

The Role of Soviet Identity in the Relationship of Multiculturalism and Boundaries Permeability for Russians in Armenia

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The article considers whether support for multicultural ideology by the ethnic majority leads to a more inclusive sociocultural context for ethno-cultural minorities. We investigate the role of common superordinate identity in these relations on the example of Soviet identity in Armenia. A socio-psychological survey was conducted among 213 representatives of the ethnic majority of Armenia using the scale of multicultural ideology of J.W. Berry (2020), the scale of Soviet identity by K. Velkova (2020) and the scale of the permeability of social boundaries as adapted by M.R. Ramos et al. (2016). The results show that support for multicultural ideology by Armenians is positively associated with the permeability of social boundaries for Russians only if the Soviet identity is highly important for Armenians. To conclude, recategorization is influential for building inclusive sociocultural context and harmonizing intercultural relations.

Keywords: multicultural ideology, social boundaries permeability, inclusiveness context, superordinate identity, soviet identity, Armenia

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Роль советской идентичности во взаимосвязи мультикультурализма и проницаемости социальных границ для русских в Армении

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В статье рассматривается поддержка идеологии мультикультурализма этническим большинством как фактор инклюзивности контекста для этнокультурных меньшинств. Исследуется роль общей надэтнической идентичности в данных отношениях на примере советской идентичности в Армении. Социально-психологический опрос был проведен среди 213 представителей этнического большинства Армении при помощи переведенных на армянский язык шкалы мультикультурной идеологии Д.У. Берри (2020), шкалы советской идентичности К. Велковой (2020) и шкалы проницаемости социальных границ в адаптации М.Р. Рамоса и соавторов (2016). Было обнаружено, что поддержка идеологии мультикультурализма армянами позитивно связана с проницаемостью социальных границ для русских только при условии высокой выраженности у армян советской идентичности. Делается вывод о важности рекатегоризации для выстраивания наиболее инклюзивного контекста и гармонизации межкультурных отношений.

Ключевые слова: мультикультурная идеология, проницаемость социальных границ, инклюзивность контекста, надэтническая идентичность, советская идентичность, Армения.

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Introduction

At present, most countries are, to some extent, culturally diverse. In order to determine the effects of cultural diversity in a given country, it is necessary to consider how favourable intercultural relations and mutual acculturation are. The success of mutual acculturation is influenced not only by the behaviour of migrants or ethnocultural minorities, but also, to a large extent, by the attitudes of the majority [9], as well as by the sociocultural context [4]. Societies with a more inclusive sociocultural context seek to integrate migrants and ethnocultural minorities, and are able to benefit effectively from cultural diversity. An exclusive context that excludes migrants and ethnic and cultural minorities from society is more likely to contribute to the emergence and escalation of conflicts and related social, economic and political problems [21].

The focus of this study is intergroup relations, in which historically, thanks to the collapse of the Soviet

Union, the status of groups inhabiting a single territory has changed [1]. In particular, the inclusiveness of the socio-cultural context of Armenia for Russians living in this country is studied. Based on the common Soviet past, a special role in the relationship between multiculturalism and the permeability of social borders for Russians in Armenia in this work is assigned to Soviet identity.

**The permeability of social boundaries
as an indicator of the inclusiveness
of a culturally diverse society**

The psychology of acculturation mainly considers the perceived sociocultural context through meta-perceptions of migrants and minorities [8], reflecting their perceptions of the extent to which the host society supports their integration. Given the reciprocity of the acculturation process, it is necessary to consider the

socio-cultural context also from the position of the host majority. From the point of view of the host society, one of the most important characteristics of the inclusiveness of the context is the perceived permeability of social boundaries for migrants and members of ethnic and cultural minorities.

The permeability of social boundaries—the perceived possibility of representatives of a certain group to move from one social group to another [36]—is the most important determinant of intergroup attitudes and behavior, reflecting not only the objective socio-structural characteristics of intergroup relations, but also subjective attitudes in relation to certain groups [16], and the desirability of their inclusion in the life of society with which a person associates themselves. Studies show that more permeable social boundaries are associated with a high frequency of contacts, which helps overcome stereotypes, reduce anxiety and improve intergroup relationships [20]; they contribute to the assimilation and integration of migrants and ethnocultural minorities [14]. Less permeable social boundaries, on the contrary, lead to the formation of a negative image of representatives of the outgroup [13] and are associated with the exclusion of ethnocultural minorities from society [39].

However, a number of additional factors need to be taken into account when considering the permeability of social boundaries as an indicator of the inclusiveness of the context. First, since the perceived permeability of boundaries in intercultural relations from the position of the majority reflects attitudes to the permissibility of cultural diversity [29], the formation of attitudes to more permeable social boundaries will be facilitated by assessing cultural diversity as a resource useful to society, that is, supporting multicultural ideology.

Secondly, the status of a particular ethnocultural group in a given country is important. The permeability of social boundaries for representatives of high-status groups contributes to the improvement of intergroup relations and the leveling of negative attitudes on the part of the receiving society [13], and has the opposite effect if social boundaries are considered by the receiving majority as permeable to representatives of low-status groups [16].

The ideology of multiculturalism and its impact on the permeability of social boundaries

Intergroup ideologies reflect social norms of behavior and ways of solving problems in culturally diverse societies [28]. Adherents of multiculturalism believe that people should strive to understand and accept ethnic differences as a means of maintaining justice,

including improving economic and social conditions for ethnic minorities, and intergroup harmony [31].

Studies show that the understanding and acceptance of ethnic group differences leads to improved attitudes towards outgroups compared to an approach ignoring differences between groups [30]. Levin and colleagues [19] found using the example of the US that if multiculturalism is perceived as the norm in society, this reduces the attitudes of representatives of the majority to social dominance and bias against ethnic minorities.

Thus, multiculturalism through the recognition and positive assessment of cultural diversity creates a favourable climate for reducing social and economic differences between majority and minority groups [26]. In this regard, we assume that multiculturalism will contribute to the formation of an inclusive socio-cultural context, and, in particular, the perceived permeability of social boundaries. The permeability of boundaries will be truly inclusive when groups are perceived as homogeneous in one of the social characteristics [39]. Therefore, in this work, we address the issues of the influence of a supra-ethnic identity, which has the potential to unite representatives of different groups into one community.

Inclusive role of supra-ethnic identity: Soviet identity

Social identity is defined as part of the self-concept of an individual, which is related to their membership in a social group, and includes the value and emotional significance of this membership recognized by the individual [37]. In the structure of the social identity of an individual, there may be an identification with an ethnic group (ethnic identity), with citizens of a certain country (national identity), with residents of a certain territory (regional identity), etc. The existence of higher order groups ensures the existence of such composite identities as supra-ethnic/supra-national identity, uniting representatives of different ethnic groups and citizens of different countries [15].

Studies demonstrate the positive role of supra-ethnic and supra-national identity in harmonizing inter-ethnic relations. The identification of EU citizens with Europe is positively linked to a more inclusive attitude towards immigration; this applies to migrants from other EU countries as well as migrants from non-European countries [12]. The positive relationship of British identity with bias against the French was revealed, while the supra-national (European) identity in the British is negatively associated with bias [33].

A special case of supra-ethnic and supra-national identity is Soviet identity. At present, it represents

identification with the values and ideals of the former Soviet Union and unites all national groups of the former USSR [38]. Soviet identity still persists 30 years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, despite the active process of identity transformation that accompanied the change of system. In particular, this applies to Armenia, whose Soviet past contributed to the modernization of society, laid the foundations for the formation of a modern nation and Armenian identity and is perceived, for the most part, positively [34].

Sociocultural context of Armenia and hypotheses of this study

The sociocultural context of Armenia bears the features of the common past of all republics of the former USSR, however, Armenia is characterized by some specific features: the almost mono-ethnic composition of the population and dynamic migration processes—most ethnic Armenians live outside the territory of Armenia. Ethnic minorities account for less than 2 percent of Armenia's population. Russians constitute the second largest ethnic minority (0.4% of the total population) [7]. In the early post-Soviet period, it was believed that there was no problem of Russian adaptation in Armenia [3], but over the past fifteen years the number of Russians in Armenia has decreased due to the deterioration of living conditions and the adoption in 1993 of a law on language and complications in intercultural relations [6]. The current situation in Armenia is characterized by the gradual restoration of ties with Russia, the growing attractiveness of Russia as a country for moving for the Russian minority and for Armenians, and the awareness of the importance of the Russian language for interethnic communication. The situation of the “Soviet-Slavic” minorities in Armenia is more favourable than that of other ethnic and cultural minorities in Armenia and reflects their special status in the Soviet Union [32].

In summary, this study is based on the following assumptions:

1) the inclusiveness of the sociocultural context contributes to the prosperity of society and the harmonization of intercultural relations;

2) the support of multicultural ideology and the consideration of cultural diversity as a resource for solving problems of society promotes the inclusion of ethnocultural minorities;

3) the permeability of social boundaries by the receiving population is an important indicator of the inclusiveness of the context, provided the high status of ethnic and cultural minority groups and the presence of unifying social characteristics;

4) Russians in Armenia are a high-status group, and Soviet identity, appealing to the common past, makes majority and minority groups more homogeneous and has unifying potential.

Based on these assumptions, we hypothesize the following:

H1: The orientation towards multicultural ideology among Armenians is positively associated with the permeability of the social boundaries of Armenian society to Russians.

H2: Soviet identity reinforces the link between the orientation towards multicultural ideology among Armenians and the permeability of the social boundaries of Armenian society to Russians.

Sample

After excluding 68 questionnaires due to completion errors, the final sample of the study included 213 respondents, representatives of the ethnic majority of Armenia (average age $M = 24.82$ years, $\sigma = 11.33$). The sample was heterogeneous, but males (74.2%), Christians of the Armenian Apostolic Church (57.75%) and people with higher education (55.39%) were more represented.

Instruments

All questionnaires were translated into Armenian in accordance with the forward and backward translation procedure by the staff of the Centre for Sociocultural Research, HSE University (Russia) and the Russian-Armenian University (Armenia).

The support of multicultural ideology was operationalized according to Berry [10] and measured using a short version of the revised Multicultural Ideology Scale. The respondents were asked to rate the degree of agreement with eight statements describing how different ethnic groups should live in a multicultural society on a 5-point scale. Example of a statement was “It is right to help ethnic groups preserve their cultural heritages in Armenia.” The level of internal consistency of the scale was $\alpha = 0.81$.

Soviet identity was measured using a 5-point scale of 4 questions, designed to assess how much the respondent feels like a Soviet person [2]. An example of a question was “I feel a part of Soviet culture.” The level of internal consistency of the scale was $\alpha = 0.94$.

The permeability of social boundaries of Armenian society for Russians was assessed using the scale of the permeability of social boundaries [23] adapted by Ramos et al. [27]. The respondents had to choose one of five answer options (from 1 – very difficult to 5 – very easy)

to complete 4 statements which described how difficult it was for a Russian person to become a part of Armenian society. An example of the statement was “If a Russian person wanted to participate in social activities together with the Armenians, it would be ... for them to do so”. The level of internal consistency of the scale was $\alpha = 0.82$.

Procedure

The study had a cross-sectional single-sample design and was implemented in the form of a socio-psychological survey on the 1ka.si Internet platform. Completing the questionnaire began with an informed consent form. Further, a block of questions followed to assess the Soviet identity, multicultural ideology, and the permeability of social boundaries for Russians. Finally, respondents answered questions about their socio-demographic characteristics. The questionnaire was filled out individually, without time limits or control by the researcher. The average time required to fill out the questionnaire was 10 minutes.

Results

Descriptive statistics and correlations between variables are in Table 1. Since all the variables were assessed on a 5-point scale, we can make a conclusion about the relatively high degree of support for a multicultural ideology among the Armenians, and a relatively low importance of Soviet identity for Armenians. Males

are more oriented towards multicultural ideology than females: and the Soviet identity is more pronounced in older people.

The hypotheses testing about the relationship between multicultural ideology and the permeability of social boundaries for Russians (hypothesis 1), and the role of Soviet identity in their relationship (hypothesis 2) was carried out using hierarchical regression analysis with an assessment of moderation effects in the SPSS 22.0, PROCESS MACRO program module. The results (Table 2) demonstrated the absence of a significant relationship between the support of a multicultural ideology among Armenians and the permeability of social boundaries of the Armenian society for Russians. The interaction of Soviet identity and multicultural ideology was also positively associated with the permeability of social boundaries, which confirmed the moderating role of Soviet identity.

The analysis of conditional (moderation) effects (Fig. 1) showed that when the Soviet identity was relatively low ($SI = 1.00$), multicultural ideology was related to the permeability of social boundaries of Armenian society for Russians negatively, but insignificantly ($\beta = -0.08, p = 0.44$). When Soviet identity ($SI = 2.00$) was moderately pronounced, multicultural ideology was positively, but insignificantly, related to permeability of social boundaries of Armenian society for Russians ($\beta = 0.08, p = 0.35$). Finally, when Soviet identity was relatively high ($SI = 3.50$), multicultural ideology was positively and significantly related to the permeability of social boundaries of Armenian society for Russians ($\beta = 0.30, p < 0.01$).

Table 1

Descriptive statistics and correlations between variables

Variable	M (σ)	SI	PSB	age	gender
MI	4,15 (0,62)	0,12	0,10	0,09	-0,29**
SI	2,21 (1,17)	-	0,04	0,51**	0,01
PSB	3,59 (0,66)	-	-	0,05	-0,04
age	24,82 (11,33)	-	-	-	0,01

Note: * – $p < 0.05$, ** – $p < 0.01$; M – mean, σ – standard deviation, MI – multicultural ideology, SI – Soviet identity, PSB – permeability of the social boundaries of Armenian society for Russians; when coding gender, the following designations were used: 1 – men, 2 – women.

Table 2

Regression analysis of the relationship between Multicultural Ideology, Soviet identity and the Permeability of Social Boundaries for Russians

Variable / Model	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Multicultural ideology (β)	0,10	0,09	0,1
Soviet Identity (β)	-	0,03	0,02
Interaction of the Soviet identity and Multicultural Ideology (β)	-	-	0,15*
R ²	0,01	0,01	0,04
F	1,98	1,06	2,70*

Note: * – $p < 0.05$

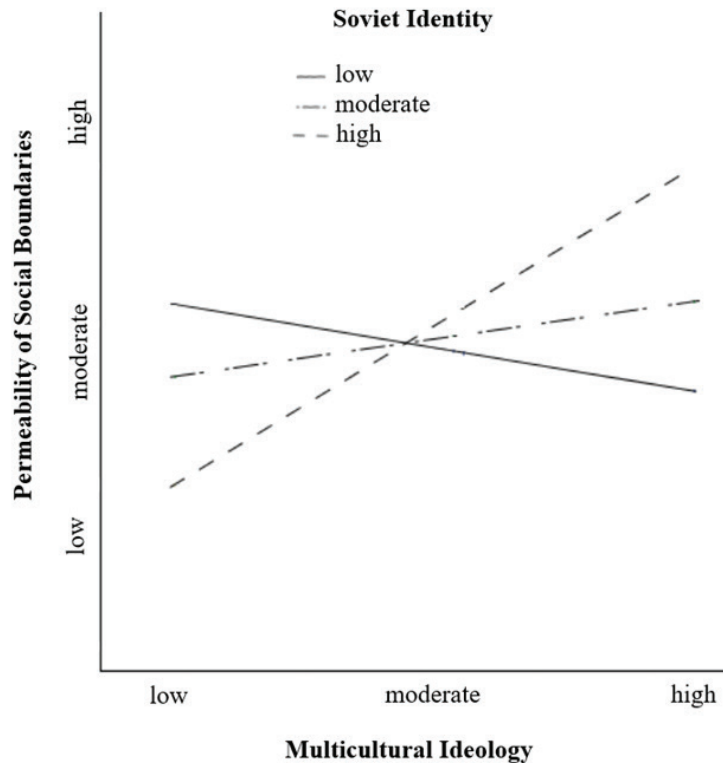


Fig. 1. Conditional (moderation) effects of Multicultural ideology on Permeability of the Social Boundaries of Armenian society for Russians depending on the level of Soviet Identity

Discussion

According to the results of the regression analysis, there is no relationship between the orientation towards multicultural ideology among Armenians and the permeability of the social boundaries of Armenian society for Russians if the level of Soviet identity is not taken into account. This conclusion contradicts the first hypothesis. This may be due to the fact that in the conditions of high perceived threat, the permeability of social boundaries can lead to increased competition and negative attitudes towards the outgroup [24]. Armenia is experiencing difficulties in institutional rehabilitation and economic development [20], which may increase the perceived threat and impede inclusion. Since mostly young men, i.e. representatives of the economically active population, took part in the study, the question of the impact of the perceived threat is especially relevant.

Taking into account the moderating role of Soviet identity, it was found that orientation towards multicultural ideology contributes to the permeability of social boundaries among Armenians with a high level of Soviet identity. This confirms the second hypothesis of the study. Unlike previous studies that found that the interaction of multiculturalism and ethnic identity leads to inequality between groups and discrimination [19], current study shows that supra-

ethnic identity, interacting with multiculturalism, on the contrary, promotes inclusion. This result on the role of Soviet identity appealing to general social categories expands the prospects for building a favorable socio-cultural context. The conclusion is consistent with the general group identity model which states that the recategorization of members of individual subgroups within the same identity improves intergroup relations [13].

The results obtained are characterized by novelty and show the importance of the recategorization processes for the favorability of intercultural relations. However, it is necessary to acknowledge a number of limitations concerning the model and methodology of this study. The first limitation concerns a relatively narrow understanding of the inclusiveness of the context. Adding new indicators to the internal content of the term “inclusiveness of context” in future studies, such as, acculturation expectations, perceived discrimination, tolerance, will help create more comprehensive vision of the situation.

The second limitation is related to the consideration of multicultural ideology only from the standpoint of prescriptive or “ideal” multiculturalism, that is, how different ethno-cultural groups should live in society [8]. However, this may not coincide with how a multicultural society actually functions: “ideal”

and “real” multiculturalism have different effects on representatives of ethnic majorities and minorities[4]. Therefore, it seems promising to consider both types of multiculturalism as factors of inclusiveness of the socio-cultural context in further research.

In this paper we have paid attention to only one type of identity that potentially contributes to recategorization — Soviet identity. Attitudes to the Soviet past differ among three generations of Armenians [15]; it can be assumed that the level of Soviet identity also will be different. Therefore, it is also necessary to consider other types of supra-ethnic identity that can emphasize the unity of the host society with ethnic minority groups among the younger generation of Armenians, for example, civic or European identity.

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Conclusion

The main conclusion of the study is that in Armenia, the support for multicultural ideology among the host majority population contributes to the permeability of social boundaries for the Russian minority only if the Armenians have a high degree of Soviet identity. It means that the attitudes towards universal equality and support for cultural diversity in society do not always contribute to the inclusion of representatives of a particular ethnic group. Categorization and actualization of the common relatively positive past play an important role in this process. Many factors that have the potential to influence the inclusiveness of the context are yet to be explored.

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