The Childhood at the Border of Two States
The Representation of Private Memoirs

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Abstract

This article attempts to represent private remembrances of childhood as collective narration of people who were children in the 1980s, especially in the 2nd half of the decade. It is based on the analysis of their interviews. The main attention is paid to the way in which they remember the collapse of USSR and the proclamation of independence of Ukraine

Parole chiave: childhood; memory; Ukraine; social status; language; children's folklore

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There are too many definitions of Childhood to follow only one. However, it is clear, that childhood is not only a physiological stage in life, it is also a complicated system of sociocultural phenomena. As reknown British sociologist Chris Jenks put it "Childhood is not a brief physical inhabitation of a Lilliputian world owned and ruled by others, childhood is rather a historical and cultural experience and its meaning, its interests reside within such contexts."[1] Within the frames of this article, I attempt to explore only several aspects of this phenomenon .

[1] Jenks, Chris. *Childhood*. London, Routledge, 1996. p. 61

Borrowing the Jenks's term of childhood as an 'index of civilization', I would like to represent the childhood as an "obvious signifier" [2] of social context. I mean that behind any kind of childhood special social context always appears.

Introduction

This article is a brief summary of wider research that had been done mainly within MA work about remembrance the childhood in Ukraine during the 1980s as the last decade of Soviet Union existence. In that work, I attempted to compare two views of childhood at that period - "official" and "private" one. As an "official" view of childhood, I consider the "normative" image of childhood presented by official (centralized) periodicals for children and youth. Meanwhile, the "private" image of childhood was obtained after analyzing autobiographical in-depth interviews with people, who were children at the border of 1980s – 1990s in Ukraine.

To process the information I have gathered through in-depth semistructured interviews I relied mainly to discourse analysis, content analysis, narrative and comparative analysis. I have also used grounded theory methodology. The most important books for my work were: *Interviews: An Introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing*, (Kyale, 1996); *The Cambridge introduction to Narrative* (Abbott, 2003); *Life History and Narrative* (J. Amos Hatch, R. Wisniewski, 1995) and *Strategies of Qualitative Inquiry* (N. Denzin, and Y. Lincoln).

For the interviews I have taken I chose 10 persons with urban experience of childhood (spent in the cities, not villages), who also had an experience of involvement into the number of educational institutions such as kindergartens, hobby groups, summer pioneers' camp etc.

Relying on the *stages of psychosocial development* proposed by Erik Erikson, I limited myself to the research of school age. Consequently, all respondents were in the age **from 5 to their teens** in the period under the consideration. Particularly, I was interested in their remembrance of the collapse of USSR and proclamation of the Independence of Ukraine.

Talking about the remembrance, there is always a question about objectivity of what exactly has been seen and adequacy of its' interpretation. There is always a question – can somebody's memory be a "quotation from the reality"? However, in this case I totally accept the modern tradition of history and qualitative methodology based sociology, which allows us to view memories as a valid object of research.

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[2] Jenks, Chris. *Childhood.* London, Routledge, 1996. p. 67

I consider the childhood in the end of 1980s – beginning of 1990s to be a very peculiar period. This is time when model of the child status is being transformed. The link between children and the rest of the society, the way through which children were socialized in the previous system – that is, in mass children and youth organizations, disappeared. Children were still rhetorically included into society, however, the rhetoric changed. Clearly the processes that caused the USSR break-up in the end had started long before that and perestroika in the mid-1980s brought many changes. However it is at the turn of 1980s and 1990s that the most abrupt and radical changes happened. Below I will briefly point only those concerning children.

1980s

Until the Soviet Union collapsed, the youth had to belong to mass all-encompassing organizations, which were October Children (7-10 years old), 'Pioneers' (10-15 years old) and the "Komsomol" – All-Union Leninist Young Communist League (15-28 years old). The main governing body was the Central Council of the Young Pioneer organization of the Soviet Union, which functioned under the leadership of the main governing body of *Komsomol* . Its official newspaper was *Pionerskaya Pravda* ("Pioneers' Truth"), founded in 1925 in Moscow. In 1970s-1980s its circulation reached approximately 10 million copies, which meant that almost every child in the Soviet Union was subscribed to it. Enormous number of periodicals for youth and children was still publishing. Soviet ideology was always important part of these periodicals. Nevertheless, at the late 1980s "many of the central assumptions of Soviet policy relating to children were in tatters. Institutional care – the flagship of rational child management for seventy years – was increasingly criticized, not just for its incidental failures, but in itself, as a fundamentally wrong-headed system".[3]

1990s

Soviet Union collapsed and on the 24th of August 1991 the independence of Ukraine was proclaimed. The beginning of 1990s was marked by serious economic crisis, inflation, loss of status (for children – status of Pioneers and October Children), worsening of medical services and education, dramatic social inequalities, all of which children felt very quickly.

Changes in Ukraine were not happening simultaneously. The people I interviewed grew up in different regions of Ukraine and I am writing here about certain common tendencies I could trace in their life stories, however under no circumstances this should be viewed as an attempt to unify their experiences.

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[3] Kelly, Catriona. *Children's World. Growing up in Russia 1890-1991*. Yale University Press, 2007. p. 283.

Based on my previous research I would argue that the "Soviet" ideology influenced children's socialization long after USSR broke-up formally. Due to economic crisis and inflation, children of the independent Ukraine used Soviet textbooks almost until the end of 1990s. Of course, new textbooks were written and published, but most of the efforts were directed to producing new Primers and reading books for primary schools – children had to be taught Ukrainian language. High school books and programs had to await their turn for quiet a while. Besides, not enough copies of the new books were published, so more often than not one book had to be shared by 2 or 3 pupils.

In the 1990s children could still get hold on periodicals and children literature published in the Soviet times. They were available at homes and in the libraries. Many children had older friends or siblings who read those books. These older ones still managed to become "October children" and pioneers, they had the authority. Moreover, in the Soviet system of education children were taught to read before the school, in kindergartens (when they were 4-6 years old).[4] Thus, even children born in the 1980s read "Soviet" literature and were influenced by it. My research demonstrated that even persons born in 1980s clearly remember at least some clichés and images from Soviet times. What is more, respondents declared that the influence of previous epoch was felt even after the collapse of Soviet Union. Of course, every interviewee narrates about his/her past from the prospective of his/her current position in life, experience etc. Person's views of his/her own past are fundamentally influenced by education. However all interviewees also narrate about certain common experience – they all were born in one state and grew up in another. For most of them, born in the 1980s, break-up of the USSR and proclamation of Ukraine's independence was the moment when they were still going to school (after going to kindergarten for a while). Their childhood experience became marginal in two ways or in a double sense – not only as the past stage before more serious school experience, but also as "Soviet" past which had to be annulled in the newly independent state.

Consequently, the peculiarity of social group considered for research lies also in the fact, that they are the representatives of both Soviet generation socialized in the Soviet system and at the same time they are the youngest citizens of the independent Ukraine.[5]

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[4] Zajda, Joseph I. *Education in USSR*. Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1980. p. 272.

[5] Describing the generation of 1980s as a generation, which was still influenced by Soviet civilization, I would like to disagree with Alexey Yurchak's attempt to define the last Soviet generation, which was made few years ago in his very resonance book *Everything was forever until it was no more. The last Soviet Generation* Although Alexey Yurchak declared that his book explores "the period of late socialism through the eyes of the last Soviet generation" he describes the epoch of late socialism mainly based on interviews with persons who were born in 1960s and 1970s.

The status loss and new status

In the 1990s the group of my respondents was in the school age. The beginning of school is always related to new duties and responsibilities, with quite strict discipline and with inclusion into new social group. All this creates enough pressure for children. In the 1990s the stress was reinforced by change of social expectations from children – even one or two years ago they were different.

Just before entering the school children of the generation considered here were observing their older colleagues, brothers and sisters, who, following the example of the book and movie heroes, were preparing their school uniforms (which because of the shortages in supply – so called "deficit" – had to be bought in advance) and dreamt to be the pioneers and do great deeds. Those of respondents, who were already pioneers, remembered that they were really satisfied with their social status. One respondent describes it as follows:

"So, a pioneer is a certain social standing" – "...for me it was like a certain level: pioneer means already a grown-up. Hero and all, you know what I'm saying... And the necktie – when I used to walk home and it was cold, I still didn't button up the overcoat, for all to see that I already have the necktie there – which means OK, you're a grown-up now. And how the girls did change! You walk into the school the next day and now all the girls have neckties, now they're not like they were yesterday, but special somehow»[6]

Almost all respondents (9 of 10) stated the loss they felt after realizing that they can not be pioneers any more. *[in Russian] "...I 've read "Timur and His Team" and I wanted so desperately to become an "octiabrionok"* [member of October Children]*, because there were two stars... and there was a really beautiful and decent portrait of Lenin. And I wanted so desperately to have two stars as well... With all my piety towards little Volodya Ulyanov I never associated the stars with Lenin; they were just cool...»*[7]

From these memories we see that in a preschool age (in the end on 1980s) our respondent still was dreaming about the star with portrait of Lenin, but not about the new independent Ukraine. However, being an October Child and have a star meant for her not faithfulness to Socialistic ideals but just a status. It was rather about an opportunity to be included into the system, which, as she already knew, begins with the acceptance to October Children.

It is remarkable, that no one of them mentioned the Ukrainian analogue to the Pioneers which was set up in 1990. Nevertheless children were being "adapted" to the new social reality. One of the "adaptation" examples was a "reinterpretation"

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[6] Interview #1. Respondent born in 1978, male. Places of Childhood: Lviv, Lviv reg.; Ukraine. (Interview from 19.05.2007, in the author's property).

[7] Interview # 2. Respondent born in 1984, female. Places of Childhood: Gorlivka, Donetsk reg.; Lviv, Lviv reg.; Ukraine. (Interview from 15.04.2007, in the author's property).

of pioneer history in Ukraine. As an alternative to former Soviet pioneer movement, on 21 of November 1990, at the XI meeting of pioneers of Ukraine the Union of Pioneer Organizations of Ukraine (UPOU) was created. Its symbol was a rainbow and its slogan "For Motherland, Goodness and Justice". All pupils of the primary school were automatically included in this organization (but not all of them were informed about it). However, the pioneers themselves did not exist in the independent Ukraine. This name [Pioneers] was just borrowed from previous form of childhood socialization, because new name had not been invented yet. Organization introduced itself as a "modern pioneer movement" with accent on "modern" history of Pioneer movement, which was interpreted first of all as Soviet **Ukrainian** history and in which Pioneers played the important role in "rebuilding of postwar Ukraine". UPOU (SPOU), changed, exists till nowadays. The concept of "modern pioneer movement" was the basis of Federation of Children Organization of Ukraine.[8]

There are many books arguing that discursively children have been always located rather within family, which "effectively excludes them from what we might call the public sphere".[9]However, Soviet Union had proposed children different social roles from a very young age. First of all, it had been realized through official status division into October Children, Pioneers and Komsomol. Analyzing periodicals and books for children and youth as well as whole system of social institutes, created in the Soviet times, we can see that many attempts had been done to include children into the 'public sphere' as soon as possible. The whole image of childhood, created in the USSR, worked on bringing up children for the state. The occurrences of family "betrayal" in the name of communistic ideals were famous and keeping up by official ideology. The most famous was story on Soviet child-hero Pavlik Morozov, who denounced his parents as "enemies of the people",. [10]In my opinion, new Ukrainian analogues to Pioneers movement were incapable to attract children as much as Soviet version partly because of 'displacement' of children's status back into the family. Modern Ukrainian society has chosen the traditional values as a ground of national identity construction and declared the nuclear family as a fundamental base of "healthy nation". Therefore, the rhetoric was changed again and new form of pioneer movement became optional. Thus, it could not give children the feeling of having important social status.

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[8] See *Federation of Children Organization of Ukraine declaration* on <http://www.fdo.org.ua/pioneer.htm> and <http://www.tnpu.edu.ua/kurs/60/t9-SPOU.html> [acceded 5 March 2009].

[9]Wyness, Michael. *Childhood and Society. An Introduction to the Sociology of Childhood.* New York. Palgrave Macmillian., 2006. p. 96.

[10] Kelly, Catriona. *Comrade Pavlik: The Rise and Fall of a Soviet Boy Hero.* London: Granta. 2005. 324 pp.

The Outsiders

The next quotation illustrates the child's feelings that they were not getting "into the system". In the beginning of 1990s this interviewee understood, that the good behavior and help were still expected from her. At the same time the old valuesystem ceased to exist – the one, where it was clear for the child, that if you were a Pioneer, you should act as a pioneer and this was a way to gain a status and acceptance in the society.

The interviewee describes this "turn" in the following way: [switches into Russian] *"And so I read that I should help the older and younger ones, but we had neither old, nor very young people... I had a grandmother who didn't exactly seem to be someone in need of my help. Old women didn't walk across streets, didn't live anywhere nearby. Everyone could do everything on their own. I horribly envied my friend because she had an old grandmother, and she had to keep bringing her water, and I thought, oh, now she, Lenka, will be accepted into the October Children, even though she has a Barbie doll... And I fed the neighbor's cat... with cutlets"*

Neither respondent nor friend of her childhood belonged to the October Children. Both of them went to school in 1991 – exactly when the Soviet system of youth organizations collapsed and the October Children stopped to exist.

It is interesting, that respondent remembered Barbie doll – one of the striking examples of "capitalism" as it was introduced to children. Barbie dolls were available in Ukraine from the beginning of 1990s. However they were owned in fact only by the "resource children" (as one of the respondents calls them) – children who had a sort of connection with the "abroad" through their parents or relatives. The relation with "foreign" only increased the value of a toy converting it into status attribute.

In the beginning of 1990s Barbie advertisements appeared on TV. It was a real shock for children. Toys made in the USSR were either extremely primitive and clumsy or absent at all. Therefore, Barbie dolls (as well as transformers, cars and different dolls' accessories) became popular and desired very quickly. At the same time, it puzzled children. They felt confusion and bifurcation. Respondent, for instance, does not know whether there is still a reason for heroic deeds and making the efforts to "refuse the Barbie" (for benefit of becoming pioneer). She is perplexed by making such a decision, especially because already then the "capitalism" seemed to be legal.

We know, that "Love and respect towards Lenin, the Motherland (Rodina), the native land and the village are the highlights of political socialization" in the Soviet times.[11] What is more, so-called political socialization very often was substituted by moral education, which received a special treatment in the USSR. Children

[11]Zajda, Joseph I. *Education in USSR*. Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1980. p. 59.

were not politically educated; they did not usually know the administrative state organization, the rights and authorities of legislative power etc. They were just simply taught what they should do to be good children in this state.

In my opinion, exactly the **moral** educational principle did not disappear together with the Soviet political socialization strategy. Furthermore, it did become quite important feature of children's upbringing in Ukrainian state.

"Ideology... had no influence on me at all, I mean it! I remember of all that Soviet stuff – well, you know, they had that very sharpened sense of morality... So these sorts of moral things I do remember, but as for... You see, we didn't become October Children... of course, we didn't become pioneers... So that somehow went past... When you look at it, in 1990 we went to school, and it was Perestroika already..."»[12]

Thus, children found out the way to be included to the society again and according to my findings it was quite similar to previous. When the Soviet political ideology has already lost its importance, children were still strictly taught about their moral duties, such as patriotism, readiness to protect the Motherland and unconditional love to the national, now – no more Soviet but Ukrainian culture. The quotation is a good example of time, of how the Soviet context/reference frame for moral attitudes has been already decomposed or lost its credibility, but their moral value was still current.

The Language Switch

One of the most important and radical changes in that time was the official change of language. This change was so important to a child, because its socialization occurs mainly through the language. Let me refer to a quotation:

"...In the first year I was in a Russian class. Me, from a Ukrainian family, couldn't get into a Ukrainian class because all Ukrainian classes were already full. It was more of a Russian-dominated school – Russian language, Russian literature, Russian means career..."[13]

Respondent, born in 1981, went to school in 1988, when he was 7 years old. As he remembers, Russian still meant career in that time Ukraine. Until the end of its existence, Soviet system was nourishing the centralized Russian-speaking culture, in the framework of which any career seemed to be easier and much more possible. However, just three yeas later the situation has changed radically. The same respondent continues:

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[12] Interview # 3. Respondent born in 1984, female. Places of Childhood: Nadvirna, Ivano-Frankivsk reg.; Ukraine

[13]Interview # 4. Respondent born in 1981, male. Places of Childhood: Zdolbuniv, Rivne reg.; Chernigiv reg.; Lviv, Lviv reg.; Ukraine (Interview from 27.04.2007, in the author's property).

"I went to the class where teaching was in Russian... From that moment, I started to socialize as a Russian... My second mother tongue is Russian; I communicated and thought in Russian, my friends were Russians. Already in the first class there was a major conflict. The events of 1987-88 were projected on us, children (this is how I reflect it today). "Who are we" - was the question often asked. Those Russians are such and such, and we are different, we have to be separate. Independence... Children must have overheard these conversations and they had the word "moskal" [derogatory Ukrainian word for "Russian person"] *in their vocabulary. At that time they were able to call class with teaching in Russian "moskals". We heard it from them then.* Later interviewee tells about the fight of children with different self-identification: "*Everyone in the class - head for the showdown, that is Ukrainian part of the class waged war against Russian part...*"

Children were divided into the groups. Undoubtedly, the origin and language were crucial criteria of the division. Consequently, the self-identification as an Ukrainian became a partial compensation for the loss of prestigious status of Pioneer or Komsomolets, through which children were included into the "adult life" before. The tuned mechanism of Soviet times was already broken while new one did not come into existence yet. At the same time, the first thing they were proposed was a patriotism and service to (the new for them) Motherland. Whereas children were confused, being Ukrainians seemed the only one way to them to be "legal".

The next important feature is the language of the memories in question. These recollections are told in a specific language. Interviewees intermingle Russian and Ukrainian words (so called "surzhyk" – mixed elements of two or more languages, "substandard" language; common term of traditional Ukrainian linguistic for mixed Ukrainian and Russian). Mostly respondents switched to Russian in the moments when they were describing realities of their childhood or used Russian words as terms for certain specific phenomena, things or events. Interesting though that sometimes interviewees used perfect flawless Ukrainian, which was especially cultivated in the 1990s when it was considered as a matter of honor not to use Russian words. In general, however, none of the interviewees used standard codified Ukrainian language when speaking about his or her childhood, though all of them declared themselves to be Ukrainian-speaking.

Monuments dismantling and children folklore

The wish to be switched over from one regime to another with the same speed, as Ukrainian Constitution was prepared (in one night) predominated in the part of society that wanted Ukraine to be independent form USSR at that time. Doing this, new political elite presupposed that all Soviet should disappear from *independent* Ukraine. For erasing previous culture canon, new Ukrainian establishment referred to quite mythical, patriotic pre-modern view of Ukrainian history. Conse-

quently, they referred to folklore, archaic culture and old history of Kievan Russ and Cossack period.

New canon was partially supplemented by things from Soviet heritage, for instance by patriotic poetry in the name of (Soviet Ukrainian) Motherland. Later, topos of Motherland will transfer into separate discourse, however this is a topic for separate research. The process of cultural nationalization occurred in different way in the different regions of Ukraine. For example, in its western region the symbolic of radical opposition to Soviet system (Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN), Ukrainian Insurgent Army (Ukrainska Povstanska Armiya; UPA)) became popular. Years from 1989 until 1990 in the Western Ukraine were described in children's memories in this way:

The beginning of 1990s in Ukraine is influenced not only by economic crisis, but also by revival of nationalism, patriotism and traditional culture. This mix of instability, economical difficulties and fascination with liberalism and nationalism simultaneously confused and puzzled adults and children).

Children remembered many things as something strange and incomprehensible – something that was not explained to them. Some other things they saw as very attractive. They were very impressed by monument dismantling, demonstrations, meetings etc. This all was very spectacular and children love spectacles.

"... I remember all those manifestations very clearly, all those demonstrations - not those on the 1st of May, those, which began when Independence started... my aunt would go to all of them – Unification of Ukraine, Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists, Living Chain and so on. We had Lenin removed in our place too! And we were the whole day in the hot sun, waiting till they would remove that Lenin... then we could not stand it anymore and went home and Lenin was removed. And everyone was so disappointed that we did not see how Lenin was removed. Then there were different legends, like, about how was his hand removed, and it was very important among the children – the topic how was Lenin removed..."[14]

I suppose that children would have come to see any monument dismantling. Nevertheless, till now the only one destroyed monuments they have ever seen were the monuments of communist leaders.

It is remarkable, that at the same time, when children were proposed new state, new ideology and new status – inside of family as the main social institution, patriots, Motherland defenders, they continue to take laugh about previous state

Here I should explain that there is a big amount of studies done on children's mythology and folklore in the Soviet times. Throughout all my work the same sym-

[14]Interview #3. Respondent born in 1984, female. Places of Childhood: Nadvirna, Ivano-Frankivsk reg.; Ukraine. (Interview from 07.05.2007, in the author's property).

bolic images were present in children's stories and jokes. Remarkably, the main image of them was Lenin or his younger hypostasis – Volodya Ulyanov. Beside these images there were also the images of the Unknown Warrior, cosmonaut Yuriy Gagarin and other images representative for social realistic culture ascultivated in the Soviet Union.[15]

There is very little distance between ideology and mythology for children. Idealized images of political leaders, mythologized characters of Soviet heroes and their almost mythological antipodes from the land called in the media "America" or just "Capitalism"[16] were understood by children in the similar way as they understand the fairy tales. Hyperbolized features of personalities and extremely "positive" way of representation of Soviet ideologists' images through the decades cast to this way of perception.[17] Making the storytelling personages from the real persons, children can distance themselves from them, laugh at them.[18]

"Whites" and "reds" (Bolsheviks), Vasiliy Chapaev (Russian soldier and Red Army commander during the Russian Civil War.), V. Lenin, J. Stalin (among others as Cinderella or gnome) were extremely popular in children's jokes, scary and funny stories, counting-out rhymes etc.

On the one hand, children were laughing at idealized images, on the other - comunist leader Lenin was considered to be omnipotent in their eyes. However, he was omnipotent rather as a fairytale hero, which highlights the totemic value of his or (their) image(s), but at the same way would leave us rather a comic emotions.

From the interviews it is clear that the image of Lenin had been popular in the children folklore even until the middle of 1990s. Lenin appeared in funny stories and anecdotes about the past epoch, to which children felt to have some connection. What is more the spirit (*sic*) of Lenin appeared in a very popular children's game of calling spirits.

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[15]These aspects were good explore in the huge number of researchers. See at least, Kelly, Catriona. *Children's world. Growing up in Russia 1890-1991*. Yale University Press, 2007. 714 pp. *Соцреалистический канон* / Ред. Ханс Гюнтер, Євгений Добренко. Санкт-Петербург: Академический проект, 2000. 1036 pp. [Social Realistic Canon. Ed. By Hans Gunter, Eugeny Dobrenko. St. Pitsburg, 2000. 1036. pp.]
Штейнер, Евгений. Искусство советской детской книги 1920 годов. Авангард и построение нового человека. – Москва: Новое литературное обозрение, 2002. – 251 с. [Shtejner Eugeny. Art of Soviet Children's Book of 1920s. Avant-garde and New Man Creation. Moscow, NLO, 2002. 215 pp.].
[16]Yakovlyeva, Viktoriya. *Remembrance about Childhood in Ukraine*. 1981-1991. MA Thesis, Ivan Franko National University of Lviv, Ukraine, 2007. – 105 pp.
[17] Wolfenstein, Martha. *Children's humor*. – London: Indiana University Press, 1978.
[18]Wolfenstein, Martha. *Children's humor*. – London: Indiana University Press, 1978. p. 162.

*"And as a rule we summoned Lenin at my place, because my parents were Party members and we had Lenin oeuvre, and you had to summon Lenin using one of his books... We used to put a saucer on the book and say: "Granddaddy Lenin, come to us!" Then saucer would rattle which meant that Granddaddy Lenin came... And then we would ask him questions, but only about the past, because he knew nothing about the future..."*_[19]

Children would mock *Vozhd* and they would be allowed to do that, however new cult objects would be introduced to them, which were to be treated seriously and with respect.

Conclusion

Opposing "Soviet" and "Ukrainian" as two separate realities seems to be inherent to the contemporary Ukrainian culture. Everything "Soviet", that is to say, all that is situated between new "Ukrainian" and "Pre-Soviet", found itself in paradoxical yet interesting situation.

On the one hand, there exists a sort of nostalgia - somewhat idealized and simplified retrospective of Soviet times combined with the humorous reflection. This concerns especially Soviet childhood and seems to be natural because of specific nature of childhood itself, as this period of human life is closely related to memory, it is very controversial and open for sentiments or speculations.[20] Nostalgic representation of Soviet life is mainly traced in private conversations and memories. Since recently nostalgic representation of some elements of Soviet epoch have been increasingly present in mass culture and literature. However, this phenomenon remains rather marginal, because renunciation and opposition to the Soviet past are more pronounced in the Ukrainian society.

On the other hand, in contemporary debates the essence of Ukrainian identity is usually derived from pre-modern history. Ukrainian Soviet Socialistic Republic is somehow absent form the real discussion, although it is the nearest past and something which really is in the collective memory of the Ukrainians.

Meanwhile, collective identity of Ukrainians is being formed as if completely detached from "Soviet"; it is the identity of "victims of the regime". This split caused my interest in the childhood of the last decade of USSR existence.

Ukrainian society chose negation as a mean to fight everything Soviet. The main criteria for everything and everyone included in the new hastily prepared canon was opposition to Soviet power. It seems that the more negatively event or person was perceived by the authorities in the USSR, the more heroic and

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[19] Interview # 2. Respondent born in 1984, female. Places of Childhood: Gorlivka, Donetsk reg.; Lviv, Lviv reg.; Ukraine. (Interview from 15.04.2007, in the author's property)

[20] Passerini, Luisa. Memories between silence and oblivion,// *Contested Pasts: The Politics of Memory*, ed. by Katharine Hodgkin, Susannah Radstone. New York, 2003. pp. 238 – 252.

worthy it became in the new canon. In this process often pre-Soviet Russian history, as well as Russian language and culture were closely linked to Soviet history and thus negated as well. Russian language and literature disappeared almost entirely from the school curricula. The same logic directed the renaming of the streets, removal and inauguration of the monuments.

In Ukraine, especially in the Western and some Central parts, the fast "wiping out" of symbolic traces of Soviet existence occurred. Communist monuments were dismantled, streets were renamed, new schoolbooks in Ukrainian were printed, and periodicals for youth and children were reformatted.

In view of all these rapid changes childhood period from before 1991 was being quickly "cast into oblivion". Not only it became "the past" as every childhood does, but it was also additionally negated because of the 1989-1991 developments in Ukraine. Other things rapidly started to be prestigious – participation in Plast (Ukrainian Scout organization, banned in USSR but revived in the late 1980s), which became very popular in the Western Ukraine, or stories about resistance to Soviet system and non-inclusion in its educational endeavors (not participating in Pioneer camps or hobby groups in "Pioneer Palaces"; the latter, by the way, were rapidly transformed in the Centers or Palaces for Youth and Pupils, left to decline or privatized). Something that was prestigious previously ceased to be so – grandparents, who fought in the World War II remained part of family history but were not heroes anymore.

Another interesting change occurred. In the Soviet times family was in the background – individual was transformed into human being in the public space: as a member of Komsomol or Pioneer Organization. Parents were "vestiges of the past" together with accompanying sentiments. After 1991 more and more attention is being directed to the family. Loyalty to your family, friends became normative.

Nevertheless, interviewees describe the childhood, spent in the USSR, with the great pleasure. They declared that time to be important for them and influencing their identity.

I would argue that these conclusions can be applied to the wider group of interviewees' peers within Ukraine. In most of the childhood recollections Soviet Ukraine is perceived sentimentally. This is nostalgia, which has nothing or very little to do with reality of those times. It tells us more about the present situation in Ukraine than about its past.

I read it also as an attempt to legalize a part of Soviet experiences in the Ukrainian national discourse, which still fights everything Soviet and rejects it. These accounts are producing alternatives to "perfect" images of Ukrainian

child, whose identity was being formed as if completely detached from "Soviet". What they tell us, is not that Soviet childhood was ideal, but that what followed was not any better or even any different.

Sources (interviews):

Interview #1. Respondent born in 1978, male. Places of Childhood: Lviv, Lviv reg.; Ukraine. (Interview from 19.05.2007, in the author's property)

Interview # 2. Respondent born in 1984, female. Places of Childhood: Gorlivka, Donetsk reg.; Lviv, Lviv reg.; Ukraine. (Interview from 15.04.2007, in the author's property)

Interview #3. Respondent born in 1984, female. Places of Childhood: Nadvirna, Ivano-Frankivsk reg.; Ukraine. (Interview from 07.05.2007, in the author's property)

Interview #4. Respondent born in 1981, male. Places of Childhood: Zdolbuniv, Rivne reg.; Chernigiv reg.; Lviv, Lviv reg.; Ukraine (Interview from 27.04.2007, in the author's property)

Interview #5. Respondent born in 1981, male. Places of Childhood: Lviv, Lviv reg.; Ukraine. (Interview from 19.05.2007, in the author's property)

Interview #6. Respondent born in 1983, male. Places of Childhood: Zolochiv, Lviv reg.; Ukraine. (Interview from 07.05.2007, in the author's property)

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