceted ethnic identity is a widely discussed topic of the immigration process. Immigrants' narratives include acculturation (Berry, 1997) and ethnic identity development (Phinney, 1990). Acculturation is a multidimensional process that relates to the ethnic group, the homeland, and the receiving

country. Each of these dimensions has its dynamic of change in the process of immigration, which depends on the circumstances of the immigrants' cultural perception first in the homeland and, after that, the adjustment to the culture in the receiving country.

Psychological outcomes of the acculturation depend on the individual characteristics of immigrants and the responses of the culture of resettlement. Studies show that the combination of strong ethnic identity and a strong national identity promotes the best adaptation (Phinney, Horenczyk, Liebkind & Vedder, 2001). The former Soviet Union did not leave behind a solid identity paradigm; quite the contrary, the unquestionable identity of the Soviet citizen that used to provide strict qualities and instructions faded away, subduing the post-Soviet people to uncertainty. These circumstances led to extra difficulties of acculturation because migrants did not have any prop to lean against or deny. Many post-Soviet immigrants seemed to experience in-between social, familial and identity status for many years. This article will analyse several post-Soviet personal narratives from the perspectives of social and familial adaptation.

Narratives of social relationships and family

In the autobiographical article *Found in transition*, Tartakovsky (2010) describes the obstacles to assimilation in terms of social contacts and family. Personal narratives are accompanied by theoretical analysis in which the author uses the autobiographical method to retrospectively assess their life in the previous culture, looking at it from temporal and spatial distance:

> I had only a couple of native Israeli friends. They were not chosen but rather "forced" by circumstances, such as my roommate, her boyfriend, or my boss at work. Israelis did not hurry to befriend me. In Russia, university was a place where friendships were created most easily. Israeli students come to the university at a later stage in their lives than students in Russia or in the West; most of them work for a living, and some even have families or live with a partner. They mostly make friends in the army, not in university. Their relationships in university are mostly instrumental, such as helping in studies or looking for a partner. Since I could not provide them with anything valuable, being a new immigrant and having no resources, they politely ignored me. Sometimes they helped me with Hebrew, but they had no interest in a strange Russian and certainly did not want to befriend me. (Tartakovsky, 2010, p. 355)

The former culture was collectivistic with an imposing ideology of considering everybody a part of the tremendous and "harmonious" whole, people addressed to each other using the word *comrade*, and it was conventional to have friends at school and work. The new culture was individualistic, and despite getting help when needed and being treated politely, a post-Soviet person would inevitably feel alienated.

A collectivist culture expects of the people to be relational, and allowing others into one's time-space reality is conventional. However, an individualistic culture provides a private space for each member without any interference into it unless requested. The expression "they politely ignored me" shows the author's expectation from the new culture that was nurtured by the previous reality. The agents of the new culture were not aware of these expectations for the simple reason that their background did not welcome uninvited relationality. Therefore, in their perception, they did not ignore the newcomer at all, they just did not allow him to enter their friendship zone, which was reserved for only a few *special* people and was closed even to family members, not because they were bad, but because they were not suitable.

Family relationships are another important area of acculturation:

> My relationships with my parents drastically changed after immigrating to Israel. It was the first time I had separated from them physically: I rented a flat separately from them, despite their fierce resistance. Their argument was that 'living together we may save money'; however, it was obvious that the main issue was my growing independence (Tartakovsky, 2010, p. 355).

Soviet people were taught to be economical. Saving money was a sound reason for living together with parents, and any kind of spending money for buying comfort and autonomy was considered to be damaging the principles of frugality. In Russia, as well as in other collectivistic societies, unmarried children are expected to live with their parents, and living separately is perceived as an act of rebellion.

The older generation felt difficulty in becoming accustomed to new conventions. The economic reason was fortified with ethnic-cultural perceptions of intra-familial relationships. The collectivistic habit of caring about conventions created psychological barriers to the acceptance of different rules of relationships:

> Another area of friction between me and my parents related to dealing with Israeli reality. My parents' acculturation behaviour, their learning of Hebrew and approach to finding a job, seemed dangerous to me. My parents came to Israel at the age of 53. Their first reaction was 'we will never be able to learn Hebrew or

> find jobs in our professions.' Besides their anxiety, I saw no reason for this attitude, because they were very intelligent, and their professions were in high demand on the Israeli market. However, I understood that their behaviour of not studying Hebrew and looking for non-qualified jobs (cleaning, babysitting, or blue-collar factory work) might lead to the actualisation of their worst fears. Therefore, I pressured them to study Hebrew and to look for professional jobs. My persuasion succeeded, and my parents found jobs in their professions about four months after their arrival in Israel and successfully worked until retirement. However, this process harmed our relationship, because in Soviet culture, a child cannot tell his or her parents what they should do. In fact, the opposite is the norm: parents are supposed to know better and tell the child what he or she should do. Some of my parents' attempts to follow this pattern (for instance, trying to persuade me not to study psychology but rather to work as an electrician) triggered my anger because of their misunderstanding of my needs and interests (Tartakovsky, 2010, p. 355).

The attitude to children in collectivistic and individualistic cultures are different. Because of their privileged position in Soviet society, children were highly supervised and overprotected (Althausen, 1996). At the same time, child-parent relationships are highly restrictive; parents expect children to obey and comply with their rules and orders. Surveys show that Russians are inclined to use an authoritarian child-rearing style (Zorkaia, 2004)

Parents in the USSR, as in many collectivistic cultures, felt difficulty in overcoming the barrier between themselves and their children. They continued to be overprotecting and guarded their children until the end of their lives. At the same time, they expected their children to take care of them when they were able to do so. When children wanted autonomy, it caused psychological conflicts as parents thought it to be unnatural, felt guilty for these arbitrary conditions, blamed themselves for the "failure" in bringing up their children properly and also found the children to be ungrateful.

When the children give advice to their parents, the latter feel disempowered due to the threat that they can lose their absolute authority over children, their "always rightness position". In a new culture, studying a new language and new customs in order to work at professional jobs was an attractive idea. However, it also meant future challenges, uncertainties and, most of all, the risk of having lost the function of omniscient parents and omnipotent guardians. The possibility of losing the influence over their children promised weakened or even broken links in parents-children relationships, which meant

unconscious rift between generations. Parents resisted as far as possible, whereas the children were eager to pull away from their past.

Physical separation from the parents meant a loss of parents' decision-making powers within the family. The parents experiencing the pain of wrenching apart from the native culture would naturally strive to adhere to previous cultural values as far as possible. Children, in contrast, enjoyed experiencing autonomy because of greater decision-making powers within the family. The resistance of younger generation to follow the previous patterns because of the euphoria of being in a new and desired place and eager to integrate to its reality as soon as possible deepened the gap between generations in immigration.

Narratives of individual empowering

Tartakovsky (2010) writes about his disappointment due to his hard economic situation when the program financing him finished. Different from the stable working places in the Soviet Union, receiving countries did not provide permanent jobs. The Soviet people who were accustomed to stable earnings and permanent employment positions found it challenging indeed to search for a job after a certain period of working at one place. The euphoria, which accompanies at least some groups of voluntary immigrants, strengthens the immigrants' resilience when facing the hardships of adjustment. There appears a paradoxical situation. We read in Tartokovski's story about the challenges in finding a job. In the following narrative, we will also read about a long process of job search in the receiving country. This process, however, is not accompanied by hopelessness and no desperation is visible. Mayskaya (2007) explains the reason of its lack explicitly saying that America is a humanist country and from the time she arrived there she did not feel any anxiety for the future that always took place in the USSR. The paradox is the lack of a sense of convenience in a country which provided a permanent job and stable salary. In the country where jobs were temporary and there was no certainty of finding a new one when it is terminated, the post-Soviet people felt more confident.

Tamara Mayskaya emigrated from Moscow, Soviet Union (USSR) to Cleveland in the United States in 1974. In her book *The boundary situation* (2007), she looks at the Soviet life from the perspectives of her new place of settlement, the USA, comparing all realities of the new place with the lived-in USSR experiences, making parallels, a meditation about the personal attitude to the dynamics of identity changes happening to her within the scopes of a new culture.

The title of the book is symbolic. It is not clear whether the author meant the boundary situation as a term offered by Jaspers (Portuondo, 2016) describing that people reevaluate their past life and identity and look at their personality from new perspectives after encountering crucial events in life. For Jaspers, the meaning of boundary situations as a structure of e*xistenz* underlines the possibility of risk in the individual historicity. Taking risks breaks the flow of reflection and, at the same time, appeals to an opening of ethics without sacrificing the universality of Kant's categorical imperative (ibid.).

Immigrants face boundary situations in the literal and figurative meaning of the phrase. The conventions that had been taken for granted become subjects for analysis and reassessment. The ways of living that seemed unfamiliar and unconventional becomes normalised due to their conventionality in the receiving culture. The interruption and breaking from the flow of usual reflection never goes without internal struggle, confusion, self-analysis, assessment, contrasting cultures and times. The following episode is depicts the difference in gatherings in the USA and former USSR.

> Once our school Principle M.B. invited me to celebrate Thanksgiving in his house. He introduced me to his wife and children. That was my first Thanksgiving in the USA, and our friendship with them continued for 20 years. The Russians get surprised why Americans speak on innocuous issues at parties; they do not argue about politics, do not discuss world problems. Once, when I raised this question, the Principle's wife said that if there was a need, she could do a fundraising, gather signatures or money … The Americans do not understand how it is to just talk in circles. We had been doing it for ages gathering in our kitchens. In those years—we could be excused—we didn't have a real political life. (Mayskaya, 2007, p. 14)

Soviet people discussed politics, knowing that they had no chance of changing its course. In the Soviet Union, neither individuals, groups or collectives had a chance of affecting politics. We are paradoxically reading that when people found themselves in the countries where they could have some influence on the course of political events, they became lost, confused and did not feel competent to do this. Maria Arbatova (1998) did not actually emigrate—but had a second husband who was a Westerner—experienced the subtle differences between talking *about* politics and *doing* politics: 'Many of us, considering ourselves to be democrats, feel absolutely lost in the bosom of real democracy, instead of struggling for it' (Arbatova, 1998, p. 323).

Arbatova (1998) writes that though she was a feminist, it was hard to live with a real feminist:

> Sasha [first husband] helped me a lot about the household. But it was within my total control and strict instructions. Oleg considered our home to be a field of common responsibility and tried to assure me that 'it is not your refrigerator is empty but our refrigerator. It is not you have dirty dishes, but we have. It is not you have dirty floors, but we have.' And gradually my psyche turned from revolting kitchen machine to an average European one, where you need to meet the qualities of a good hostess only if you are hired to work as hostess for someone. I started to attribute all criteria of a real woman—cleanliness of the house, well-ironed bed-cloth, the height of dough in cakes—to violations of human rights on gender basis … It was still hard to keep my hands away from reaching a sponge and a vacuum cleaner … I, of course, as every Soviet woman would, desperately tried to make Oleg happy, to predict his desires, but thanks God, he did not allow me to do that. (ibid.)

In the Soviet Union, people were imposed to consider themselves to be different parts of the big whole and act centripetally. An individual was not powerful enough to change anything. Politics was an area in which changes were not only impossible but inconceivable. With the firm conviction about the inability to interfere with any aspect of political reality, people, however, talked about it very much. These talks were not goal-oriented; indeed, they were the speakers' expression of their erudition about the serious affairs of life.

Western individualistic society, on the contrary, was more pragmatic and far from justifying the own importance in the eyes of the interlocutors showing *competence* in politics. Talking politics reduces resistance to political involvement (Parry et al., 1992). The Freudian concept about energy release through imitation of real actions (for example, Maria Bonaparte, a psychoanalytical critic insisted that if Edgar Allen Poe was not describing the crime with all details, he could have released this energy in real life murdering people) (Pederson-Krag, 1950) moderated the Soviet people's natural desires to make important changes in society.

Another difference between the two cultures was described in the example of school experience discussing the relationships between teachers and students. The notion of guilt was almost as actual in the Soviet Union as it was in religion. The sense of guilt was imposed on people everywhere: in the kindergarten, when as a child you did not want to sleep or spilt compote on your shirt; at school, when you had poor handwriting; at work when you could not be as successful as somebody from the cover page of a magazine. Guilt was an inseparable attribution of people's lives accompanying them both spatially,

as it was everywhere, and temporary, as it took place at all stages of their lives. Mayskaya, (2007) wrote about the absurd blaming of teachers when their students were not doing well. Though she was writing about a Russian school where she used to work prior to her immigration, it exactly coincides with the situations in which teachers from all 15 republics of the Sovient Union inevitably encountered:

> In contrast to my most compatriots, I like the relationships between teachers and students here. They are equal. When it comes to behaviour, teenagers are teenagers everywhere. Anyway, they do not think here that if there is a poor discipline in the class—the teacher is to be blamed. Here, they do not punish the teacher if a student carved the desk. But at a Moscow school N 206 where I used to teach, our principal stated it at meetings: we will punish the teacher … (Mayskaya, 2007, p. 15)

Mayskaya somewhat romanticised the care of the Americans for individual lives, to contrast it to Soviet neglect of individuals on behalf of the collective:

> When I tried to illustrate how millions of Soviet people are suffering, I received a good answer from an American woman that she did not want her son to go and die rescuing Russia, Cuba, China. You would not argue that. The life of an individual citizen is the greatest value here. (Mayskaya, 2007, p. 16)

She emphasised this with the Challenger shuttle crashing in which an American astronaut Christa McAuliffe[1] who was a high school teacher, died:

> That day all students in America were sitting in classes and watching the astronauts' tragic fall on TV. I asked T.U. 'How was your sons' reaction to this?' He answered: 'My wife and I explained them that they should not be astronauts.' The cult of heroism, the ideology to die for ideals do not exist in American ideology. On the contrary, there is the cult of survival. … For today's people here, the main issue is personal success. (Mayskaya, 2007, pp. 17-18)

The above described episodes and the following interpretation of it has ontological and epistemological significance. In the collectivist culture, sacrificing one's life for ideals was the notion of heroism. People were supporting it because they needed approval from the community—the collective. People who thought differently, had different attitudes, kept their thoughts for themselves because of the fear of disapproval. The episte-

[1] Christa McAuliffe was born in Boston, Massachusetts, on September 2, 1948. A high school teacher, she made history when she became the first American civilian selected to go into space in 1985. On January 28, 1986, McAuliffe boarded the Challenger space shuttle in Cape Canaveral, Florida, but the shuttle exploded shortly after lift-off, killing everyone on board.

mological misbalance between the "duty" to meet expectations and the natural instincts of survival could cause cognitive dissonance among the post-Soviet immigrants that would serve to be one of the proofs for the difficulty of living under the Soviet power. In the USA, natural human instincts were not suppressed under the heroic slogans. Given the sense of being significant with individual strengths and weaknesses, the immigrants felt empowered and confident, regardless of their social and financial status.

Narratives of nostalgia and freedom

Soviet censure defined the paths of development in each sphere. All schools and universities offered studies based on specific books, and different approaches seemed odd and questionable. This approach was providing stability but left no space for creativity. The people who preferred stability found such an approach convenient. Even in ex-Soviet countries, some people still long for that stability. We can appreciate the freedom of choice in America but there are other nuances of the past that seem conventional and hard to be reassessed. Mayskaya (2007) was, for example, notified about an open position in a military institution in Monterrey. It was a 40-hour working week that scared her. She received an email from Cleveland State University offering to fill in the questionnaire, which she understood as an offer to work there from September. When there was not any news in September, she asked them about it and they answered that it was just a formal data collecting. She says that in Russia you would be asked when you are definitely offered a job. The discoursive analysis and hermeneutical reading of this episode do not show any sign of a desire to be in the Soviet Union and live the life of certainty and stability. On the contrary, Mayskaya already perceived herself to be a part of this unstable and dynamic society that offered possibilities everywhere. A Soviet person who would hardly agree to work at a position lower their social status did not care about this status in the country where people were not judged by their social positions.

American flexibility certainly causes challenges but it is not disempowering. In this story, as in many self-narratives written by post-Soviet authors, freedom of choice in the receiving country is the main point in encouraging and empowering the immigrant writer. Stability, a permanent job, tight family relationships cannot stand against freedom in the eyes of the writer, and even when people who feel nostalgic about the past in the homeland, do not connect it to longing for the previous identity; they are just pleasant moments of childhood, reminiscences about the younger age.

Nostalgia among post-Soviet immigrants is not obsessive homesickness; on the contrary, it is often perceived as a positive experience at the times of dynamic changes to personal

identities. The reminiscences bring to life past pleasant or painful memoirs that are preferred to relive in mind rather than in reality. Amidst massive changes in the lives of an immigrant, the memoirs of the stable past create a peaceful space to dwell upon temporarily.

Shteyngart (2004), in his essay *The mother tongue between two slices of rye*, writes:

> When I return to Russia, my birthplace, I cannot sleep for days. The Russian language swaddles me … Every old woman cooing to her grandson is my dead grandmother. Every glum and purposeful man picking up his wife from work in a dusty Volga sedan is my father.

The need for appreciation is a primal human longing. The grandmother in the Soviet Union was a generalised image of a person alongside with whom children felt loved and fully nurtured. The author's longing for deep emotional ties with his late grandmother is not a desire to go back to the Soviet past. He describes his father as being glum, like many Soviet males who purposefully fulfilled their obligations. When he returns to Russia, it produces a sensation of returning to the safety of the childhood. The seemingly temporal shift from adulthood to childhood evokes warm feelings, not spatial transition.

Chakrabarty (2000) similarly suggests that 'what remains buried in the current Bengali nostalgia for *adda*,[2] is an unresolved question of their present: how to be at home in a globalised capitalism now. An idealised image of *adda* points to the insistent pressures of that anxious question' (p. 213). The perception of and adaptation to globalised capitalism is presumably also a difficult cognitive process for post-Soviet immigrants, because they had grown up in a reality that determinedly denied the worthiness of both notions. *Globalisation* was not a word in Soviet vocabulary; *capitalism* was mentioned frequently as an evil threatening people's safety and prosperity.

One of the repeated motifs of post-Soviet self-narratives is the liberation from constraints and feeling the support from the government and organisations. Furthermore, in the receiving country, following personal desires was not considered to be a notion of egoism; on the contrary, it counted to be normal and natural. Many female immigrants from post-Soviet countries to Western countries mention reevaluated gender roles and even psychological challenges they had to overcome in the re-evaluation of their negotiations with diverse social institutions. In the highly patriarchal Soviet society, women's secondary status was *de facto* accepted and not questioned. The new cultures provided

[2] Adda is a distinct Bengali speech genre and is the practice of friends getting together for long, informal, and non-rigorous conversations.

another reality—although idealised—in which women did not have to serve males to deserve attention and respect:

> America is a humanistic country. Alongside with government aid programs, there are many private charity organisations, which unfortunately still do not exist in Russia. They indirectly finance culture. By the way, culture does not need auspices; it needs freedom. In the countries where culture was in the hands of the government (Hitler, Stalin's totalitarian regimes), it turned into ideological servant … In America, talents are not suffocated. They are free to develop. The way it happens depends on that person.… (Mayskaya, 2007, p. 23)

Liberation from chores due to better services, richer consumer choices, and higher living standards together with empowerment because of freedom and diversity of choices made post-Soviet immigrants feel confident and secure. The Western consumerism that was severely criticised in the Soviet Union appeared to be not an attribute of selfishness but a simple human need to have time for oneself.

Conclusion

Immigration causes changes in cultural identities. This process is multifaceted and includes cognitive, emotional, and behavioural dimensions of the immigrants. Acculturation includes a retrospective examining of the past culture and scrutinising the new culture.

Cultural identity and cultural practices are both sensitive to the changing social circumstances of the individual immigrant, as well as to the macro-level socioeconomic changes in the immigrants' homeland and the receiving country. Finally, acculturation is both an individual and a group phenomenon; however, we should always remember that individual acculturation patterns are unique and shaped by previous experience, and do not necessarily correspond to the acculturation dynamics of an entire group.

Immigration history is easily studied in group social terms. However, these chronologies and mainstream features do not reveal authentic facts about the cognitive, emotional, and behavioural aspects of the immigrant lives. Challenges the immigrants encounter in the result of leaving their homelands (even when they opted to do so) and the complexities of immigrant mentalities are visible in the self-narratives of the individuals. In contrast, studying immigration in the materials of individual self-narratives is a long and time-consuming process due to the necessity of finding commonness in individual stories and theorising the materials into general tendencies. However, the results of this

qualitative research provide authentic materials about real situations encountered by immigrants, their feeling about these situations, their perceptions of past and present cultures by individuals, and common points in these perceptions.

Post-Soviet immigrant narratives include many episodes about individuals' changing relationships with diverse social institutions after moving to a Western country. Soviet families had a special type of relationships among their members. The ties between parents and children were (and remain in post-Soviet countries) tight and often burdening. Expectations to be ideal Soviet citizens, imposed obligations, and censure were the overwhelming realities of life in the fifteen republics. Stability, permanent jobs, lack of aspiration for a better future, ambition-free standardised life, absence of need for struggle to survive were also a part of the Soviet reality, and many of these qualities had to go through reassessment process when the immigrants compared the culture they left with the reality of the receiving countries.

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Povzetek

Sovjetska zveza je vzpostavila posebno kulturo, ki je na vsiljivo združevala predstavnike različnih narodov okoli strogo določenih vrednot. Zaradi zaprtih meja je bil zunanji svet za sovjetske državljane neznan. Po razpadu Sovjetske zveze se je večina ljudi iz postsovjetskih republik soočila z zahtevno potrebo po ponovni oceni svojih vrednot. Zmeda je bila še hujša pri ljudeh, ki so se izseljevali v zahodne države. Pričujoči članek obravnava samopovedi post-sovjetskih izseljenskih avtorjev s poudarkom na kulturnih razlikah, ki jih opisujejo v svojih delih. Stabilnost in varnost prejšnjih časov sta izpostavljeni kot nasprotje z dinamike in težnjami sedanje resničnosti. Interpretacija kulturnih razlik s strani avtorjev razkriva zanimive podrobnosti post-sovjetske identitete.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: post-sovjetsko, identiteta, kultura, pripoved, kulturni šok, priseljenstvo

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