

Images of the 'Other' with 'Alien' Ethnicity in the Conscience of Russian Population Living in Border Regions

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ABSTRACT

In the age of dense international relations, heightened by intensive migration flows and local ethnic identity strengthening, the study of social representations of ethnic 'others' in public consciousness permit to fulfill the evaluation of the current interethnic situation in the country, explore the latent unconscious groundings for ethnic roles differentiation. As was found in the psychosemantic research in four border regions of Russia, the images of the 'Other' are constructed and reshaped through interrelations between different social roles performed by a representative of the other nationality. The core of these generalized images relies on the evaluation of the potential risk and the threat to national security, ethnic conflicts and tension, social inequality, cultural and intellectual level. The self-perception of Russian citizens is contradictory, assembling paternalistic view on other nationality, national uniqueness and superiority with a low self-esteem. Regional mentalities differ from general representations and reflect peculiarities of social perception of their possessors.

KEYWORDS

Image of the 'other', social representation, repertory grid, ethnicity, migrants

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Introduction

Interethnic relations in contemporary multi-polar world are far from being serene and torn by multiple contrarities in the face of geopolitical challenges. In today's Russia, the activation of ethnic differentiation is one of the most striking features of social and political processes as well, strongly associated with domestic economy and foreign policy problems. Questions about national dignity, civic self-consciousness and peaceful interethnic relations within and outside the country form the public and state agenda (Omelchenko et al., 2015). The problem of interethnic perception acquires particular acuteness in border regions, located at the edge of geographical, political, economic, ethnocultural and confessional frontiers, where social representations about ethnic 'others' are more contrast and contentious. The peculiar traits of ethnic self-determination in this area appears as a deferred feedback on the soviet national policy, which had favored the creation of ethnocratic regimes on the territory of the country and until now in some Russian regions, ethnicity serves for a latent ground for unequal access to power and administrative resources (Tishkov & Kirsiev,

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2007). The polyethnic composition of population in border regions, historic reasons apart, is also due to international migration processes, among which the most important is labor (including illegal forms) migration from China and CIS countries, causing confrontation between ethnic groups (Maximova, Avdeeva & Maximov, 2013). Therefore, the border territory possesses apparent risks of social and political instability for high latent ethnic conflictogenity.

The image of the ethnic 'Other' represents a generalized frame for social interactions, following which the individuals shape their behavior and expectations from people of other nationalities, compare and evaluate its representatives. Our research draws on a range of findings in the field of social representations (Arruda, 2015; Sammut, 2015), theory of personal constructs (Kelly, 1955), experimental psychosemantics (Petrenko, 2005). Due to the importance of the problem of interethnic relations, the data of this study will be useful in the prediction and prevention of interethnic conflicts.

Literature Review

A large proportion of social interaction occurs through the representation of the ethnic "others" that allows to build up expectations on the behavior of people of other nationalities, and plan the behavior according to these expectations. In recent years, many seminal works consonant with our research explored this subject directly or through related categories. Thus, several studies based on personal trait theory provided cross-nationally validated data on the national character stereotypes and representations of national prototype (Hřebíčková & Graf, 2014) constituting a very important symbolic resource for defining and supporting hierarchy between groups in a society (Sibley, 2013). V. Burr, M. Giliberto & T. Butt (2014), and S. Stupar et al. (2014) had concentrated their researches on the degrees of 'distance' and 'similarity', perceived by people between their own nation and 'Others' and its impact on the corresponding attitudes. Some crucial essays were made to associate existent national stereotypes and social representations of 'Others' with actual political situation in the country to ground the need of recognizing "the diversity of the Other in the construction of the common" and support the construction of new inclusive imaginaries to prevent confrontations and conflicts of people (Lozada, 2014; Hjorth, 2016).

We follow A. Arruda (2015) in considering the social imaginary being a part of social representations. The latter is in its turn a dual and multifaceted concept, conceived as a social process of communication and discourse, through which common meanings are created, and, at the same time, as individual structures of knowledge, ensemble of thoughts and feelings, expressed verbally or behaviorally and shared with other people in a group or society (Sammut, 2015). In the literature on social representation theory (SRT) it is ubiquitously

pointed out that social representations belong not only to individual conscience but exist “across minds” and are shared in a way similar to language (Wagner et al., 1999). Social representations are seen as mobile and dynamic, existing only in the relational encounter and fulfill an important function of constructing, defending and changing (sometimes in a furious struggle) a view about reality (Howarth, 2006a). So, the image of represented object depends on subjects of representations, their *habitus* – structurally predisposed way of thinking, tastes and preferences (Bourdieu, 1990) and on the pragmatic context within which the representation acquires sense (Bauer & Gaskell, 1999).

In his the original work, S. Moscovici (1961) had described three dimensions of social representations – attitude, information and field of representation or affective, cognitive and imaginative compounds in a social representation as it was conceptualized in further works (Arruda, 2015). While the latter elements are rather evident and not contested, the former had merited a long-term discussion about its compatibility/discrepancy with social representations. The issue of this discussion is very important, as it permits or does not permit to use attitudes’ methodical repertory to explore social representations, especially social images, at empirical level. Firstly, attitudes had been thought as only individual and internal by nature states, attentions and predispositions (Augoustinos, Walker, & Donaghue, 2014). In opposition to this individualistic focus, the SRT adepts had affirmed that social representation gave a wider view to explore the interactive and dynamic relationships between social knowledge, common identities and social practices, and finally, to ‘define the experience of reality, its boundaries and significance’ (Howarth, 2006a). Further, in 90s, this tradition towards attitudes was shaken and some studies appeared to reestablish the social nature of attitudes and emphasize that attitudes originate from social life through everyday interactions with others (Augoustinos, Walker, & Donaghue, 2014).

The study uses the social constructionism as a general epistemological approach, especially within postclassical discourse about identities and images in the frame of modernity and risk society (Bourdieu, 1990). In the analysis of the role of the “Other” in the process of symbolic reconstruction of borders and group-making we have relied on the works by I. Neumann (1999), R. Brubaker (2012), and others. Exploring different images of ethnic ‘Other’, revealing the peculiarities of meanings and characteristics given to them in the public conscience, we have tried to describe and explicate existing social representations about interethnic relations in border regions of Russia on the base of three distinctions – ethnicity, social distance and social structural position. Thus, results of the study extend the modern knowledge of the bases of interethnic relations in the border regions, i.e. the areas where the problem is particularly acute. The study results allow to predict and prevent social conflicts, especially in the workplace, as labor migration is particularly widespread in the border areas.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to analyze the representation of the ethnic “Other” among the population of the border regions of Russia, aimed at better understanding and more effective prevention of social conflicts.

Research questions

The question of this study was the following:

How does the representation of the ethnic “Other” manifest itself in the phenomenon of ethnicity, social distance and social structural position?

Method

Psychosemantic approach has turned out to be the most relevant for the aims of our research for it considers the personality as the wearer of complex world-view, including representations about external and internal objects and phenomena (Petrenko, 2005).

The psychosemantic questionnaire was designed as a modification of multiple identifications method, semantic differential and repertory grid technic. Objects of evaluation (elements) differed by the ethnicity – ‘same’ or ‘alien’, social roles, level of social distance and social structural position, manifested in legal, forced/ unconstrained character of sojourn. Six elements were included in the list: ‘Nearest person of other nationality’, ‘Representative of other nationality, who was born and constantly lives in region’, ‘Refugee’, ‘Migrant worker (legal or illegal)’, ‘Representative of other nationality, who came with educational or cultural purpose (tourist)’ and reference position ‘Native citizen of Russia’.

All elements were assessed with 7-point bipolar scales, representing affective (items 1, 2, 4-7, 11-17, 19), cognitive (items 3, 10, 20, 21) and behavioural (items 8, 9, 18) components:

- | | |
|--|---|
| d1.peaceful – aggressive; | d10. discriminated – exercises fully rights and freedoms; |
| d2.strong – weak; | d11.egoistic, devoted to one's own interests and advancement – altruistic, capable of self-sacrifice; |
| d3.poor – rich; | d12.irritant, inspiring disgust – non-irritant; |
| d4.subtle, enterprising – naïve, artless; | d13.trusty – mistrustful; |
| d5.well-wishing – hostile; | d14.(not) evoking fear; |
| d6.intellectually and culturally developed – intellectually and culturally poor; | d15.(not) evoking compassion; |
| d7.close – alien; | d16.evoking superiority (humility); |
| d8.breaks the law, violates public order – observes the law, maintains public order; | d17.associated with national exceptionality – associated with national diversity; |
| d9.respects Russian national traditions and culture – destructs Russian national traditions and culture; | |

- | | |
|---|--|
| d18. stands apart, has different way of life –stands together, adopts way of life, behavior and habits;
d19. inspiring respect – inspiring enmity; | d20. represents a threat for national security, social-economic development of Russia – does not represent a threat;
d21. is (not) a source of interethnic conflicts and tension. |
|---|--|

The research was fulfilled in four border regions of Russian Federation (Altaisky krai, Omskaya oblast, Krasnoyarsky krai, Republic of Altai) (n=2400, aged 15-70 years). Primary data were analyzed by means of descriptive statistics, t-tests, one-way ANOVA and multivariate MANOVA. It allowed to analyze the reasons of such differences in perception among people from different ethnic groups.

Data, Analysis, and Results

Univariate analysis of elements has shown that main differences in descriptors rates related to social identification, social security and social inequality (Table 1).

The profile of 'Nearest person of other nationality' (friend, member of the family) was biased to the positive pole of the scale, mean values varied from 3.3 to 5.7 points. The most significant features were associated to security and peacefulness, trust and respect.

The 'Representative of other nationality, who was born and constantly lives in region' was assessed approximately to previous one, but slightly biased to the left, mean values were located between 3.0 and 5.3 points. Thus, this position was evaluated as less peaceful, inspiring trust but more subtle and evoking less pity and compassion.

The profile of 'Refugee' had very different configuration. First, all mean values were much smaller than in other profiles and varied from 2.7 to 4.8 points. Key characteristics have changed considerably and above security included pity and compassion, discrimination, poverty and alienation (mean for the descriptor 'close – alien' – 2.9).

The 'Migrant worker' had more negative emotional assessment than previous positions though its configuration was alike to the 'Refugee'. Migrant workers were perceived as more alien, less worthy of respect and trust. This role in the conscience of respondents was associated with interethnic conflicts and social tension, isolation and alienation.

The position of the 'Tourist' was the most attractive and idealized, biased as much as possible to the right, several mean values attained 6.0 points. In respondents' evaluations, the 'Tourist' was peaceable, intellectually and culturally developed, well wishing, rich, enjoying fully rights and freedoms, not representing a threat for national security. He did not evoke irritation even if he was marked as alien, not evoking pity and compassion, subtle and enterprising.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for descriptors and elements (M±SE)

<i>Descriptor / Element</i>	<i>Close friend</i>	<i>Living in my region</i>	<i>Refugee</i>	<i>Migrant worker</i>	<i>Tourist</i>	<i>Native citizen (Russian)</i>
1. peaceful - aggressive	5,7± 0,10	5,3± 0,11	4,83 ±0,12	4,38± 0,12	5,98± 0,10	5,25± 0,11
2. strong - weak	5,2± 0,10	5,0± 0,10	3,72± 0,12	4,16± 0,12	5,18± 0,10	5,18± 0,10
3. rich -poor	4,2± 0,11	4,2± 0,10	2,66 ±0,11	2,62± 0,11	4,88± 0,11	3,34± 0,10
4. subtle, enterprising - naïve, artless	3,4± 0,12	3,3± 0,11	3,80± 0,12	3,10± 0,12	3,48± 0,11	3,94± 0,12
5. well-wishing - hostile	5,5± 0,10	5,0± 0,10	4,60 ±0,11	4,23± 0,11	5,57± 0,09	5,31± 0,10
6. intellectually and culturally developed - intellectually and culturally poor	4,9± 0,12	4,7± 0,11	3,89± 0,11	2,98± 0,11	5,84± 0,08	5,08± 0,09
7. close - alien	4,6± 0,13	3,8± 0,12	2,87 ±0,12	2,09± 0,09	3,31± 0,11	5,23± 0,12
8. observes the law, maintains public order - violates public order	5,2± 0,12	4,9± 0,12	4,56 ±0,11	3,80± 0,13	5,49± 0,10	4,43± 0,12
9. respects (deconstructs) Russian national traditions and culture	4,6± 0,10	4,3± 0,10	3,87± 0,10	3,34± 0,10	4,68± 0,10	5,03± 0,10
10. exercises fully rights and freedoms - discriminated	5,1± 0,12	5,2± 0,11	3,18± 0,12	3,14± 0,12	5,32± 0,11	4,24± 0,13
11. altruistic, capable of self-sacrifice - egoistic	4,2± 0,11	3,9± 0,11	3,56± 0,11	2,95± 0,11	4,12± 0,11	4,23± 0,11
12. non-irritant - irritant, inspiring disgust	5,4± 0,12	4,8± 0,12	4,31± 0,12	3,54± 0,13	5,40± 0,11	5,54± 0,09
13. trusty - mistrustful	5,0± 0,13	4,4± 0,12	3,59± 0,12	2,77± 0,11	4,63± 0,11	5,10± 0,10
14. (not) evoking fear	5,4± 0,13	5,1± 0,12	4,62 ±0,13	4,27± 0,13	5,51± 0,11	5,35± 0,11
15. (not) evoking compassion	3,3± 0,12	3,0± 0,12	4,71± 0,12	4,10± 0,13	2,73± 0,11	3,80± 0,12
16. evoking superiority - evoking humility	4,2± 0,09	4,3± 0,08	3,79± 0,12	3,65± 0,10	4,36± 0,08	4,32± 0,09
17. associated with ethnic diversity- associated with national exceptionality	4,5± 0,11	4,4± 0,10	4,30 ±0,09	4,29± 0,09	4,48± 0,11	3,91± 0,10
18. stands together, adopts way of life, behavior and habits - stands apart, has different way of life	4,5± 0,13	4,3± 0,12	3,72± 0,12	3,24± 0,12	4,66± 0,12	4,78± 0,12
19. evoking respect (enmity)	5,2± 0,12	4,6± 0,12	4,15± 0,11	3,25± 0,11	5,07± 0,11	5,19± 0,10
20. (does not) represents a threat for the national security and social-economic development of Russia	5,7± 0,12	5,3± 0,12	4,82 ±0,12	4,04± 0,13	5,56± 0,10	5,59± 0,10



<i>Descriptor / Element</i>	<i>Close friend</i>	<i>Living in my region</i>	<i>Refugee</i>	<i>Migrant worker</i>	<i>Tourist</i>	<i>Native citizen (Russian)</i>
21. is (not) a source of interethnic conflicts and tension	5,7± 0,11	5,1± 0,13	4,68 ±0,12	3,87± 0,13	5,52± 0,11	5,30± 0,12

The 'Native citizen of Russia' was evaluated as definitely 'own', peaceable, not representing a source for interethnic conflicts nor a threat for national security, nor evoking fear, but at the same time poor and cunning, evoking pity and compassion. In contrast with other positions, this role was associated with the sense of national exceptionality and the lack of diversity (see Table 1 for more details).

At the next stage the multivariate analysis of variance was performed to reveal differences in perception of role positions among different social groups. Variables of descriptors were selected as dependent, while sex, age and region were chosen as independent factors. The variable 'age' represented the recoded factor variable with three levels – less than 30, from 31 to 49 years and 50 years and more. After that the one-way ANOVA, post-hoc and t-tests were applied to precise the nature of these differences.

Multivariate tests showed statistically significant influence of independent factors on the complex of dependent variables (Table 2). The factor of sex was insignificant for the whole complex but considerable for single variables. Gender differences emerged in evaluation of interpersonal relations, richness-poverty of regional ethnic groups. Women felt more respect for friends and relatives of other nationality, but perceived 'native citizen of Russia' less 'own' and assessed them as less poor and discriminated than men did (t-test, $p < 0.05$).

The age was a significant factor for all positions except migrant worker and native citizen. In general, assessments at middle age and seniors groups were similar and opposed to those of young people. Old generations demonstrated positive attitudes towards ethnic 'others', especially on criteria of social security and social inequality, preservation of cultural traditions. The youth generation, in contrast, felt irritation, disgust and distrust even towards representative of other ethnos, born and constantly living in the region, without speaking about those who was obliged to immigrate. Young people chose more frequently negative poles, semantically connected with conflicts, tension, threat, destruction of culture, assigning them to almost all role position.

The factor of region was the most important for roles of refugee and migrant worker. Regional specific of social roles perception consisted in different evaluation of social-economic characteristics and emotional reactions, determined by economic status of region and particularities of ethnic composition, their cultural-historical singularity. Respondents from 'rich' regions (Omskaya oblast, Krasnoyarsky krai) gave higher assessments of well-being of representatives other nationalities, born and constantly living in the region, whereas inhabitants of regions with lower standards of living (Altaysky krai and Republic of Altai) treated them as poor and deprived of rights. Similar tendency was revealed towards position 'Tourist'. In wealthier regions it was described rather moderately, whereas in poorer regions 'Tourist' was the real embodiment of welfare and prosperity, exercising plentifully his/her rights and

freedoms. The ‘Migrant worker’ possessed contradictory assessments. Respondents from Krasnoyarsky krai and Omskaya oblast felt irritation and enmity, considering migrant workers as violating the law, being culpable of interethnic conflicts and representing a threat for social-economic development of Russia. Inhabitants of Altaisky krai and Republic of Altai described them more positively, but yet as deprived of respect and socially isolated.

Regional differences in evaluation of ‘Native citizen’ were emotional and evaluative by character. For respondents of Republic of Altai (region with high rate of non-Russian population) it was characterized by exceptionally positive characteristics – law-abiding, altruism, trust and respect. Particularity of Krasnoyarsky krai was a low assessment of altruism of native people, inhabitants of Altaisky krai more frequently noted violation of public order. The combined influence of age and region, revealed for elements 2-5, indicated the different position of age groups in social structure of region, provoking significant disparities in attitudes. So, the perception of different images of ethnic ‘Other’ depended not only on individual peculiarities, but was greatly influenced by social factors and intergenerational gap, while the attitude towards native citizens was more invariant and less liable to changes.

Table 2. Multivariate MANOVA results. Multivariate tests (Pillai’s trace). Isolated influence and co-influence of factors[†]

<i>Factor</i>	<i>El 1</i>	<i>El 2</i>	<i>El 3</i>	<i>El 4</i>	<i>El 5</i>	<i>El 6</i>
Sex	1,348 ^a	0,999	1,450 ^a	,698 ^a	,940 ^a	1,237 ^a
Age	1,631*	1,712**	1,710**	1,115	1,894**	1,925**
Region	1,269	1,225	1,407*	2,160**	1,316	1,727**
Sex* Age	0,875	1,004	1,044	0,662	0,938	0,928
Sex* Region	0,865	0,874	1,133	1,140	1,125	1,100
Age* Region	1,179	1,256*	1,280*	1,411**	1,358**	1,304*

[†] El 1 - ‘Nearest person of other nationality’, El 2 - ‘Representative of other nationality, who was born and constantly lives in region’, El 3 - ‘Refugee’, El 4 - ‘Migrant worker’, El 5 - ‘Tourist’, El 6 - ‘Native citizen of Russia’.

* - p<0.05

** - p<0.01

Discussion and Conclusion

The theory of social constructivism, which we followed in our study, is particularly relevant within the scope of political and public realities (Anderson, 2006). The social image is an integral combination of archetypical, stereotype and socially constructed representations, reflected in public mass conscience and public opinion. The image is a very symbolic category by which the collective semantical treatment of the world is effectuated. From the point of view of the analysis of the structural components, the social image is made by

social roles and is related to them as a “kit” of social expectations, social position and status, attitudes and myth creation as well as the peculiarities of visual representations.

Thereby, given on the obtained results of our research, the image of the ethnic ‘Other’ in the conscience of Russian population is construed on the base of negative stereotypes, projected on the representatives of other nationalities. The contents of these stereotypes is mostly related to evaluation of potential risk and threat for national security, interethnic conflicts and tension, social inequality, low cultural and intellectual level. The influence of stereotypes is smoothed in close relations and ties and intensified in the conditions of the lowering status and illegal status of sojourn on the territory of the region. The self-perception of inhabitants of Russia is contradictory and painful. On the one hand, native residents of Russia are viewed paternalistically from the position of their national uniqueness and superiority. On the other hand, they demonstrate a low self-esteem which is usually caused by the low standard of their living and legal and moral disadvantages.

According to M. Lozada (2014), in a situation of social polarization (most notable in the border regions), the subject is usually not aware of their similarity to the “Other”, which contributes to making the image of the “Other” malicious and dangerous. At the same time, the denied “bad” traits in themselves and representatives of “their” ethnic group are projected onto “Other”, which may cause an increase in social tension. The study, conducted in the border regions based on sampled representatives, illustrates the operation of this mechanism. As a result, the authors obtained the data to track the formation mechanism of social representations of ethnic “Other” in modern multiethnic societies.

Implications and Recommendations

Recommendations for future studies are as follows. Firstly, to find out (using interviews, surveys), based on data on the representation of ethnic “others”, what caused the appearance of such representations, and is it necessary for each generation to pass them on intact. Our study found out that the young generation rigidly divides people into “own” and “alien”, and experiences irritation and distrust toward the latter. Studying the formation history of such an attitude will serve as a way to prevent further polarization. Secondly, it was found that the most important factor in the formation of social representations is the residence of the respondents. This suggests that each border region has their specific patterns of perception and “hot spots”. Views and values that are the embodiment of social representations in a particular community form the sphere of social confrontation (Lozada, 2014). It is therefore important to continue to investigate the current status of the ethnic representations of the “Other” in each territory with a multiethnic population.

Social representations reflect the existing institutionalized relations and thus support the distribution of power in society (Howarth, 2006b). Therefore, the data on the social representations indicate the most vulnerable categories of population and potential aggressors. Thus, the results of the study should be considered in the prevention and management of social conflicts. At the moment, the risk area is the relationship between the migrant workers and the young inhabitants of the border regions.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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