

EFFECTS OF SOCIO- POLITICAL DISRUPTION ON NATIONAL IDENTITY

**ANGELINA NILSSEN
SOCIOLOGY AND ANTHROPOLOGY**

ABSTRACT/INTRODUCTION

This small-scale project considers the concept of national identity. National identity is prevalent in contemporary debate, as it is constantly being challenged due to factors such as immigration, globalization, and significant socio-political transformation. The purpose of this study was to examine the effect of social disruption, or societal collapse, on people's sense of national identity using the Soviet Union as a case study.

BACKGROUND/ LITERATURE REVIEW:

- Diamond (2005): Elaborates on the concept of collapse. “Collapse” occurs when there is a physical “decrease in human population size and/or political/economic/social complexity, over a considerable area, for an extended time” (pg. 3).
- McAnany and Yoffee (2010): View collapse as a response to stress; societies respond with resilience.
- Yurchak (2005): Investigates internal shifts that were emerging within the Soviet system during the 1950s and mid-1980s.
- Bassin and Kelly (2012): Elaborate on what it meant to be a Soviet citizen. Soviet citizenship was clearly inscribed on the passport.

THEORY

- Key argument: With the fall of the USSR, the previous *Russian* identity resurfaced because it was the identity that was already established and merged with the new Soviet identity.
- Berger and Luckmann (1966): Internalization of society. Primary socialization is critical in identity formation. Secondary socialization is important, but may not override primary socialization.
- Bourdieu (1986): Explains how groups of agents use their capital to allocate social energy in the form of living capital.

METHODS

- Survey examined a wide range of Russians' opinions regarding their identity during and after the fall of the Soviet Union.
- Sample size: 15
- Gender: 8 Females, 7 Males
- Age Range: 24-54 years (average: 31 years)
- Ethnicity: 11 Russian and 4 Ukrainian
- Procedures: Survey was sent out to the Church of St. Seraphim of Sorov in Moscow.
- Responses translated from Russian to English.

RESULTS

- Regardless of where they were born (USSR or Ukraine), all participants had a Russian identity.
 - *Скорее всего да. Живя на Украине не чувствую себя украинкой, чувствовала бы себя русской, живя в России – не знаю, надеюсь да. (Lived in Ukraine, but felt that I was Russian, if lived in Russia- I don't know- I hope yes)*
- Language appears to be a key factor in identity formation. All 15 participants spoke Russian during the Soviet era and speak it now. Participants believe that speaking Russian makes them Russian.
- Many of them also see themselves as Russians because of the Russian “cultural events” in which they participated.
- Family is an important agent of socialization.

“В СССР я жила очень хорошо. Не в смысле материального. На материальную сторону я и не обращала внимания. Каких-то вещей не хватало, но это не было никакой проблемой для большинства! Ни за какими вещами лично я не "охотилась", не было необходимости, желания и времени. Разве в вещах смысл человеческой жизни? Я жила, училась, работала, растила детей, не было проблем, пока не устроили Перестройку! Это была МОЯ СТРАНА, где я была ХОЗЯИНОМ. Как в своём доме, в своей семье. Я старалась исправлять какие-то недостатки, старалась быть полезной для страны. Могла напрямую общаться со многими руководителями, они были доступны для народа. Это сейчас бюрократии во много раз больше, чем тогда. Безопасность людей во много-много раз было выше! Любое письменное или устное обращение гражданина во власть не оставлялось без внимания. При всех недостатках, это был самый справедливый строй.”

CONCLUSION

Although much of the data is not representative of the population, those that responded felt that they were Russian even after the collapse of the Soviet Union. This was the case simply because they participated in studying Russian language, literature and were taught by parents to be Russian. They had internalized this identity.

REFERENCES

- Bassin, M. & Kelly, C. (2012). *Soviet and Post-Soviet Identities*. NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Berger, P. & Luckmann, T. (1966). *The Social Construction of Reality*. New York: Dell Publishing Group and Doubleday.
- Bourdieu, P. (1986), *The Forms of Capital*. In J.G. Richardson (ed.), *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*. NY: Greenwood.
- Diamond, J. (2005). *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed*. NY: Penguin Group.
- McAnany, P. & Yoffee, N. (2010). *Questioning Collapse: Human Resilience, Ecological Vulnerability, and the Aftermath of Empire*. NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Yurchak, A. (2005). *Everything Was Forever Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generations*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to:

- Amy Orr, for your endless guidance, patience, advice and moments of relief.
- Tom Love, for helping to me clarify my writing, and for laughter when things were just not going the way they should have.
- Rob Gardner, for your calm nature and the numerous times when you helped me to see that, even when you don't have things go your way, in the end, it will be okay.