

”Dear Yunost...”

The worldview and everyday life in the public letters of Soviet youth,
1964-1982

Riikkamari Johanna Muhonen
University of Jyväskylä
Department of History and Ethnology
General World History
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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Research Questions and Methods

Everyday life in the Soviet Union remains a relatively little researched area in the field of history. The aim of this thesis is to spread light to this topic through the analysis of letters from readers of a Soviet youth magazine. Even though in many cases less than 1% of letters send to the editor's office were published, these letters are a valuable resource of the young people's opinions and thoughts from the period of the 1960's-1980's. The themes discussed are also fairly varied so that it is possible to form a rich image of the everyday life and thoughts of the Soviet youth in 1964-1982. The theme of this study is closely related to current trends on research of Soviet history. The new areas of study in the field of Soviet history are interested in the role of individual as a member of the society and in post-Stalinist periods of time, even though the majority of research conducted on Soviet history still concentrates on political history and the internal mechanisms of the Soviet system.

My research aims to find out what kinds of themes were discussed and what kinds of opinions were published in the letters from readers of the Soviet youth magazine *Yunost* (Youth). Altogether these questions aim to form an image of representations of the worldview and everyday life of the young readers of *Yunost* in 1964-1982. Another aim of this study is to point out the limits for freedom of expression in the Soviet media. What kind of topics could be openly discussed? What kind of critical opinions were visible in the letters? Through research literature the letters are placed in a wider political, cultural and social context and their contents is analyzed in relation to these contexts. The key research questions are, how the young people were describing their everyday life, values and problems, and how were these representations related to the political, cultural and social reality of the surrounding society? The research is closely connected to history of everyday life, values and mentalities. The aim is not to analyze the sources linguistically, but instead to look behind the language used and form an image of the phenomena discussed by combining the individual opinions presented in the letters to the different contexts of the Soviet society. The aim is to analyze the individuals as representatives of their culture and era and the ways they are reflecting socialist values.

The study contrasts the era of late socialism to preceding and subsequent

periods, namely Stalinism, the Thaw and Perestroika, and compares the descriptions presented in the letters to the sociological and political research of the era. This way the changes of worldview and everyday life in different political periods of Soviet society become visible and the texts can be placed in the appropriate contexts. The themes discussed, such as patriotism, internationalism, work and human relationships, derive from my sources. My aim is to provide a wide, yet not totalizing image of the written representations of different aspects of everyday life, ideals and values of youth in the Soviet society. This way the changes in values and ideology of late socialism when compared to Stalinism, the Thaw or Perestroika become visible. Due to the amplitude of this study I am demonstrating the phenomena by choosing examples from my sources that clearly show the contradictions between the letters and the Soviet society in general or changes and similarities between different periods of time. The goal of this comparison is to place the letters into an appropriate historical, social, political and cultural context. My method is qualitative and concentrates on thorough and intensive analysis of a limited amount of sources. The theoretical basis of this thesis lies in the ideas of hermeneutic research tradition and on the idea of dialogue between the sources and the researcher. It belongs to the field of new social history and culture history. Concepts such as ideology, mentality, youth culture and everyday life are valid for the subject.

Hermeneutical knowledge theory is based on the philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer, who sees texts as conversations between the text and its reader. In hermeneutical understanding of texts perfect understanding or regression to original situation is not required. Instead the aim is a limited process of understanding, which gives an opportunity to new type of interpretation. The interpretation process is a dialogue between the text and the reader, where the reader tries to adapt his hypotheses to the arguments presented in the text. Hypotheses or prejudices enable understanding: with background information we can understand texts that are unfamiliar to us. The beliefs and practices of the reader about the people or phenomenon he is studying make up his understanding of this social reality. This process of understanding and the relationship of the text effecting on the reader and the reader then making new types of interpretations is called the double hermeneutics. By achieving more background information it is possible to question the arguments of

the writer and reinterpret the text.¹

The text must be put into its own historical context. This is essential when studying the Soviet society, as the ways of public behavior and possibilities to express personal opinions were limited. Hermeneutical way of reading aims to understand the text, but is aware of its otherness and foreignness. The process is a dialogue of the current with the past. Text affects the readers and, according to the theory of hermeneutic circle, through analytical reading the reader finds new levels from the text, starts to make new types of questions and in this way the reader's opinion on the text changes. The goal of hermeneutical analysis is to understand the writer better than he understands himself by applying the background information about the surrounding society, political and economic situation to the text.²

Also the question of contextualism is essential for my research. Contextualism refers to the fact that extratextual political, economic and social phenomena have an impact on the text. Quentin Skinner presents a similar idea about historical research. In his opinion, the words and concepts had different meanings in their own context from how historians have usually read them. We might know that the phenomenon our object of study is describing is false, but we may still analyze the concepts used and the way the phenomenon is being described, and this way find out what the object thinks about the phenomenon he is describing. Even concepts that seem irrational to us may have been completely rational in their own historical context. This is eminently true with political and social vocabulary as all the beliefs and concepts we are using are socially constructed. Because of this the problem of translation extends from interpreting words from one language into another to interpreting conceptual categories of one time to those of another.³

For Skinner, the concepts of time, place and values were of major importance, which leads to the analysis of linguistic, generic and ideological contexts. He also believed that the author's motives and intentions can be extracted from their texts, as they are visible inside the texts and in their intended meanings. The writer has created the meaning for his text by writing in a particular way and this way shows his

1 Clark 2004, 136-137; Gadamer 1975, 235-239, 258-267; Gadamer 2005, 29-35; Leskelä-Kärki 2006, 79-81.

2 Clark 2004, 136-137; Gadamer 1975, 235-239, 258-267; Gadamer 2005, 29-35; Leskelä-Kärki 2006, 79-81.

3 Berkhofer 2008, 31; Clark 2004, 138-139; Hyrkkänen 2002, 134; Skinner 2002, 27-30, 35-37.

intentions to the reader. Skinner sees writing as an action in itself and is not concerned only with the intended meanings of a text, as a text can have meanings that the author did not intend. According to Skinner, we must understand one's use of language and vocabulary before we can understand his actions. Language and social activities have an impact on one another.⁴

The questions of contexts and hermeneutics is essential for most studies in history, where the aim is to understand the way thinking of a person or a group of people that live in a different historical period of time from the researcher. Due to this, the language and concepts the object of study is using are different from our current understanding. The letters are representations of the everyday life in the Soviet Union, which is why it is not possible to form a totally realistic picture of the past through the letters. By achieving a sufficient amount of background information about the society and its values it is possible to understand the actions of the young people better than they understood their own actions at the time of writing. Even though it is not possible to return to the original situation of the everyday life in the USSR, it is possible to understand the actions of an individual as a representative of his own era, culture and society.

Youth is usually considered a marginal group in a society, but when talking about Soviet youth, the object of study is a group of people that had a major impact in the society around them. In 1976, half of the population of the USSR was under thirty years old and about 45% of the people were born after the Great Patriotic War.⁵ Also due to the early maturation, marriage and entering working life, Soviet youth as an object of research is different from its Western counterparts. Since the Second World War the role of youth and youth culture has emerged in Western societies and is also visible in the historical research on this period of time. This is not the case with Soviet Union, as very little historical research on Soviet youth has been done.

1.2. Previous Research

The most important part of my research literature is the groundbreaking study of Alexey Yurchak, 'Everything was forever, until it was no more. The last Soviet generation', where he explores the Soviet reality in the period from the 1960's to

4 Berkhofer 2008, 31; Clark 2004, 138-139; Hyrkkänen 2002, 134 ; Skinner 2002, 96-101.

5 Mouly 1976, 221.

1980's through speech act and performativity theories. Yurchak sees language as a central way to impact inside a society. He describes the changes that occurred in the language of Soviet government and media from the Stalinist era onwards. His research is closely connected to everyday life and especially youth culture. In his research he discusses issues like music, fashion, Komsomol⁶, humor and their role in the lives of Soviet citizens. The concept of 'late socialism', which I use throughout this research, is invented by Yurchak. It refers to 'the years of stagnation', from 1964 until Perestroika and stresses that life in the USSR in those years was not as stagnated as we often think. Instead, many changes were going on in the mental and cultural atmosphere of the country, especially among the youth. Even though Yurchak's theoretical approach to the subject is different from mine, his work has been groundbreaking in the study of the everyday life of Soviet people.

Another important author for me has been Vladimir Shlapentokh, a Russian sociologist and an exceptional pioneer in the field of Soviet empirical sociology. I have used his works from the 1970's as a source of background information. Shlapentokh has also written several sociological works on Russia and the USSR after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Shlapentokh represents an earlier view on the era discussed when compared to Yurchak and his research is quantitative in nature, offering a wide amount of statistics discussing various fields of everyday life of Soviet citizens. His works are also practically the first attempt to do sociological analysis on the Soviet society based on public opinions.

Other important works for my research include Oleg Kharkhordin's 'The Collective and the Individual in Russia', David L. Hoffmann's 'Stalinist Values – The Cultural Norms of Soviet Modernity 1917-1941' and Sergei I. Zhuk's 'Rock and Roll in the Rocket City. The West, Identity, and Ideology in Soviet Dnepropetrovsk, 1960-1985'. Kharkhordin's approach to the subject is fairly theoretical, but by using various sources from official documents of the Central Control Commission to reference books for party officials his book forms a vivid representation of the subject, which is essential for understanding the Soviet and Russian mentality. Also in my work questions on collectivism vs. individualism are in central position. The theoretical and

⁶ Komsomol (Kommunisticheskiy Sojuz Molodyoshi) was an organization working in subordination of the CPSU. It organized various patriotic and political activities, including different types of camps, meetings, demonstrations and projects.

methodological background of his work lies in Foucault's knowledge theory and hermeneutics. Hoffmann's work is less theoretical than Kharkhordin's and by using various both written and visual sources he discusses various themes of Stalinist everyday life, such as behavior, mass consumption, family values and perhaps most importantly social and cultural unity under Soviet socialism. The study of Sergei I. Zhuk offers a wide panorama to the various aspects of everyday life and cultural consumption of the youth in the Ukrainian city of Dnepropetrovsk during late socialism. By using interviews and various archival sources Zhuk discusses the main cultural influences and their impact on the mentalities of young people during in the period from the 1960's to 1980's in the closed city of Dnepropetrovsk. His research interests are very close to mine as the issues discussed are strongly connected to everyday life and questions of ideology and identity.

As background literature I have also used historical and sociological research from the 1960's to the present. The research is both Western and Soviet in order to create a more varied image of the social conditions in the USSR in the period from the 1960's to the 1980's. I also use historical research with relation to other periods of Soviet history. By using research literature from various fields and eras I try to avoid creating a one-sided image about the Soviet society. Because of the comprehensive duality of the world during the 1960's-1980's using only Soviet or only Western research would not generate a complete image of the era as there was no free scientific research in the USSR and on the other hand Western scientists had a very limited access to the Soviet sources of information. This is why it is essential to use both Western and Soviet research and have a critical approach to the facts this literature has to offer. When it comes to current historical research about the Soviet Union, I try to find different points of view from both Russian and foreign researchers.

There are some clear restrictions when it comes to the sociological research of the era. There is certainly a lack of uncensored and reliable data on what people in the Soviet Union 'really thought' about the society in which they lived. Until Perestroika it was not possible to ask questions about major political and social issues. All national and local surveys had to be approved by the official censor. The same problem is present with the letters as well. One cannot be sure how accurate 'the facts'

in these letters are and broad generalizations based on these sources are not possible.⁷ The aim of this study is not to study the reality of everyday life in the Soviet Union, but instead to analyze the representations the young people produced about themselves and their lives in period from the 1960's to the 1980's.

1.3. Sources

The sources for this master's degree thesis consist of approximately 250 letters from readers published in 1964-1982 in the Soviet youth magazine *Yunost* (Youth), which I have separated into three main categories of societal values, human relations and work. These categories arise from the material itself, as almost all the letters can be roughly placed under one of them. These main categories can be divided into subcategories, which discuss the most typical issues visible in the letters. As there are no clear changes in the themes of the letters between different political periods, I found this thematic approach to the study more appropriate than a chronological one. The number of published letters varied greatly each year. 1970-1972 only two letters per year were published. In 1982 only one letter was published and in 1981 none. On the other hand in 1978, in the middle of the period of 'stagnation', altogether 35 letters were published. Also the length of letters varied greatly: shortest of them included only a few lines and the longest ones were several pages long.

The literary magazine *Yunost* has been published since 1955. It is a 'literature-artistic and social-political journal' (*literaturno-hudozhestvennyi i obshchestvenno-politicheskiy zhurnal*) and in the Soviet times it was published by the Soviet Writers' Alliance (*Soyuz Pisatelei SSSR*). These types of professional organizations authorized people to work as cultural producers and doled out perquisites. During 1964-1981 editor in chief was Boris Polevoi and from 1981 onwards Andrey Dementyev. Polevoi was a well-known figure in the field of Soviet public culture: a journalist, novelist and winner of a Stalin-prize in 1949. *Yunost* was a monthly issue with approximately 112 pages in each journal. It included short stories, poems and articles concerning current issues in science, sports and culture. Works of Anna Akhmatova and Mikhail Bulgakov, among others, were published in *Yunost*, which is one of the reasons why *Yunost* was considered one of the most modern and liberal literary journals during the

⁷ Shlapentokh et al. 2008, 114-115; *Yunost* homepage [21.10.2011].

time of Perestroika.⁸

In the USSR all magazines worked under the control of the CPSU (the Communist Party of Soviet Union) and its Central Committee. The publishers of magazines were party and state organs, ministries, state committees, unions and other types of organizations. The publishers controlled the contents of magazines and the work of journalists. The contents of magazines were also controlled by an editorial committee, which consisted of representatives of the publisher and the journalists. This means that the content of media was at least as much a result of self-control as of state-dominated censorship. Due to the hierarchical structure of this control system, it was not always working very efficiently. There were also differences in the amount of control on national, republican, regional and local levels. The weaknesses of the system were familiar to the journalists and in some cases, such as in Estonia, the journalists took benefit of these weaknesses by publishing articles that were fairly critical toward the political system. In Russia these critical opinions were mostly spread through samizdat⁹. On the other hand also publications that were placed on the lower levels of control, such as youth magazines, enjoyed relative freedom to publish various opinions on current issues. Even though the principles of censorship were strict, the practices on implementing them varied.¹⁰

The readers of Yunost were mostly 13-30-year-old people from all over the USSR, but even older people read the journal. This means that Yunost cannot be directly compared to Western youth magazines. Its material is also much more serious and reflective than the contents of its equals in the West. Popular culture is not visible on the pages of Yunost, but still it can be considered as a liberal magazine in its own context. On the other hand youth magazines were not allowed to publish on very important political or ideological topics before the central newspapers due to their lower levels of control. The liberal character of Yunost was visible in various ways, such as in the lack of stories related to Komsomol in the fiction it published. The 1960's and 1980's were very liberal periods for Yunost and the magazine was well-known for its liberalism. The situation changed in the 1970's due to political reactions

8 Brooks 2001, 237; Roth-Ey 2011, 5; Yurchak 2006, 2-3.

9 From words 'sam izdat' ('to publish by oneself'). Samizdat-literature included various types of literature and journalism that was otherwise illicit in the USSR. It was spread through unofficial ways, from hand to hand.

10 Kreegipuu 2011, 54-46; Volkovskiy 2006, 181, 187-188.

and Yunost temporarily lost its liberal reputation.¹¹

Yunost was the biggest youth magazine of its time. Other magazines for youth at the time included Rovesnik (Peer), Molodaya Gvardiya (Young Guard) and Smena (Offspring). Rovesnik included articles about the actions of foreign communist youth organizations, whereas Smena was similar to Yunost with its social and artistic contents. All these magazines had circulation of approximately 2,5-3 million copies in the 1970's and 1980's. After the collapse of the Soviet system also their circulations collapsed. Nowadays Yunost concentrates even more clearly on literature and its circulation is approximately 100 000 copies.¹²

Letters from readers had a major significance in Soviet journalism. The editor in chief of Komsomolskaya Pravda, Yuriy Voronov, described them as 'the most important capital: richness that cannot be compared to anything else'. Still, the people working in the media did not see themselves as catering to public taste but rather educating and directing it. During the 1960's letters from readers started to be published in all major newspapers of the Soviet Union. Sending letters to the media and institutions was an essential way to express opinions and have an impact on the society. Most of the letters went through examinations by the KGB, which is why the writers formulated their critique so that it did not mark them with an anti-patriotic stamp. The issues that were seen as a threat for the society or its values were removed by the censoring officials. The majority of the letters discussed issues like election campaigns and election system, food shortages and housing. In most cases they concentrated in specific bureaucratic problems and avoided general critique towards the socialist system. The writers of letters and petitions were aware of the current politics and projects, such as the construction policy in the Thaw, and often used rhetoric of citizenship and civil rights in order to reach their goals. The letters sent to media served as a source for audience research, which started in the 1960's in order to find out the preferences of the consumers of media. This type of information provided realistic data about the consummation of cultural products and pointed out the contradictions between ideals and reality, as most of the people writing to Soviet television reported that they preferred feature films, programs with performers and concerts. On the other hand the letters sent to media were not representative of its

11 Kreegipuu 2011, 30; Medish 1966, 150; Shlapentokh 1989, 110, 149.

12 Shlapentokh 1989, 149; Yunost' homepage, unost.org (25.3.2012)

audience as the most active groups of letter-writers were the retired and the disabled, who often had extremely negative or positive points of view.¹³

In 1981-1983 the Central Committees received 2 million letters and the local party committees 10 million letters. All the major newspapers received hundreds of thousands of letters. Pravda, the main newspaper in the USSR alone received more than half a million letters each year. The writers were the most active part of the population. Of all the writers of letters to newspapers, 35% were party members and 25% had higher education background. This is twice as high as their proportion in general population. A sociological survey shows that 17% of the population in Taganrog, a major harbor town in the southern part of Russia close to Rostov-on-Don, sent at least one letter to a newspaper or a party committee each year. Most of these letters were complaints about personal problems, even though the media tried to present them mostly as general comments to public events. The role of letters in making the problems public was central as they often provoked public discussion on issues that were normally kept silent. During Perestroika the amount of letters increased dramatically and many newspapers and magazines started to print them on their first pages. Issues discussed included bureaucracy, lack of goods and other problems.¹⁴

Letter-writing to newspapers and authorities as well as taking part in political activities can be described as the public sphere of the Soviet society. These were not the arenas to express one's actual feelings, but to take part in ritual actions for the articulation of officially approved 'opinions'. This is why such a phenomenon as 'public opinion' in its modern sense did not exist in the Soviet Union as the individual opinions expressed in public were never independent. Negative feelings could be expressed openly only in the presence of family or close friends and in some cases they could not be expressed at all. In public letters negative opinions were usually expressed in a roundabout way. Private activity of individuals became more public only during Perestroika when the societal atmosphere opened.¹⁵ Still, as my sources point out, Soviet citizens were aware of the existence of dissident opinions and

13 Roth-Ey 2011, 93-94, 269-271; Shlapentokh, et al. 2008, 123; Varga-Harris 2006, 103-104; Volkovskiy 2006, 92.

14 Pietiläinen 2010, 80-86; Shlapentokh 1989, 102.

15 Malinova 2010, 177-180.

various types of underground culture served as arenas for these types of opinions. These issues could not be discussed in the media, but people were still aware of them through word-of-mouth information sharing.

The questions of public and private actions are essential when talking about letters from readers, as writing letters to a newspaper or magazine combines both public and private spheres of action. When letter-writing in general is mostly seen as a private process of discussion and identity-building, letter-writing to a wider audience must be seen as a public action. Letter-writing to Yunost was a form of public action, which was usually supervised by the bodies representing the society or some major segments of it. In modern societies the interests of the whole nation are supposedly represented by the state and often this leads to the fact that 'public' and 'official' are often used as synonyms. This is especially true in authoritarian societies, such as the Soviet Union, where the state controlled all major spheres of social life.¹⁶

In my sources the dialogue and the performativity of public letters is very different from private ones. The writers strongly aim to create a certain image of themselves and to get the attention, compassion or some other reaction from fellow readers. The psychological concepts of public self-image and private self-concept¹⁷ can both be found from the letters, but often the weight is put on self-image of an ideal individual as the letters Yunost chose to publish are mostly written in favor of the official values, even in cases where issues connected to private spheres of life are discussed. Dialogue does not materialize the same way as it does in ordinary correspondence, so it is not possible to talk about long-term identity-building processes, but instead about strengthening of the common group identity of the Soviet youth. Some letters, such as stories about unwanted pregnancies, also seem to have an educative goal.

For the journalists the letters were a way of collecting feedback and get information about the current interests of the readers. From the officials' point of view it was important to guarantee that the letters did not provoke wrong types of discussion or harsh criticism toward the state. All the letters that arrived to editorial offices were carefully read and several different employees, starting from the editor in chief, read the letters before publishing them. Often there were also professionals

16 Shlapentokh 1989, 3-4.

17 Shlapentokh 1989, 4.

from different fields hired to newspapers to answer the questions of readers. Letters from readers were one of the most popular sections of a newspaper.¹⁸

In the case of Yunost the role of public letters from the reader's point of view was to give them a forum where they could discuss social issues and problems. Through their letters young people interacted with other young readers of the magazine. The special characteristic of these letters was that writers do not know personally the recipients. Instead, they aimed their letters to a wider audience. Discussing themes that were familiar to all the readers was a way of building the identity of Soviet youth. These themes familiar for all the readers included relationships, work, study, patriotism and Komsomol-activities. Letters were written in different ways, depending on whom the writing was for and what were the goals in the process. Many letters got answers from professionals and experts of different fields and their themes were often discussed in subsequent issues. Also feedback and commentaries about the magazine were published.

For the transliteration I have used the British standard. I have tried to translate all quotes literally. Nonetheless the structure of Russian text is very different from the English one, with long sentences and several subordinate clauses. Also different types of participial constructions are used, which makes it difficult to translate the quotes literally. Because of this I have separated original sentences into shorter constructions when needed, so that the translation would be fluent and easy to understand.

1.4. New Social History and Cultural History

New social history sees that masses form out of individuals. By going closer to a working subject, new social history aims to reach a broader view on the society in general. Microhistory sees that history is made by individuals, who through their actions impact on, but also reflect the surrounding societal structures. These structures also define the limits for their actions. History of everyday life (Alltagsgeschichte) was originally a German counterpart to microhistory. It concentrates on the research of routines, work, masses, private life, on things that seem spontaneous or unreflective but are actually results of false consciousness or ideology. Within field of microhistory there are two dominating theories, which offer a cultural and a social

18 Volkovski 2006, 200-201.

view on research subjects. The cultural view on microhistory stresses the importance of traditions, social values and other external factors on the behavior of an individual, whereas the social view concentrates on networks and relations between individuals as key factors in understanding their worldview and actions.¹⁹

In my work all of these factors are present, as the writers often discuss both issues connected to collective memory or ideology and their networks of friends, family and co-workers. Differences between the individual vs. the collective and public vs. private were of major importance in the Soviet society. The binary situation should be taken into consideration always when doing research on the public activities of Soviet citizens. This is why it is not possible to do research on the reality of Soviet everyday life by reading letters from readers, but instead the objects of study are the public representations of everyday life and society.

A part of new social history is history of mentalities, which turned away from economics and structures and is defined as historical research that concentrates on common structures of thinking of a certain group of people or a community. It is also connected to questions concerning human ideas and worldview. History of mentalities concentrates on the collective 'mind' on a community, its ways of thinking and cultural behavior. It has connections to methods of social studies, anthropology and cultural history. As the history of mentalities is discussing questions of culture, worldview, ways of thinking, values, norms, behavior and traditions, it is also closely connected to microhistory.²⁰

The question of mentalities is in relation to questions of values and ideologies. It is interested in collective mentality of a certain group. Mentality is something that an individual has in common with other people living in the same era and society. It is a combination of individual and collective, long periods of time and everyday life, the unknown and the analytic, the marginal and the common. In this way mentalities are essential parts of everyday life. Research on history of mentalities aims to understand the attitudes, assumptions and ideologies of a certain group of people. On the other hand time, culture or surrounding society cannot fully determine the values, worldview or mentality of an individual, as the mental, cultural and social processes are also visible in his actions. Thinking, actions and societal relations are all

19 Clark 2004, 77; Clark 2004, 77; on different views on microhistory, see Cerutti 2004.

20 Katajala 1995, 11-14.

connected to one another.²¹

In my work the ways of thinking of a certain group of people, in this case the Soviet youth, are in a central position. Several internal and external factors had an impact on their thinking. The representations produced about their life are controlled by the factors that are in the core of research on new social history. On the other hand it is also possible to see the letters as cultural products, which means that the study is also closely connected to cultural history. The worldview of the young people is a mixture of individual and collective factors that can be recognized from the representations they produce. In many cases the letters describe individual feelings in connection to the collective, its history and ideals. For example stories about work in building projects of Siberia offer individual views on a subject that was of major collective importance in the 1970's.

The mentality of an individual is always connected to the concepts of collective memory and identity. Collective memory is the memory of a society, the way the society depicts its past in books, films and museums. These form a part of the mentality of a certain group and a part of the identity of a certain individual. Collective memory is closely connected to nationalism as the idea of the past forms a major part of any nationalism. Myths, memories, symbols and traditions are all essential in nation-building process.²²

Soviet Union can also be seen as an example of a nation-building process, as the construction of an entity of Soviet people from the multinational Soviet population was one of the main tasks of the state ideology. This process included many aspects, such as ideological education on collectivism and internationalism, illusions about the prosperous future and present and the glorious past of the society. In this formation process of one, united people the search for a common understanding about the past by constructing a new Soviet history concept was crucial. As the Soviet people missed most of the traditional unifying factors, such as ethnicity, culture, religious and national customs, national unity was sought by attempting to create a shared understanding about the past.²³ Though there were dozens of ethnic nations within one state, they were all connected into one Soviet Union by means of collective

21 Hyrkkänen 2002, 89, 106-108; Korhonen 2002, 42-44, 49; LeGoff 1974, 244-246, 255-256.

22 Green 2008, 104, 106-109.

23 Kreegipuu 2011, 32-33.

memory and mentality. Objects and landmarks, such as tombs of unknown soldiers, were essential in this identity-building process. Questions on patriotism and themes such as the Great Patriotic War were regularly discussed in the letters.

Identity and self-image can be expressed through letter-writing. In this way through examination of letters it is possible to examine the identity of young Soviet people and the overall self-image of the USSR and its citizens. Writing letters can also be seen as creation of imagined communication: letters are a way of social intercourse and their goal is to create mutual unity. Letters tell about the relations between individuals, the community and culture in the society and about the identity-building process of an individual. They serve as a way to the space of common remembering, self-reflection and strengthening of identity. Through letter-writing to media it was possible to bring up flaws in the society, to get one's own voice heard and to get compassion from other readers among other things. Letters are a form of dialogue and through them it is possible to tell about what we are or what we want to be. Writing letters is a performativity act and letters can also be seen as narratives. They stress the actions of individuals as causative agents in the unfolding of events. Through actions of concrete individuals they explain what happened in the past.²⁴

An important part of new social history is to understand the meaning of values for a certain human community. Values within the community limit the behavior of individuals and reflect the ideas of history, future and ideals that are predominant in a certain community. The purpose of an ideology is to represent the location of a community within the global unity. Through ideology the past, the present and the future become understandable for the community. Social structures are based on predominant ideologies. An ideology may also have a stabilizing effect on society, for example in the form of traditions or myths.²⁵ The concept of ideology is essential when doing research on the Soviet society. Ideology, in this case developed socialism, offers Soviet citizens the right type of values, defines the history and sets goals for the future. The official ideology was a major stabilizing factor in the Soviet society and also highly uniform by nature. Officially only one ideology existed in the USSR and it presented a very uniform view on the past, present and the future of the society. Other types of ideologies and values could only be present in the private spheres of life and

24 Berkhofer 2008, 51-54; Helsti 2006, 121; Leskelä-Kärki 2006, 58, 65, 70.

25 DUBY 1974, 87-90.

they could not be discussed in public or in the media.

Official and controlled images were made personal not only through force. Instead Soviet citizens were reminded that one should accept the goals of the state as goals of his own life in order to become a Soviet subject. The ideas of an ideal Soviet citizen varied through periods of time, but in 1964-1982 the official ideals remained fairly intact.²⁶ The state ideology had a major role for the citizens as it places the society into the global context as the leader of the socialist countries and defines the past with events such as the October Revolution and Great Patriotic War, the present with building of communism and developed socialism, and the future with the ideal communist society. All these ideological factors are also present in the letters.

The task of a researcher of history of mentalities is to read his sources and contextualize them with the time of their origin. My sources are representations of what young writers saw as important and worth telling about themselves and the society around them. In other words, the sources describe the social identities and mentalities of the writers. In the letters the writers also reflect and confirm their social roles. In this process the writers' own images about themselves, the society they were living in and the past of the society are important. The ways of telling, the writers' connections to different groups and communities are essential parts of the analysis of letters.

26 Raami 2010, 163-167.

2. SOVIET SOCIETY AND MEDIA 1964-1982

2.1. Historical Context

The era of Brezhnev as the secretary general of the CPSU lasted from 1965 to 1982. During that time political life in the country returned partly back to Stalinist models. During the rule of Brezhnev's predecessor, Nikita Khrushchev, the political atmosphere in the country had widely emancipated. Now censorship was tightened again and the possibilities of Soviet citizens to travel abroad remained very limited, even though the amount of Soviet people traveling abroad increased throughout the period. People rarely resisted the party and instead showed formal favor to the government. At the same time appreciation of official ideology and working moral of ordinary citizens weakened. Cynicism of masses led into political apathy from the end of the 1970's until the mid-1980's, but in the private sphere of life many types of both political and cultural activity existed.²⁷ Denouncing the evils and failures of Brezhnev's predecessors was a successful way to legitimate his power.²⁸

The core of Brezhnev's politics was pretension to conservative reforms, which was meant to lead to communism. The command of the party gave itself three goals: to stop destalinization and restrain dissidence, to improve well-being with minor reforms and invest in arms. Already in 1971 the command of the CPSU realized that transition to communism by 1980 was utopia. Because of this, according to official propaganda, the USSR was moving into the era of 'developed socialism'. Positive changes such as increased social mobility, job opportunities and improved living standards increased the general support of the socialist system. The support was especially great among party members, social activists, mid-level management officials, teachers and the working class. The values of socialism were not necessarily forced upon all people and they were not brainwashed against their will. In fact, millions of people were enthusiastic followers of the government and supported the system consciously and honestly. Examples of this phenomenon were the hundreds of thousands of young people who volunteered during the 1960-1970's in the grandiose construction projects in Siberia, such as the Baikal-Amur railway. Also a large group of people supported the system not because of ideological reason, but because it was

27 An example of the Ukrainian youth in Dnepropetrovsk 1960-1985, see Zhuk 2010.

28 Ruutu 2010, 70; Shlapentokh et al. 2008, 120.

beneficial for them. Issues like job security, individual safety and individual comfort depended on people's political loyalty to the government.²⁹

The people who were displeased with the society were usually those who rejected the communist ideology and saw it as totalitarian and oppressive, religious people and friends and relatives of those who were sent to Gulags³⁰ or otherwise suffered due to the regime. They associated the Soviet system with distastefulness, rigidity and primitiveness. They also despised the fact that war veterans, factory workers and party supporters were depicted as heroes of the society in the official context.³¹

Developed socialism is an essential concept when discussing the years of late socialism. It replaced the optimism, dynamism and utopianism of Khrushchev's era and had a central role in the lack of social initiative, which was faced by the Soviet society in the 1970's and 1980's. It has been seen as one of the reasons for stagnation. The concept occurred for the first time in 1971 and it soon became the means of differentiating the USSR from other socialist countries and asserting its leading role as the only country in the world with a developed socialist system. Developed socialism was no longer seen as just a phase between capitalism and communism, but as a prolonged historical stage and something eligible in itself. The socialist system had to be fully developed before moving on to communism.³²

Russian historians stress that the era of Brezhnev was not only 'period of stagnation' in its literal meaning. Actually this name was created during the period of Perestroika as an opposite for the new reforming discourse. 'The period of stagnation' became an overwhelmingly dominant conceptualization of the almost two decades Brezhnev ruled the Soviet state. Actually this period brought stability to the system and many economic reforms were performed during the era, which improved the productivity of industry. This made possible the enormous investment on arms and military industry but also the standards of living rose. At the same time the relationships between the USSR and USA were normalized, as the Helsinki

29 Luukkanen 2004, 316, Shlapentokh et al 2008, 116-118.

30 GULag (Glavnoye upravleniye ispravitel'no-trudovyykh lagerey i koloniy): Chief administration of corrective labor camps and colonies, the system of Soviet forced labor camps during the Stalinist era, from 1930's to 1950's.

31 Shlapentokh et al. 2008, 124.

32 Sandle 2002, 165-169.

Conference of Security and Co-operation in Europe showed in 1975. On the other hand the Soviet attack to Afghanistan in 1979 weakened the relationship of these two superpowers.³³

The main opponents to official policy were many intellectuals, who since the 1960's strove to abandon the heritage of Lenin and October revolution and move towards democracy. Before this the Soviet intelligentsia had experienced an extensive wave of neo-Leninism in the 1950's and early 1960's. The Communist Party and state-owned factories were seen as constant elements of the society, which could not be changed. In the opinion of many intellectuals, the emergence of capitalism in the Soviet Union would require deeply ingrained respect for private property – a psychological condition and a legal imperative that the Soviet people had lost for good. The intellectuals were considering the possibility to establish a liberal-socialistic polity. 'Socialism with a human face' aroused great interest among the young intelligentsia. This meant that individuals should have a role in all spheres of life and their voices should be heard in the media. They demanded freedom of movement and speech, which would lead to a new and improved political, economic and social system. Most of the intelligentsia wanted to develop the Soviet society into a combination of economic socialism and political pluralism. Critical views on the society were propagated through samizdat-publications. A part of the intelligentsia was formed by nationalistic Russophiles, who considered that Russia had a unique culture, traditions and morals. For them, Russia was an exclusive country, which should neglect Western moral values. The Russophiles of the 1970's held a positive view of Stalin and saw patriotism as the most important value of the society.³⁴

The political opposition in the Soviet society can be described as relatively weak. In 1967-1977 only 1583 individuals were sentenced for 'anti-Soviet activity'. The number includes those persecuted for nationalist and religious activities. The ideologies that these convicted supported included bourgeois nationalism, Zionism, revisionist and reformist ideologies and religious ideologies. The intellectual opposition in the Soviet Union was almost fully suppressed by the early 1980's. The majority of the regime's critics accepted their role as disgruntled but formally loyal

33 Muntchaev 2008, 601-603; Zhuk 2010, 11-12.

34 Shlapentokh et al. 2008, 65-69.

Soviet citizens.³⁵

2.2. New Views on Soviet Reality

The Soviet reality is often seen like a combination of two binary categories: oppression and resistance, repression and freedom, the state and the people, official economy and second economy, official culture and counterculture, totalitarian language and counter language, public self and private self, truth and lie etc. In some examples of this discourse, *Homo Sovieticus* was seen only as a mouthpiece of 'communist values'. Many of the common cultural phenomena in the USSR were allowed or even supported, even though they were quite distinct from the ideological texts of the party. For great numbers of Soviet citizens many of the fundamental values, ideals and realities of Soviet life were important, even though their everyday practices did not always support the official ideology. The difference between the ideal of socialism and the reality of socialism was visible in the society. It was built on the ideals, but paradoxically full liberation of the society and individual was reached by controlling the society and individuals through party leadership. This is why the private sphere and personal contacts had such a major significance in the Soviet society. For example a media survey from the late 1970's shows that word-of-mouth communication was the most important way of achieving new information, surpassing newspapers, radio, television and other sources of information in this sense.³⁶

The Soviet ideology was also based on the binary system of individualism and collectivism. The collective was the base for all human activities. People worked for their collective, which could be anything from a school class or a factory unit to a Komsomol cell. In a wider scale they were working for their Motherland as builders of communism. Values such as equality were essential. On the other hand also individualism had a major role in the Soviet ideology. Self-training, setting high aims for oneself and reaching them were strong features in all levels of the society and for all individuals, from kindergartens to working places. This was represented on a wider scale by setting five-year plans. According to the ideology it was important to strive for the ideals to become an ideal 'new Soviet man'. This is also visible in Yunost,

35 Shlapentokh et al. 2008, 70-71.

36 Parta 2007, 41-43; Yurchak 2006, 5- 11.

where many people discussed issues such as activities in Komsomol or the choice of profession, which was considered to be one of the most essential steps in the process of self-training.³⁷

In the Soviet system it was typical for the citizens to take parts in acts of mass participation and support (such as May Day demonstrations and Komsomol-meetings) paying little or no attention to the literal meanings of the ritualized acts. These rituals and the pretended subscription of ideological claims allowed them to keep their actual thought private and to sustain a gap between performance and belief. This process can also be described as inventing new traditions to legitimize power institutions, socialize groups and inculcate beliefs, values systems and conventions of behavior.³⁸

Youth was the favorite topic of the Soviet discourse and often seen as embodiment of the revolutionary spirit. The youth was a symbolized promise of the communist future and a sentimental homage to the wild days of the revolution. Still, young people misbehaved in various very visible ways. Overt resistance was rare during Stalinism, but even then they pushed the boundaries of acceptable actively and often unconsciously. Their behavior, style and political beliefs challenged the image of a perfect young Soviet man and woman that was so crucial to the Soviet Union's self-perception. The young people of the 1970's had various social roles that were completely separated from one another, as a Komsomol-member, a schoolchild and a trade union member. These roles were essential; person as such had no individual value for the society.³⁹

2.3. The Soviet Press

The press had a major role in sustaining the idea of the possibility of socialism. Journalists were producers of the everyday terrain of imaginary, disseminating images and figures through which Soviet citizens understood their world. The press was also an institution that presented continuous reflection of the state of socialism and the achievements of socialist society. Printed products represented images of socialist people and their identities. It was also the daily manifestation of the party's presence and intentions. Newspapers were instruments of general education and enlightenment.

37 On collectivism and individualism, see Kharkhordin 1999.

38 Kreegipuu 2011, 32-33; Yurchak 2006, 16-17.

39 Dobrotvorskaya 1992, 146; Fürst 2006, 136.

They can also be seen as an essential part of the totalitarian project: the press was considered to reduce conflicts of interest, purpose and value. They also reflected the hierarchical organization of the party and government, with papers appearing at all-Union, republic, regional, district, and village levels. Other press products were directed towards ten social and occupational groups: party-government workers, general workers, labor union members, members of kolkhozes and sovkhozes, peasants, women, economic experts, the military, youth, and indigenous populations. This division mirrored the administrative structure of the party and the diversity of Soviet population.⁴⁰

In late socialist era many journalists projected the image of a socialist person as a critical thinker focused on the problem what it was like to construct or enable a critical society. The 'new Soviet person' changed during these years with the changes in party leadership and the development of new communications technologies. Journalists participated in the governing of the USSR by supplying texts and images that would make Soviet readers aware of and a part of the processes through which their society was realizing socialism. They envisioned and projected a form of person whose thoughts and actions would embody the socialist project: journalists were builders of the self. The press worked according to the Marxist-Leninist principles of party-mindedness, high level of ideology, truthfulness, popular orientation, criticism and self-criticism and mass character. Also values like internationalism, patriotism, humanity, truthfulness and objectivity were officially an important part of the Soviet press. The Soviet media was an organization of communications from center to periphery that consisted of instructions, models of behavior and narratives of conduct whose collective emulation would realize socialism.⁴¹

The role of Soviet press as a distributor of information was in many ways different from the Western media. News was used to illustrate recent party politics or economic development. The news that was not suitable for this purpose was not published. Negative news from the West, such as strikes, economic crises and social flaws were used to strengthen the juxtaposition between socialism and capitalism. This meant that most of the Western news was concealed from the Soviet public. When it comes to domestic news, negative issues were kept completely silent.

40 Kreegipuu 2011, 19, 26; Wolfe 2005, 2, 7-8.

41 Kreegipuu 2011, 28-29; Wolfe 2005, 2, 18.

According to the media, there was no crime in the USSR. This was based on the Marxist-Leninist sociology, according to which the surrounding society defines the behavior of an individual. This way criminality would have been a sign of flaws in the society. Also natural disasters and different types of accidents were kept silent, for example the Chernobyl catastrophe was not reported immediately in the Soviet media, because it would have shown defects in Soviet science and industry. Instead the press waited for two days before publishing any information on the accident and it took weeks before any complete account on the event was given out to the Soviet population. The Chernobyl case is a good example of the power of Western radio broadcasts and subsequent mouth-of-word type of information sharing, as most of the information on Chernobyl was spread through these methods.⁴²

The purpose of news was to convince the people about social balance and well-being. The aim of Soviet media was to create a picture of a tranquil and stable society: changes were controlled and manageable and social problems were seldom if ever beyond solving. Uncertainty, despair and doubt were not characteristic of the political leadership or of the official national mood. The newspapers paid little attention to issues that were important to the general public (such as housing). There was also a major gap between the perceived social problems and media coverage. Social problems were described as something that affected all the citizens and which could be solved through common effort.⁴³

After the relative freedom of the Thaw years, the press became more strictly controlled during late socialism. It was no longer allowed to explore the question of the meaningfulness of socialism, but instead was forced to repeat the mythic history of the Soviet Union, which was seen as the best way to define the individual's relationship to the state. The goal of journalism was to support the communist orthodoxy pronounced by the party's authorized thinkers. Journalists were no longer active agents of socialist self-understanding or allowed to use their critical, imaginative faculties on behalf of the party. Instead, their mission was to supply images and texts that would represent an effective, stable, and prosperous state of 'developed socialism'. The party demanded from journalists the defense of orthodoxy and stability, in which there was no need to imagine socialism as anything but the

42 Ellis 1998, 212-214; Parta 2007, 57-58; Pietiläinen 2010, 76, 94.

43 Ellis 1998, 213-214; Parta 2007, 57-58; Pietiläinen 2010, 76, 94.

rhetorical idiom that justified the party's power.⁴⁴

During late socialism the shift from print media to audiovisual media happened in the Soviet Union. As television and radio became more accessible to Soviet citizens, they also started to receive more information, images and arguments from abroad. The task of the party was less to win people over to socialism than to manage Soviet citizens' feelings of complete indifference to it. The problem of 'bad news' became more current. News about natural disasters and accident were traditionally not published as it was believed that they fostered the sentiments of fear, uncertainty, and suspicion and detached them from the task of building socialism. As the flow of information grew, the press had to change its attitudes towards these kinds of events and news from abroad was reported more actively in the Soviet media. Still, the Soviet media reacted slowly to events that were discussed in foreign media. People were able to get information about events from the foreign radio or samizdat before they were discussed in the Soviet media.⁴⁵

Practically all families subscribed to Soviet newspapers or magazines, on the average of two or three newspapers and four magazines. The demand for many magazines often exceeded the available number of copies. In the 1970's shortages occurred in such newspapers as *Trud* ('Labor'), *Komsomolskaya Pravda* ('Komsomol Truth'), *Nedelya* ('Week'), *Za Rubezhom* ('Abroad') and *Literaturnaya Gazeta* ('Literature Magazine'). Soviet sociologists found out that people paid minimal attention to purely propagandist articles. Many Soviet citizens shunned the solely propagandist periodicals and were most interested in magazines with minimal ideological fillers, such as *Zdoroviye* ('Health') and *Vokrug Sveta* ('Around the world'). The same result is visible also in a survey carried out by *Pravda* in 1968 and 1977. About 90% of *Pravda*'s readers were interested in articles on international issues, 70% on economic issues, 68% on moral and educational issues and 60% on Marxist theory. The behavior of other newspaper readers was practically the same. People were also interested in articles concerning moral problems related to family and youth and other issues, clearly far from public issues. Only international issues could compete with private ones for the attention of Soviet people.⁴⁶

44 Wolfe 2005, 104-105.

45 Wolfe 2005, 126-128, 133.

46 Shlapentokh 1989, 103, 143, 188.

Sociological surveys show that considerable majority of people was satisfied with Soviet newspapers and television and believed in the accuracy of their information on domestic and international events. At the same time they were interested in other sources of information, especially foreign radio. By the end of 1970's more than half of the Soviet Union's urban population listened to foreign broadcasting more or less regularly. The majority of people listening to foreign radio broadcasts were young, liberal, highly educated men from urban areas of the country. Listening of foreign radio broadcasts was often combined with the distribution of word-of-mouth information. For some, these were the only sources of information they used. This group can be described as 'non-consumers' of official information. The motivation for listening to foreign radio broadcasts was to hear uncensored news and to obtain information not available from sources within the USSR. They also compared the information they received from the Western radio to the news published in the Soviet media. In a media survey from the late 1970's 26% of informants mentioned foreign radio broadcasts as an important source of information for national news and 35% for international news. The people's attitudes toward critical information about their country were binary. Some became more critical in their views on the society, while others found the new information offensive and inappropriate. The majority of listeners found only few new facts in the Western broadcasts: they already knew what real life in the Soviet Union was.⁴⁷

During Perestroika the role of Soviet press changed radically. It started to report problems, catastrophes, accidents, crime and scandals. It also criticized the government harshly. The press presented an alternative image of reality, where both desirable and undesirable events can actually happen simultaneously. Newspapers started to publish more critical letters from readers, as there were almost no forbidden political or ideological topics to discuss. Magazines, *Yunost* among them, started to for example publish political documents, diaries and correspondence of the survivors of Gulags. Due to large print-runs and cheap prices, these magazines were also widely read and discussed around the Soviet Union. This new kind of 'historical journalism' had a major impact on the change of the political and historical worldview of the

47 Parta 2007, 27-34, 42-45, 70; Shlapentokh et al. 2008, 122-123.

Russian public.⁴⁸

Social problems as presented in the socialist, state-controlled media were parts of the official discourse which was covertly opposed by the unofficial discourse of the civil society. According to some views, the conflict between common sense and the official discourse of the rulers caused the collapse of the system. During Perestroika this binary opposition broke as problems related to services, ecology, ethnic issues and the rise in prices were widely discussed in the media. Soviet public opinion became more volatile and flexible than ever, which led to the polarization of views. The media started to reflect the opinions of politically active segments of the population and the public opinion became more influential. Little by little the discussion about the historical past was replaced with open condemnation of the socialist system.⁴⁹

2.4. Censorship and the Language of Soviet Media

In principle the Soviet citizens were guaranteed freedom of speech, according to the constitution from 1977, 7th chapter, 50th article:

*In balance with the wishes of the people and the fortification of socialism-building and the goals of growth, Soviet citizens are guaranteed the following rights: the freedom of speech, print, meetings, political meetings, marches and demonstrations. Implementation of these political rights is guaranteed to workers and their organizations in public buildings, streets and squares and as a possibility to spread information widely and to utilize print, television and radio.*⁵⁰

In reality literature, theatres, media, museums and other sources of information were under strict censorship. The everyday censorship work was done in publishing houses, editorial offices, and different governmental and security institutions and above all by the CPSU and Glavlit⁵¹. While the CPSU and KGB planned the censorship system

48 Malinova 2010, 182-183; Scherrer 2010, 39; Shlapentokh et al. 2008, 122-123.

49 Pietiläinen 2010, 77, 80-81.

50 Russkaya zhurnalistika v dokumentakh. Istoriya nadzora. 370.

51 Glavlit (Glavnoe upravleniye po okhranegosudarstvennykh tayn v pechati pri SM SSSR): General Directorate for the Protection of State Secrets in the Press under the Council of Ministers of the

and set the ideological principles and censorship rules, Glavlit was the executive hand of the system. The CPSU also controlled the work of Glavlit. Party control and supervision over the press were mainly practiced by using administrative tools, such as decisions, decrees and other ordering, punishing or declarative directives of censoring authorities.⁵²

The role of ideological language in the Soviet press was significant. Ideological texts, such as newspaper articles, were textual manifestations of power. They showed the ideologically correct way to depict things and justified the socialist social structures and the power of the CPSU. This image was not questioned in the official texts. These texts can also be seen as spaces, where the allowable and non-allowable, in other words the limits of being, were defined. In the texts real world was replaced with Marxist-Leninist structures: the facts whose integration to ideological framework would cause more damage than benefit were suppressed, as were the facts that demonstrated the ideological neutrality of real-life physical world. There were no clear and predictable relationships between the facts chosen by the Soviet press and elements of reality. For example life in the West was often described through few, carefully chosen images and facts. If something remarkable happened in the West, it was put back in people's minds by highlighting domestic news. On the other hand it was not only the contents of the texts that mattered. The existence of a massive censorship apparatus and the threat of structural violence made the texts important. They had to be taken seriously, whether one believed in them or not.⁵³

The goal of ideological control was to promote the ideological uniformity of Soviet citizens. The limits of allowable discussion were often defined very ambiguously and unclearly. In the definition process also non-ideological factors were often significant. The existence of control did not mean that ideological uniformity would have been reached in the Soviet Union. Social structures set the limits to discussion, but did not define the results. Press freedom also changed notably in different eras of Soviet history. During the Thaw Soviet press discussed issues like hooliganism and stilyagas⁵⁴ publicly, which was impossible during Stalinism and rare

USSR, the state organ that was responsible for censorship and the protection of state secrets in the USSR.

52 Kreegipuu 2011, 30.

53 Leisti 2010, 68-69; Thom 1987, 65-67.

54 Stilyagi (from 'stil', style) were a subculture of young people, who took a lot of influences from the

during late socialism.⁵⁵

Alexey Yurchak sees texts published in the media as authoritative, which means that they were strictly controlled from above. From the speeches of political leaders to official notes and newspaper articles, the language of Soviet state followed a certain model. Dictionaries on 'political, economic and technical terms' were published to standardize the language used in public. Journalists were encouraged to use a 'party-spirited' (partiinye) language, which meant that precise meanings of linguistic structures, such as words, word combinations and sentences, were found in already existing party texts. This was visible in the use of quotes from Lenin's texts, which were used to support even opposite political goals. Later this turned into a more pragmatic way of language use: words and texts had several meanings depending on their references to other texts and contexts. It was not advisable to critique the party in public. Instead, critique addressed to political organs should be professed in political meetings. During the era of Brezhnev authoritative and ritual usage of language reached its peak. Slogans and visual material, such as posters, statues and films, became standardized to support the official ideology, when during the 1950-1960's they included more variable elements. Also organization of events such as demonstrations and celebrations was supervised by the ideology of Central Committee, when earlier these events used to be organized independently by local actors.⁵⁶

The sensation that the language used in letters from readers is sometimes very official and fixed arises from the fact that the writers are imitating the language they faced every day in the media. This type of language offered a 'communicative space' for the people to express their opinions in a way that was tolerated in the society. The writers manipulated the official rhetoric in their own text: they employed official catch phrases and represented themselves in ways they deemed most effective to furthering their cause. By using this rhetoric they created a sense of shared experience. In their letters they do more than just repeat the official version of reality: they also expressed personal opinions and concerns and indicated the state and the party for their failure to fulfill their promises. In post-Stalinism and late socialism this

West to their clothing and behavior. They were considered hooligans by the officials.

55 Fürst 2006, 144; Leisti 2012, 72-73.

56 Yurchak 2006, 50-59.

usage of language was also seen as a problem. The young people knew well the rhetoric needed in public communication, but this did not translate into proper behavior in real life. After the death of Stalin this led to an increase of improper public behavior, two-facedness and careerist aspirations, negative attitudes towards physical labor and disinterest in pioneer organization and socially useful work.⁵⁷

According to Yurchak, the Soviet youth of 1950-1980's became very fluent in composing formulaic texts according to generative principles, reproducing them in ritualized contexts and reacting to them in ritualized ways. In his research he shows that young Komsomol leaders often copied their speeches from each other or newspapers. The usage of the authoritative language was a way of showing loyalty to the system. Language was a way of giving signals more than expressing a thought: through language it was possible to show that one was on the side of the state and communism.⁵⁸ This type of intertextuality was typical for the Soviet ideology-building processes. From this point of view writing, reading and reacting to the letters of Yunost are rituals, which the individuals had learned since early childhood. This kind of ritualized behavior was essential for surviving in the Soviet society of late socialism. If one did not follow the codex of behavior, e.g. did not attend demonstrations or produce ideologically-orientated texts, it harmed the possibilities to study or work.

The authoritative style of language is recognizable from various grammatical details: it is preferable to speak about 'us' instead of 'me', to use passive and impersonal phrases, comparatives and the imperative mode abundantly. The vocabulary of this type of language is very dual and uses a lot of strong military glossary, opposites and intensive adjectives. All fields of life are often described as battles for socialism. Also the idea of development is important, 'steps', 'stages' and 'levels' are all essential when describing the society, which is, according to the ideology, developing towards communism. Because of this, also concepts of 'multiplication', 'development', 'deepening', 'increasing', 'enriching', 'expansion' and 'spreading' are frequently used. Novelties can be absorbed into the old dual conception and unforeseen elements can be integrated into the ideology.⁵⁹

57 Livschiz 2006, 122; Varga-Harris 2006, 105-106, 111.

58 Thom 1987, 141; Yurchak 2006, 61, 86-90.

59 Thom 1987, 23-25, 28-29, 35, 39, 88.

When it comes to style, the authoritative Soviet language is often unclear. The language is frozen into immutable patterns and each noun has its own obligatory adjective. Any irregularity in the ritualized form has an ulterior meaning. The style of language remained the same regardless of the audience and there was no difference between spoken and written styles. The goal of authoritative style is not to please or to prove anything, because everything has already been settled by the founding fathers of Marxism-Leninism. The Soviet authoritative language can also be seen as scientific, as it is full of nouns, avoids verbs, is easy to write and vague about time, facilitates impersonality and is remote from the spoken word and real life. However it differs from scientific language by its metaphors, lack of sense of proportion and tendency to tautology.⁶⁰

The authoritative style of language did not legitimize the power of the CPSU, but instead it spread it through the society and in this way was a part of the functioning of the communist state. The language transmutes ideology into power firstly by formulating ideology and secondly by imposing limits to ideology. For Soviet citizens, all public spheres of life were connected with ideology and hence also with the authoritative style of language.⁶¹

When discussing the language used in the late socialist society, also the concept of discourse community is essential. It refers to the fact that a discourse community shares an assumption about which objects are appropriate for examination and discussion, what operating functions are performed on those objects, what constitutes 'evidence' and 'validity' and what formal conventions are followed. Cultural projects, such as my sources, relate in their social environment: they reflect it, speak to it and make themselves relevant to it. On the other hand they are also autonomous from their social environment to acquire a broader appeal. In the Soviet case Marxism-Leninism had a major impact on the official discourse and to the language used in official situations and in public, even on the official worldview that prevailed in the society.⁶²

This study does not aim to study the language used in the society or to do a discourse analysis on the vocabulary used in the letters, but instead to see the

60 Thom 1987, 48, 50, 55.

61 Thom 1987, 114-115, 122.

62 Swiderski 2010, 147-149.

phenomenon itself behind the rhetoric used. In order to reach this goal, I find it essential to present the most typical features of the language used in public communication and the political system that caused the wide-spread use of this type of language. To express their opinions the youth uses the type of language that was appropriate during the time.

3. MILITARISM, PATRIOTISM, INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY AND OTHER VALUES OF THE SOCIETY

3.1. Societal Values

The most important values of the Soviet society were socialism, patriotism and international solidarity, or internationalism. These three are visible in the letters through narratives of Komsomol-activities, retrospection of Great Patriotic War and international connections and activities with the communist youth organizations of other countries.

The ideal Soviet individual of late socialism identified oneself with the Soviet society and its current political regime. This ideal individual valued social interests much higher than individual ones and in case of conflict between individual and societal interests, the former should have always been sacrificed for the latter. Official ideology did not consider these values as something that was possible to achieve only in the distant future. In fact an essential element of the Soviet ideology was that it considered this image as almost completely realized in the average citizen. This was connected to the ideal of creating a new Soviet person, whose values and way of thinking were qualitatively different from those who lived under capitalism. The new Soviet person was free of egotism and selfishness, and sacrificed his personal interests for the sake of the collective. Soviet authorities tried to create the new Soviet person by controlling living environment and education. Their goal was to transform not only people's daily habits and culture but their modes of thinking and human qualities as well.⁶³

On the other hand especially during Perestroika the leaders of state were eager to criticize Soviet citizens of their tendencies to alcoholism and earning underground income. This vision is highly controversial with the one of late socialist era, as described above. The behavior of authorities toward the people showed that even during late socialism the ideals were not realistic. Restrictions of travel abroad are a good example of this. If the party leaders considered the people as highly devoted to the Motherland as the ideological publications suggest, why were such extensive restrictions necessary? These restrictions were questioned by the press during

63 Hoffmann 2002, 45; Shlapentokh 1989, 18-20.

Glasnost and later Perestroika. It was also only during the period of Perestroika that the government admitted that personal interests of an individual might differ from the interests of the society. One of the key ideas of Perestroika was that if an individual yearned for material comfort, he could achieve these goals through conscientious work for the society instead of semilegal or illegal activities. All in all, massive changes in the state philosophy occurred during Perestroika, when citizens started to be seen as individuals instead of masses. Furthermore, the most essential concept of the late socialism, collectivism, was replaced with new concepts connected to norms, values, culture, consciousness and spirituality. The social collective mass subject changed into an individual personality.⁶⁴

In my study of social values it is important to note that the usage of ideological language does not necessarily mean that Marxism-Leninism was an important part of the writers' worldview. As I have described earlier, the usage of a certain type of language was an important part of one's performance in the society. During late socialism authoritative language and behavior were visible in many levels of the society: in texts, visual materials, such as posters, films, monuments and architecture; rituals, such as meetings, reports, institutional practices and celebrations; and in everyday practices such as school curriculum, prices of goods, and the general organization of urban time and space. In the period from the 1960's to the 1980's these levels became increasingly visible as they became part of people's performance in the society. Especially rituals, such as votes, speeches, reports, slogans, meetings and parades were important. Soviet citizens did not necessarily support the official ideology, but performing it was essential for the reproduction of social norms, positions, relations and institutions.⁶⁵

The whole society was organized into collectives. Enterprises, offices, residential blocks and Komsomol-units were all different types of collectives. The Soviet ideologues realized that demand to make sacrifices to the society was seen as abstract by most of the citizens. Instead, working for the collective, an entity in which each individual knows most of the members was more humanized and therefore successful. Collectivism was also the leading moral value and raised feelings like altruism, comradeship and friendship. The ideal individuals depicted in novels and

64 Shlapentokh 1989, 21-23; Swiderski 2010, 156-160.

65 Leisti 2010, 70; Yurchak 2006, 25-26.

movies usually sacrificed their personal life for the sake of the collective. The collective also served as a watchdog and as an official moral educator for its members. Naturally there were also unofficial collectives and networks, such as unofficial clubs or groups of friends. These unofficial collectives were essential in everyday life, as they offered various benefits, such as possibilities to buy things that were not commonly available or to exchange information on various subjects.⁶⁶

The general attitude towards foreign countries was bipartite: Soviet citizens thought that the communist ideals and values they represented in the world were fundamentally 'internationalist' and outward looking and yet they were also aware that traveling beyond the border was in fact nearly impossible. According to the official ideal, a Soviet person was a 'deeply historical being', who lived in not just a country, but in an 'international and historical process'. The worldliness of Soviet identity was intrinsic, as the life in the USSR was multicultural in practice. This was combined to the ideals of collectivism and equality of different ethnic groups and resulted in a very 'cosmopolitan' identity.⁶⁷

According to Yurchak, many common people saw the party as bipartite: on the other hand common people building communism were hard-working, intelligent and compassionate, whereas high party officials were seen as bureaucratic, corrupted and distorting good ideas and policies. Some active citizens were alienated from the boring activities and senseless rhetoric, but still involved in achieving communist goals and ideals. Others saw the performance of rituals and usage of authoritative language as the only way to climb in the social scale. The binary attitude towards communism and official ideology was visible in many ways in everyday life.⁶⁸ The times of October revolution and the Great Patriotic War were often seen as ideal, as was the future, when the communist society would be ready. Only the present was imperfect and because of this it was acceptable to critique the present conditions unofficially or by using suitable rhetoric. On the other hand events preceding the Great Patriotic War were almost non-existent in the letters, which shows that their importance to the individual mentalities was minor when compared to the Great Patriotic War.

66 Kharkhordin 1999, 313-318; Shlapentokh 1989, 129-131.

67 Yurchak 2006, 158-159.

68 Yurchak 2006, 95-98.

An example about the importance of Lenin as a symbolic figure and leader of the country was a letter that was published in 1967. It was the only letter published in the period of 1964-1982 that concentrated on Lenin and his importance for the nation and this way on events preceding the Great Patriotic War. It was written by a professor, who described himself as ‘a member of the CPSU since 1896’:

I am, as an old Bolshevik, especially worried about the questions on education of the growing generation, education on Leninist ideas, on the bright Leninist character. Streaks of his multidimensional character should come up clearly from the pages of our books, from the screen and from the stages of theaters. Any type of misrepresentation of the great character objectively threatens the education of youth and worries us, the old people, who personally knew Ilyich and who worked beside him.⁶⁹

The letter described the societal values as something that should be permanent and unchangeable. The teaching of values was mainly seen as the task of the state and education system: the writer clearly did not see individuals, such as parents, capable to teach their children the right type of values. Lenin was seen as an almost religious figure, whose speeches and even personal character formed a canon, which should not have been changed or misrepresented. The letter was also a vivid example that the people of all ages wrote to this 'youth magazine'. The writer of this letter must have been over 85 years old, if he had been a member of the CPSU since 1896 and was still alive in 1967. In this way the letter also depicted the values that were important for the 'old Bolsheviks', but not necessarily shared by the younger population.

Modern⁷⁰ values had often very limited visibility in Yunost. Many issues that were discussed in the letters became acceptable themes of conversation only during the Thaw. These included the environment, love and marriage.⁷¹ While love and marriage were widely discussed in the letters, only four letters concerning

69 F. Petrov: Misrepresentation of the great character is not acceptable. Yunost 6/1967.

70 In this case ‘modern’ refers to values that did not belong to the canon of traditional Soviet values. Some of these new types of values came from the West and became more visible only during Perestroika, such as the growing interest toward environmental issues. There are different definitions for the word ‘modern’ in connection with values, but I do not discuss these in detail in my work.

71 Brooks 2001, 241-242.

environmental questions were published. In these letters themes such as conservation of nature, respect towards plants and forests, and the wrongness of littering were discussed:

Many feel regret at the disappearance of the nature surrounding us. After all, we have been lucky: we live in a country, whose nature is without a doubt rich and varied. But human activities are at the moment so fast that nature is not able to show all its richness, especially around major building projects and industrial objects. When clearing new areas for building of new objects, we do not always think about saving every tree and every bush – in that case their preservation is not always considered as a necessity.⁷²

Other themes discussed were animal rights, even though the discussion and rhetoric around this theme was fairly naïve, concentrating on the proper treatment of domestic animals. Environmental questions, such as the cases of lake Aral and lake Baikal, became more visible in the values of young people only during Perestroika.⁷³

The themes that were not discussed in the letters are also worth mentioning. Political events of the era raised a wide discussion among the Soviet citizens, but were rarely discussed in public. The majority of Soviet citizens interpreted political events such as the Prague Spring in 1968 and the Soviet attack to Afghanistan in 1979 mostly as necessary stabilizers of world politics. On the other hand already during the Thaw political development in Poland and Hungary was widely discussed among Soviet students. Also the Vietnam War faced harsh protests, but it must be taken into account that while Poland and Hungary belonged to the Soviet satellite states, the Vietnam War was a conflict between the imperialist US and the Vietnamese people.⁷⁴ Current political events were not discussed in my material.

Religion was also a taboo in the USSR. According to the party program an ideal Soviet individual mastered Marxist-Leninist teachings, systemically improved his political ‘culturedness’ and was an atheist. A good Soviet citizen was not connected to and did not attend any church or synagogue and nor marked any event in

72 V. Suvorova: The love for nature, starting from... Yunost 9/1976.

73 Riordan 1988, 561-562.

74 Fürst 2006, 140; Shlapentokh et al. 2008, 121.

his family with religious ceremonials. Still, one third of population considered themselves religious. Fearing reprisal most of these people did not attend religious services, but instead demonstrated a great personal interest toward religion by buying Bibles and other religious literature or artifacts such as icons. The statistics show that in Dnepropetrovsk in Ukraine 34% of newborns were baptized in the Orthodox church in 1970 and 42% of the funerals in the region were performed according to orthodox rituals, which shows that despite the official negative view on religion, religious rituals were important for a great share of the population.⁷⁵ The government had fairly hostile attitude towards religious organizations and people were not encouraged to practice religion. Religiousness was not a much discussed theme in letters. There were few examples of religious people appearing in letters and they were described in a very negative way, which was in accordance with official ideals.

Yunost also omitted other social issues that were considered taboos in the Soviet Union. Social disorder was among them. In reality juvenile delinquency, lack of discipline in schools and hooliganism were growing problems during the post-Stalinism and late socialism. Hooliganism, such as drunken brawls, fights and swearing in public, was a major problem in the society and closely connected to youth. More than 70% of all acts of hooliganism were committed by men under the age of 25.⁷⁶ Newspapers did not discuss this problem and its strongest manifestations, such as suicides, stabbings and murders, were not present in Yunost.

Yunost's publishing policy also silenced political opinions that differed from the official ones. Political views expressed by the youth, such as demands for free press and travel, equal salaries, and termination of censorship were usually expressed within the socialist boundaries and propagated with ideologies such as 'neo-Leninism', 'Socialism with a human face' or 'Perestroika'. These were not published in the media even though, especially during the Thaw, students were encouraged to question current political structures.⁷⁷

The only letter discussing a somewhat delicate subject, the importance of connections in order to get things, was published in 1976:

75 Shlapentokh 1989, 20, 27, 124-125; Zhuk 2010, 197.

76 Fürst 2006, 137; Livschiz 2006, 118-119.

77 Fürst 2006, 141.

... he answered: one has to know how to live, not to lower oneself to stand in queues. When we got to his place, we had a look into his room which was filled with all kinds of alluring things: a Finnish bookshelf, an Arabian divan, a samovar and a Japanese tape recorder – he started to teach me how to live. ‘The most important thing’ – he said ‘are connections. Without those you cannot do anything, even if you have money. --- To be honest, I have always suffered a little bit from the fact that my parents do not have the possibility to buy good quality things. But I would suffer even more if my mum and dad would make friends with ‘useful’ people just because of that. I grew up with different principles – in our house good books are valued above everything else. There is just one problem: I want to be beautifully dressed, I want to look good. When you look modern, you even feel more confident and calm.’⁷⁸

This letter is the only example discussing the problem of blat, or unofficial exchange, which had a major importance for the Soviet society. The system of blat meant taking advantage of social connections and networks in order to gain something. It was strongly connected to the system of unofficial markets and was visible in many spheres of life. People who had connections to those with high positions in the party had better opportunities for entering universities and gaining better positions in the society. The role of word-of-mouth communication was an example of the importance of networks in the Soviet society.⁷⁹ Those taking advantage of this system were described in a negative way, but on the other hand the temptation to take part in blat to gain good quality things was present in the everyday lives of the citizens. The writer of the letter above was pondering between the concepts of being an ideal citizen and settling for the things that were available for everyone through queuing, or following temptations and using connections to buy fashionable clothes and other things that were not commonly available. Even though the system of blat was a somewhat delicate issue to be discussed in a nation-wide magazine, the letter above included many elements of self-evaluation and this way apparently fitted in the education goal and the publishing policy of Yunost.

The themes that were discussed or silenced in Yunost were a result of the

⁷⁸ Ira K.: How to avoid such temptations? Yunost 7/1976.

⁷⁹ Fitzpatrick 2000, 166-182.

publishing policies taken. In the following chapters it is visible that the majority of letters published followed the official state ideology of developed socialism, collectivism and patriotism. The themes discussed in the letters repeated the themes that were important for the state. Even though the opinions expressed in the pages of Yunost belonged to the individuals, the letters that were chosen to be published mostly fitted into a canon of acceptable opinions and views on societal questions. This was not only due to censorship, but mostly to publishing policies. Even though Yunost was a fairly liberal magazine in its own context, the letters published were mostly repeating the magazine's internal policies to publish letters that were in favor of the official ideology. The goals of the Soviet media were to direct public opinions and educate the consumers of its products, so the letters that were published were chosen carefully to support these goals.

3.2. The Great Patriotic War

The letters reminiscing the Great Patriotic War were mostly published in May to mark the Victory Day (9th of May), which was celebrated to commemorate the end of the Second World War. Brezhnev made the Victory Day a holiday in 1965, evoking the memory of wartime suffering, war's cost and the country's losses as reasons why the USSR had not reached the standards of living of the West.⁸⁰ These letters often included narratives about war-time activities or descriptions of the sentiments aroused by films or novels about the war. Most of them point out the importance of collectivism, the sacrifice of individual interests for the sake of the collective, and patriotism that has its roots in the past. This way they are strongly promoting the official values. War is described using phrases that are familiar for the readers, in other words a part of the collective memory of the Soviet people. The letters can also be seen as a part of the people's public performance in the society, as a proof of their patriotism and loyalty to the Motherland.

The Great Patriotic War had changed the Soviet Union both physically and symbolically. It served to validate the original revolutionary prophecy, while at the same time almost entirely overshadowing it, which can be seen from the amount of letters concerning Lenin or the revolution compared to the amount of letters

80 Brooks 2001, 243.

describing the war. The war legitimized the current regime as it had rearranged the 'Soviet fraternal family of nations'. It had divided the Soviet history and life into two distinct eras and it was easy to see the war as a historical turning point. Myths connected to it were major tools for rearranging social and political hierarchies within the Soviet society.⁸¹

In Yunost dozens of narratives about war written by eyewitnesses were published in 1964-1982. The following examples presented typical rhetoric and style for these letters:

I am writing to you as a mother, who lost three sons during one year. First, I lost my youngest son. A bit later my oldest, a 19-year-old student Sasha, went to practical training in Belotokskyi oblast. There he was overtaken by war and he never returned. Until this moment I do not know what happened to him. Second son, 18 year old Leva Smirnov, went voluntarily to a military school in Bolshevo in May 1941 and on the 13th of October at 4 o'clock in the afternoon he died in battle. --- Now life is very different, a good life gained by us and our sons. And now I have a full-grown grandson, he is 18 years old (like Leva a long time ago) and finishing the 11th grade. And I am proud that in many ways he is very similar to my sons.⁸²

I had a happy childhood. Already when I was 8 years old I stepped over the doorstep of our club 'Tekstilshchik'. In our 'Proletarka' there were wonderful plays produced by Georgyi Aleksandrovits Ganges – those were ballets like 'The Red Poppy' and 'The Little Stopping Horse', in which I danced already as a very little girl. And suddenly, war! Terrible time came at night on the 17th of October 1941 when the Germans invaded to town. I remember the great shimmer of fire, when mum, me and my little brother wandered into a crowd of refugees with bags of rusk in our backs, and then returned back... --- After some time the whole factory went to the Great Proletarian Theater to grief the fallen Red Army soldiers (I think they were scouts). I can hardly ever forget it! On the podium there were eight coffins. The people were looking at the

81 Weiner 2008, 7, 18.

82 Varvara Gerasimovna Smirnova: Twelwe days of one year. Yunost 6/1966.

*savaged bodies with eyes widened of horror. I was then 12 years old, but I clearly remember: just then I understood what fascism is!*⁸³

These types of letters aimed to remind the young people about the difficulties faced by the previous generations and strengthen the myth about war-time horrors. Their goal was to encourage the youth to work hard to pay back the older generations the hardships they had to experience in building and defending the Motherland during the war years. Raising patriotism among the youth was an important task of the society, which is why war was an essential part of the official ideology.

The myth of war was driven by a narrative, which changed alongside with the Soviet politics. The cult of war intensified as the Soviet Union moved away from both the October revolution and the war itself. The death of Soviet sons and daughters should not be final or without purpose, so it was seen that the war offered the Soviet Union a new beginning. The myth of the Great Patriotic War occupied a unique place between the formation and disintegration of the Soviet system. The cross-ethnic aspect of the myth integrated new groups of people into the Soviet system. Even when individuality became an important social value during Perestroika, the war remained an important factor in the collective memory and identity of the people.⁸⁴

The war was a central feature in the world of the Soviet citizens through rites and rituals that shaped daily calendars and constantly reminded people about the war, turning them almost into participants of these events. The Soviet landscape was filled with monuments, cemeteries, collective farms and streets that bore names of battles, heroes and dates of the great event. Literature, music and cinema were full of war anthologies, memoirs, poems, albums and films that celebrated the war.⁸⁵ As an important part of popular culture, war raised emotions among the youth. In her letter a girl from Sverdlovsk described her feelings about a movie ‘Nu i molodezh!’ (Oh, the youth!) by the Gruzinskaya kinostudiya:

You might not believe me, but after this film I understood, what it means that the war deprived everything, stroke out everything and what it means to die for

83 Diana Yablokova: I can hardly ever forget it... Yunost 5/1975.

84 Weiner 2008, 380-385.

85 Weiner, 20.

Motherland, 'without loving enough, without smoking the last cigarette 'til the end.' On the screen lads from Tbilisi went to the front, but I, looking at the screen, saw guys from the class 10B who graduated in Tyumen in 1969. I myself fell into a narrow trench, which I was not allowed to leave, as behind it was the sunny Tbilisi and the statue of Griboyedov. But I felt that behind me was school number 37 in Tyumen, the statue of Kuznetsov and the favorite bench of class 10B, where we all could sit. I saw tanks, a lot of tanks with swastikas; they crawled towards me, right towards me and... towards the green bench in the park. --- What kind of feelings does the film arise? Hate towards enemies, responsibility for the future, for the Motherland. Such a huge responsibility: it is my task to protect it. Strong concern that it is my classmates who will remain fallen on the ground.⁸⁶

When discussing the Great Patriotic War, the concept of collective memory is essential. Collective memory refers to the way historical events are made into shared cultural knowledge through books, films and museums. The letter above was an example of the effects these cultural products of the collective memory could have on an individual. The collective memory is always shaped by the surrounding community. The concept of memory is also often seen as essential as many human features, such as identity, culture, gender, ethnicity, nationality and heritage, are at least partly based on it. Realms of memory are specific objects that codify national memory. They can be immaterial or material, such as festivals, speeches, flags, holidays and school textbooks. These subjects represent the past in popular consciousness. They are cultural to the extent they are shared and constitutive of a culture to the degree they comprise the collective identity of those who share it. They are historical as they survive from the past and at the same time they symbolize the past of a society.⁸⁷ Collective memory was an essential part of the Soviet nation-building process. The cultural products enforcing collective memory aimed to unify the Soviet people, which included many different nationalities with different languages and cultures.

The military-patriotic education in schools was described as systematic

86 Marina Sobstel': No, this should not be called a comedy! Yunost 8/1970.

87 Berkhofer 2008, 42-43; Green 2008, 104-105.

educational and organizational work based on the principles of Marxism-Leninism directed at strengthening the unity of the armed forces and people, and at promoting qualities of patriotism and internationalism among Soviet citizens. It also aimed to supply the students with knowledge, ability and skills required for fulfilling the duty of defending the Motherland. The goal of this education was to influence the feelings, will, mind and physical development of students in order to teach them attitudes and knowledge necessary for defending their homeland and the other countries of the socialist community and for providing international assistance to young developing countries in their struggle against imperialism. Military-patriotic education was in many ways connected to all the key values of the Soviet society. This education started in the kindergarten and continued through different school levels. Patriotism and militarism were a part of all school subjects, including natural sciences. Especially history lessons had a great importance on this education. Patriotism was also visible in the activities of various youth organizations, especially the Komsomol.⁸⁸

An example of implementation of collective memory and military-patriotic education is this description of a 14-year-old student about her feelings when standing on guard with her comrades from Komsomol at the memorial of the Great Patriotic War:

People are passing by. Here they slow their steps, giving their respect to the immortal feat of valor of the fallen soldiers. Here, closer to the gray tiles comes an elderly man, stops and slowly takes off his hat. The wind moves his gray hair and he just stands there. What is he thinking? His fallen friends? The war? The war... Too much bitterness it has brought to our country. We know about it only from books, films and stories of our fathers and grandfathers. But seeing the grief of this man, who is still not going away, one starts to little by little understand what war is. And still he is standing... The years passed, new people grew up, new cities were founded, but the scars that fascism caused cannot be healed. Our losses... Our losses in people.⁸⁹

88 Kuebart 1989, 103-105.

89 Natasha Kuznetsova: We cherish their memory. Yunost 5/1971.

The two letters above show that the state education on patriotic values also had an impact. When young people were constantly exposed to the official narrative of war through memoirs published in magazines, entertainment, such as movies and books, and pioneer and Komsomol-activities, these values had a strong impact on the young people's public performance. On the other hand these two letters represent only two very strong and emotional descriptions. Ideological education of the state most probably did not have a similarly strong impact on all young people.

The overall conservatism, which was dominant during late socialism, was also visible in the narratives about the war. The war became the most important national symbol, through which the USSR was depicted as a messiah that saved Western Europe from fascism. At the same time freedom, which was gained through the sacrifice of victims of the war, and the new role of the state in international politics were emphasized. The national identity of Soviet citizens during late socialism was an interesting combination of patriotism and image of the USSR as a keeper of peace in the whole world. The party program highlights the dual nature of an ideal Soviet individual as a peacekeeper and a defender of the Motherland. The ideal individual was patriotic, ready to defend the Motherland, politically vigilant, proud of achieving the first socialist society, capable of evaluating social phenomena from a class point of view, able to demonstrate solidarity for those who struggle against imperialism, and quick to defend the ideas of socialism.⁹⁰

A good example about this phenomenon is the depiction of a young writer about his sentiments about the war:

*I didn't experience the war, and I don't want to, but it will follow through my whole life alongside and inside me. I will never forget them, from the soldier that received the first attack to those who fell on Victory Day. The youth from all over the world should remember them!*⁹¹

As the three letters above show, the general attitude towards war was very negative. The writers felt deep compassion toward the people who suffered during wartime. However the question whether they were ready to similar sacrifices remains open. The

90 Kelly 1998, 263-264; Shlapentokh 1989, 19.

91 Aleksey Leshsenko: The bondage of time should not break! Yunost 2/1979.

first of the young writers described her responsibility to defend the Motherland, but the other two never mentioned that they would be ready for similar sacrifices as the youth generations of the 1930's and 1940's.

When the constant repetition of war and patriotic themes in various fields of popular culture is taken into consideration, it is no surprise that young people writing to Yunost found these themes familiar to themselves. The Great Patriotic War was one of the most popular themes of letters during the period of my study. The publication of these types of letters was favorable for the state as it unified the Soviet people and solidified further the patriotism among youth. The letters above also show that patriotism formed a part of the mentality of young people. Patriotism was also visible in many letters discussing other themes. This is a sign that patriotism was not only a question of past and collective memory of the war, but mostly a value connected to the present: the working life and Komsomol-activities.

3.3. The Komsomol

The Komsomol (Kommunisticheskyi Soyuz Molodyozhi, Communist Union of Youth) had a major role in the lives of many young people writing to Yunost. The members of Komsomol were 14-28-year-old and actively involved in organizing various events in schools, factories and kolkhozes. They paid a nominal subscription for their membership. In order to become a member one had to know the history of the CPSU and the Komsomol and to get a recommendation from at least two or three members of Komsomol or the party. This was for the sake of form only, as in reality all young people of a certain age could be included into Komsomol. Their knowledge was tested in annual Lenin Pass (Leninskyi zachyot) at which a member answered questions concerning his engagement in Komsomol work, knowledge of the Soviet constitution, recent party decisions and current events in the country. This educational work of the Komsomol included writing an individual plan of self-development, which included study plans, ideological work and labor training and was seen as the basic form of forecasting the social development of an individual. This plan and its fulfillment were discussed annually at a Komsomol meeting. The education also included lectures on communism and the works of Lenin and finally the Lenin Pass in the end of the year. The children below the age of 14 were members of the Pioneer

organization, which was also under party control. 7-10 year old children were Octobrists and even younger children in the kindergartens were taught the values and ideology of the society.⁹²

In the 1970's the amount of members of Komsomol rose from 25 million to 40 million. In practice this meant that the majority of youth in the country belonged to Komsomol. By the end of 1984 there were 42 million Komsomol members in the country. By comparison, in 1984 the country had 8 million junior and senior high school students and 6 million students in universities and colleges. The members were rarely excluded from Komsomol. The mission of Komsomol was to assist the party in the communist education of youth, to commit them into society-building and defending of the Motherland. Komsomol worked under strict party control and it spread its ideology through newspapers. The state published 233 Komsomol and pioneer magazines in 26 languages. These publications had a total circulation of 75 million copies. The biggest one of these was Komsomolskaya Pravda with a circulation of over 16,5 million copies.⁹³

The Komsomol was responsible for organizing much of the youth activities during the 1950-1980's. Some of them were strictly ideological, such as reading party texts, performing political assignments, participating in meetings, parades and elections, while others were more informal, including various cultural, social, musical and sporting events. Most of school children became members when they were fourteen or fifteen years old. The membership of Komsomol was practically a requirement for certain activities, such as applying to a university. In the 1980's approximately 90% of secondary school graduates were members of Komsomol, but according to a sociological survey from 1986, two thirds of Komsomol-members would not have joined the organization if they had believed in equal career opportunities without the membership. This is a sign of the lack of commitment to the values Komsomol represented.⁹⁴

Organizational structure of Komsomol was strictly hierarchical: the Central Committee of Soviet Komsomol was the highest organ. Under its subordination were

92 Kharkhordin 1999, 332-333; Riordan 1989a, 21-22, 25-27; Shlapentokh 1989, 108; Weaver 1981, 2; Yurchak 2006, 110.

93 Riordan 1989a, 21-22, 25-27; Shlapentokh 1989, 108, 110; Weaver 1981, 147; Yurchak 2006, 110.

94 Riordan 1989a, 33-34; Yurchak 2006, 81.

the central committees of republics, regions, provinces, cities, districts, committees of schools and factories and finally Komsomol cells, where rank-and-file members worked. This hierarchy was reflected to individuals: the higher the position, the more ideological training one received. Those who worked on district or higher level were usually full-time 'ideological workers' and got training at the Higher Party School, which was a graduate-level establishment for those trying to achieve a position in the party.⁹⁵

Already during the Thaw Komsomol was harshly criticized by Soviet students. They saw Komsomol as boring and unable to rally politically oriented youth. Komsomol members accused the organization of being a marionette of the party, inflexible in its procedures and out of touch with the true interests of young people. According to the critics, members of Komsomol had become 'gray mass'. The same accusations existed already during Stalinism. Even then Komsomol was considered unnecessary in its mass character. After the war the number of Komsomol-members increased and at the same time formality, bureaucracy and rigidity sapped much of the organization's credibility.⁹⁶

Some criticism toward the organization was published in Yunost as well. One of the letters that was published in 1977 expresses soft and careful criticism to Komsomol and its members:

I study on the 9th grade. In our class almost everyone is a member of Komsomol. But I haven't joined yet. Even though I study normally and am not against communal issues. But the whole thing is that in our school the Komsomol members don't stand out from everyone else. If I should judge by our guys, the Komsomol members only have to pay regularly their subscriptions and take part in Komsomol-meetings a couple times a year. And if you could only see, what kind of meetings those are! My friend, a Komsomol member, told me that when choosing the school committee (Komsorg), all those who were nominated flinched and refused right away! Anyway, I decided to join Komsomol only when I finish this school and enter an institute or go to

95 Yurchak 2006, 82-83.

96 Fürst 2006, 140-141.

*work. After all, the real Komsomol organizations are there!*⁹⁷

This is a typical example about the style of public letter-writing. It pointed out that the problems were caused by bad individuals, not the institution itself. Even though the writer described forms of activities that were probably typical for Komsomol, he felt that the activities provided were not sufficient. Most probably he was looking for something more heroic, something that would have resembled the image Komsomol had in public.

Typically Komsomol was described as something that gave life of an individual its meaning and contents. In their letters people were describing their problems and difficulties in life and in most cases work in Komsomol offered salvation from difficult family environment and social problems. Pseudonym V.K. sent five letters to Yunost describing her difficult childhood and youth with a religious and violent father. The role of religion seems essential for the character of the father, which fits well the atheist ideology of the state:

*He is, I forgot to mention, religious, this father of ours. Icons hanging on the walls like in churches, or maybe even more. And once he hung a religious picture on the terrace. It was somewhat shameful for me, as the girls come to visit me and we sit there sometimes as it's clean there. My mum took the picture and put it in the chest of drawers. He came and right away wanted to break the television with his fists. And I had been working and saving and bought that television with my own money. --- He forces me to go to church, but otherwise I'm not allowed to go anywhere. I'm not a Komsomol member, even though by character I'm more happy than uncommunicative. --- I feel that I'm living a dual life. On one side, there are books, work, and friends. But on the other – everlasting fear of father, prayers. In the evenings, festive days and Sundays it's not allowed to switch on the television and reading books is a sin. I have to read aloud religious books. And go to church.*⁹⁸

The life of V.K. changed as she moved away from home to Novgorod. She found a

97Aleksandr Ivanov: About the most serious and current for me. Yunost 7/1977.

98 V.K.: Place in life. Yunost' 8/1970.

new job and moved to a boarding house. She applied for an institute and found new friends. Especially the secretary of local Komsomol organization became important for her as he helped her with the job, apartment and all other new things. These actions are in accordance with the typical features of a Komsomol member, which are described in the two letters above: they were ideally interested in ‘communal issues’ and ‘happy’ or ‘communicative’ by character. In her last letter the new lifestyle is finalized, when V.K. is accepted to Komsomol:

But the most important thing that I want to share with you with a great joy: I was accepted to Komsomol. It is so important to me and such a joy! Of course you must understand me. I feel myself a full member of the society. After all, I am very happy and cannot say anything more, I just feel like singing all the time. It's a shame that 'a bear entered my ear' (a saying: I do not have ear for music) and it's not a joy to listen to me. But it is not that important. What is important is that I found my place in life.⁹⁹

In this case Komsomol was seen as something progressive and positive, opposite to the patriarchal and religious life in the family. In her new life V.K. herself was the main actor, a working Komsomol-member living on her own, not a traditional family girl oppressed by her father. Komsomol is described as a savior from the previous life. Only as a member of Komsomol V.K. was able to feel herself ‘a full member of the society’.

Frustration towards Komsomol described in the letters was always connected to problems in other fields of life. If a person had problems with Komsomol, it was just a sign of other problems as well. Again, the problem was never the institution itself, but the person as a member of the institution. A good example of the phenomenon was this letter from a girl, describing her disappointment towards Lenin Pass and her life in general:

I have never written to you and never would have, if not for yesterday's Lenin Pass. Now you must wonder, what about it? And what about me? Don't laugh

99 V.K.: Place in life. Yunost 8/1970.

at me, if I write something incorrectly, maybe even with mistakes. It is after all a big shame: an eighteen-year-old girl and a letter with mistakes. To make things clear, I study in a technical institute in a small town and live in a boarding house. At the moment we have working practice and yesterday was the Lenin Pass. And I was ashamed. They asked me about the 18th congress of Komsomol, and I know it very badly... You know, I have started to be afraid of myself. I have become uninterested towards everything. I have fallen into lethargy, like a bear during the winter. It's been going on for a year already. The whole year I studied in the technical institute and was uninterested towards everything. I have even started to study worse. --- Yesterday at the Lenin examinations they asked me about my plans for the future and I couldn't answer; I didn't know what to say as I don't have a goal, nothing. Why did it start, I do not know, because I wasn't like this before. And what is even worse, I have already tried drinking and smoking.¹⁰⁰

As an institution Komsomol was a representation of all the most important values the society had. If one failed in the activities of Komsomol, it meant that the individual had also serious problems in other fields of life. In the letter above the lack of self-training and inability to plan one's future have led to other problems, such as drinking and smoking. This narrative points out the importance of self-discipline and self-education, which were important parts of the Komsomol's ideology.

The membership in Komsomol was officially an honor and a patriotic sign of carrying on the task of building communism, inherited from previous generations. A member of Komsomol was a good person, who supported the values promoted by the state and wanted to fulfill them in his own life. One of the writers describes her feelings, when she got accepted into Komsomol:

And now I understood and felt, what I otherwise wouldn't have understood. For real I understood those words that are written on the application: 'I want to be in the first rows of builders of communism, continuing the task of fathers and grandfathers.' When I took the application form, my hands were shaking:

100 Valentina Alyoshina: What from now on... Yunost 4/1979.

am I really worth this? And in the regional committee I understood: here is my place, here, side by side with other young Soviet women and men in the invincibly strong army of young warriors. In the ranks of an army, where Pavka Korchagin (the main character of the novel 'How the Steel Was Tempered' by Nikolay Ostrovsky), the builders of Dneproges (a hydroelectric power station at the Dniepr) and Komsomolsk-na-Amure (a city in Siberia), Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya (a famous partisan), members of Youth Guard, and young settlers fought. Many warm hearts of Komsomol members were pierced with bullets of the enemy, the names of many proud Komsomol members are written with golden letters into the history of our Motherland. We are not afraid to step into the same rank with the heroes, as long as we know: our place is next to them, we are their successors. In the places of the fallen the new soldiers shall rise. We, the members of Komsomol are the army: the party is our commander. --- And even when the dreams of mankind shall fulfill and communism will be built, we shall not give up, but strive forward, because we are members of Komsomol.¹⁰¹

This writer is strongly representing the norms for an ideal Soviet citizen presented in party programs. In the political sphere this ideal meant that an individual took an active role in the life of the collective and the country, rejected everything that would contradict the socialist way of life and the persistent struggle for communist ideals, following the prescription of the communist morality as based on collectivism, humanism and activity.¹⁰²

As the cited letter shows, work in the Komsomol was often an important part of the social identity and the role of an individual. Features that the members of Komsomol shared were the same ones that distinguished them from others. The writer of the letter above clearly saw the membership of Komsomol as part of her internal identity, a part of what she felt she was. In reality the membership was more likely to be a part of her identity that was shaped externally, by attitudes and institutions.¹⁰³ Here we need to take into account the major impact of time and culture: at the time of

101 Marina Kasimova: I was accepted into Komsomol! Yunost 4/1974.

102 Shlapentokh 1989, 19.

103 Gunn 2006, 133.

writing the values and institutions that are completely external from our point of view, have been important parts of the internal identity of an individual. This is due to the overall ideological atmosphere of the society, which was present in everyday lives of its citizens. It remains difficult to point out, which features of behavior were parts of the internal identity of an individual and which ones were shaped externally.

It must also be kept in mind that many members of Komsomol used the organization only as a means to achieve their own purposes and were not concerned with the stated goals of Komsomol. The organization was seen incapable of representing the interests of its members. In a sociological study conducted in Estonia and Belarus in 1981-1984 only 14% of the respondents mentioned joining Komsomol as a great event in their life.¹⁰⁴ This result shows that in the end of late socialism cases like the letter above formed a minority, whereas the majority of youth considered other spheres of life more important than Komsomol and its activities.

Most of Komsomol members were involved in the organization through various assignments, which were sent from higher Komsomol bodies to lower ones. They included political lectures, ideological examinations, speeches at Komsomol meetings, work on collective farms, preparations for national holidays, participation in parades, and helping war veterans.¹⁰⁵ The everyday activities of Komsomol were mentioned in a few letters, such as this example, which described a worker's life in Leningrad:

After the 25th meeting of delegates of the CPSU we pondered how to improve work quality. The Komsomol members of our brigade decided to organize a competition to achieve a 'Certificate of work maturity' for the young workers, working in the production from its beginning, for those able to make independent decisions, for those who can guide newcomers. And the first ones in our factory to get this certificate were Sasha Ivanovits and me. This happened in the feast of 'The Day of Young Worker' in the cultural palace 'Yubileynyi'. Veterans of work (veterany truda) handed me the certificate and gave me good and demanding instructions. I was very happy and felt myself equal with the workers who create powerful machines, tractors, turning

104 Shlapentokh 1989, 109.

105 Yurchak 2006, 81.

*machines. I think that the competition for the 'Certificate of work maturity' should inspire the youth. But until now only seven people in our unit have achieved this certificate.*¹⁰⁶

This letter described one example of the work of Komsomol in factories and other working places. It also mentioned a problem connected to these activities: only few people were interested in them. This raises a question whether commendations, such as the certificate of work maturity, really were important to the majority of workers. These were promoted by the state and especially in the media, but in reality it seems that the majority of workers remained indifferent towards them.

The bipartite nature of the society was visible in Komsomol as well. There was a clear distinction between 'normal people' and 'activists', who were often also called 'careerists'. The careerists often reached an impressive career at an early age. On the other hand Komsomol was a very collective entity and most of its members shared a particular ethical and moral responsibility for others. This system was similar to 'circle binding' (krugovaya poruka, the collective responsibility to the state), which was the basis of the Soviet society. For most rank-and-file members of Komsomol the collective of friends was more important than the state institution itself.¹⁰⁷

An example about tight connections and friendship between members of Komsomol is the discussion that went on in several issues of Yunost in 1978. The discussion started with a letter from a former pioneer Natalya who wanted to get in contact with other people who took part in the pioneer camp Artek in 1967. There were over 50 000 pioneer camps in the USSR and over 14,5 million children attended them in summer for sessions of three or four weeks. Artek was a showcase camp, a Young Pioneer Camp situated close to Gurzuf and Ayu-Dag in Ukraine. It was founded in 1925 and during its heyday 27 000 children a year spent their vacations there.¹⁰⁸ The discussion showed that most probably new friends found from the camp and activities organized there were far more important than the ideology promoted by the organization. The writers themselves tried to describe these two as something tightly connected to each other: their main task was building socialism together and

106 Nikolay Il'in: It came, the working maturity! Yunost 1/1977.

107 Yurchak 2006, 104-105, 109, 111.

108 Weaver 1981, 115.

the most important feature of the new friends was their commitment to this process. Whether this really was the opinion of the majority, is open to question. The importance of the camp came up in Natalya's first letter:

*Today, they say, Artek has become larger and they have built new corpuses, but already then our camp 'Gornyi' was wonderful! I often think back to the friendship of 'Almaznyu', our unit. We were of different nationalities and came there from different corners of the country and made very good friends!*¹⁰⁹

Natalya's unit comprised of 34 people of eight different nationalities and in the following issues of Yunost she received hundreds of answers from all over the Soviet Union. Of these letters, 22 were from people of Natalya's unit, which proved that Yunost was a very popular magazine among its target audience and its edition was distributed to all corners of the USSR. Natalya herself lived in the Urals and her comrades resided in places such as Kiev, Tallinn, Penza (a town west of Samara), Sarapul (a town in Udmurtia), Moscow, Arkhangelsk and Mary (a town in southern Turkmenistan). According to an analysis made by Yunost, 68% of people from Natalya's unit received higher or professional education. All of them became members of Komsomol and 30% members of the party.¹¹⁰ The replies described Artek as an ideal way of making new friends and learning skills that were appreciated in the Soviet society:

*None of us needed to pretend. It was not important whether you were from town or village, if you had a beautiful shirt, if you had a fashionable dress or so – we valued something else. For us Artek was an exam on honesty and ability to live in a collective, which we all supported.*¹¹¹

When I returned from Artek, my life changed significantly. I changed in some way: became more sociable and active so that there were no signs of the

109 Natal'ya Kramarenko: Meeting ten years after... Yunost 3/1978.

110 A meeting ten years after... Yunost' 12/1978

111 Valeriy Tselera: I work as a machinist. Yunost 4/1978.

previous inflexibility. In my region pioneer activists gathered and I told a lot about everything that I had seen and learned at Artek. I noticed how the attitudes towards me changed then. People started to ask me more questions and the fact that I had been to Artek placed new expectations on me. --- Responsibility-giving environment exposes people to work and friendship and to all the good things that were present in the Artek-way-of-life, where the first seedlings of communism could really be seen in us.¹¹²

Komsomol was again described as something that brought out the best features of an individual, taught them to work in a collective and to sacrifice their own interests for the sake of common good. The Soviet society demanded both collectivism and individualism from its members. Work in and for the collective was the basis of the worldview promoted by the state, but also individual development was encouraged. One had to challenge himself in order to become a better person and a better communist. Komsomol camps and other activities supported the growth of these good features and young people were therefore encouraged to be actively engaged in these activities.

In the late 1970's and the 1980's the contradiction between the ethics and aesthetics of Komsomol-work became more distinct. Western rock music was played in Komsomol-events, even though officially this kind of culture was seen as bourgeois. The rich heteroglossia of Soviet youth culture became visible in Komsomol as well. The attitude towards bourgeois ideology and morality was officially uncompromising, but in reality issues like music were not seen as harmful to communism. This means that the nominal identity of the group, 'members of Komsomol', remained constant, but the meaning of being part of the group changed significantly, which means that the identity of the group was virtual and open to change, depending on political, social and ideological factors. In modern sociological studies the central role of the state and its official knowledge in the institution of modern social identities is present. Identities are often viewed as constructed through external agencies and processes of subjection. Also social interaction has a major role

112 Viktor Pimenov: Dreams changed to issues. Yunost 9/1978.

in the formation of an identity.¹¹³ This is especially true for the Soviet society and Komsomol, where the state carried a major responsibility in the identity-building process of the individuals, at least according to the official ideology. This was visible in the emphasis put on patriotic education in schools and extra-curricular activities in Komsomol. On the other hand the individual himself had the responsibility for decision-making, at least according to the rhetoric. Individuals themselves were expected to strive to become better persons and to reach this goal they were expected to join Komsomol.

3.4. International Solidarity

The Soviet state made a clear distinction between good and bad forms of international cooperation. 'Cosmopolitanism' was a product of Western imperialism, which through its imperialist goals strove to undermine the value of local patriotism among the peoples of the world and weaken their national sovereignty. During Stalinism the differences between the capitalist and Soviet system were pointed out very actively in public discourses. Stalin himself described the systems as follows: 'In the camp of capitalism there are imperialistic wars, national strife, oppression, colonial slavery and chauvinism. In the camp of the Soviets, there are on the contrary, mutual confidence, national equality of rights, and peaceful co-existence and fraternal collaboration.' The opposite of cosmopolitanism was not nationalism, but internationalism, which was seen as a positive and enriching figure. In practice it was often difficult to separate cosmopolitan and internationalist features in cultural products, such as art and music.¹¹⁴

In the party program an ideal Soviet individual was depicted as a person who followed high culture in the communication between different ethnic groups and nations, and was intolerant toward nationalism and chauvinism. Internationalism was an important part of Komsomol ideology and foreign youth often took part in pioneer camps, such as Artek. In the end of the 1970's 888 children from 59 foreign countries took part in the international program of Artek.¹¹⁵ International contacts were also mentioned in the letters:

113 Gunn 2006, 134-135; Yurchak 2006, 219-221.

114 Marantz 1976, 296; Yurchak 2006, 162-165.

115 Shlapentokh 1989, 19; Weaver 1981, 117.

And now in front of my eyes is our 'Almaznaya', cypresses, even canteen and the road to it, Medvedgora - everything, everything, everything! And you hear the universal vow: 'Artek-pioneer today, Artek-pioneer forever!' Fireworks crack, sparks fly and around you are friends from Mauritania, France, Guinea... You cannot forget it! I can still feel the sea breeze and taste of salty water...¹¹⁶

People from other countries were described as 'friends', but as the following letters show, some of these 'friends' supported the right values, while others were simply 'wrong'. In this way socialism resembled a religious activity. Those who shared the same ideology and values were seen as good people, who needed support in their struggle towards the communist society. The capitalists were described as people who were 'wrong' and not willing to discuss to find the 'right' values. In official Soviet rhetoric this binary division to right and wrong was strongly stressed and it is repeated in the letters as well.

International solidarity as a social value was visible in several letters. Behind this solidarity was the attempt to prevent developing countries from moving into capitalism. International solidarity was also visible in school education.¹¹⁷ Both militarism and pacifism were essential parts of the official ideology of the USSR, which was visible in the letters of Yunost. International affairs were discussed in the letters from several points of view. The writers described activities in international friendship societies, Soviet youth volunteering abroad and foreign volunteers that had come to the USSR from abroad. Young volunteers from Moscow described their living conditions in Cuba as follows:

We are from Moscow, a bit over twenty years of age. And at the moment we are working in Cuba. --- We have been in Cuba for almost a year now. We have fallen in love with this country and its amazing, warm-hearted people and its happy, revolutionary spirit. Every day we see the tropical exoticism: palm trees, beautiful sunsets and sunrises with feather-like clouds, climbing the feet

116 Natalya Palagina: A meeting ten years after. Yunost 12/1978.

117 Kuebart 1989, 105.

of 'Big Bear' (Ursa Major, a constellation) and the moon, resembling the horn of a buffalo. We hear the cicadas trill loudly at night and much more. But now we cannot write about all this as we are not poets and also because all this exoticism would be 'magnified'. In our opinion, there is nothing more poetic than white-trunked birches and spruces, but we are not in the Motherland, in Moscow. We don't see its streets and smiles of passers-by, we don't see Moskva-river with its bridges and promenades, or the Red Square. We cannot sit in the midnight-trolleybus 'at the moment of despair'. We truly miss Moscow.¹¹⁸

An equally warm description about the USSR was sent to Yunost by a Bulgarian volunteer Dobrin Dobrev, who dreamed about working in the construction sites of Siberia:

When I think about life, I have to stop at one truth: in how many ways my homeland and the whole world are connected to the Soviet people, whose soul is as wide as their homeland. Because of this truth I wrote this letter. I want to leave something hand-made in the Soviet land in order to respect the Russians fallen for my homeland, to honor the great October revolution and out of love towards the Soviet people. Even though it's very little. I want to work for a year along Yenisey or Lena (rivers in Siberia) as a construction worker. The money which I will earn, I will donate for building of a kindergarten in Leningrad. Why along Yenisey or Lena? Because I'm intrigued by austerity. I have already worked in northern conditions in the Soviet Republic of Komi, along river Mezen. But now I want to go along Yenisey or Lena. Why a kindergarten? Because children are purity, happiness, bliss and hope. Why in Leningrad? Because the gunshots from 'Aurora' started a new era in the world.¹¹⁹

These two letters describe from different points of view the role of Soviet Union in the world of its citizens and allies. As the Muscovite boys wrote, other countries such

118 N. Kornejev: To our countrymen in Cuba, Yunost 1/1965.

119 Dobrin Angelov Dobrev: Dobrin Dobrev travels to Siberia, Yunost 10/1975.

as Cuba could be wonderful, but never as wonderful as the USSR. The task of Soviet people was to help other countries to reach the same level the USSR had already reached: developed socialism. The Bulgarian volunteer also saw the USSR as the leader of socialist countries, the birthplace of modern socialist society. The rhetoric he used was very idealistic and no faults in the Soviet system were mentioned. Generally the letters concerning international issues remained more patriotic than internationalist by nature.

An active member of the Saratov University International Solidarity Club described the various activities of the club in his letter: the club collected money to Chile and to the children of developing countries through work activities and corresponding with the foreign communist youth organizations:

*In December 1975 among the 3rd year students of the geography faculty in the group of geomorphologists there was a Komsomol meeting, concerning the forthcoming Lenin Pass with the slogan 'You are calling me to feats of valor, Komsomol membership card!'. The guys were pondering how they make these examinations a true test of quality for Komsomol members as political soldiers, to direct their will and energy towards something concrete. And they decided – from 3rd to 10th of March, on the days of surge on postal traffic (because of the international women's day on the 8th of March) they will help out at post offices and the money collected will be sent to the Soviet Peace Fund. --- The club has wide correspondence with other clubs of the country and with peers abroad. But our major task is still to propagandize the ideas of Soviet Peace Fund – the foundation of our hearts – and to familiarize new and new people to its work.*¹²⁰

Such clubs were formed in schools and camps to promote social and political exchanges among youth. The activities included exchanging letters, study of class and anti-imperialistic struggles in developing countries. Also the activities of 'sister-cities' and international communist youth organizations were important. The members of these clubs were expected to propagandize the CPSU and Komsomol through their

120 Valeriy Anisimov: The foundation of our hearts, Yunost 10/1975.

activities. Also the Soviet Peace Fund that is mentioned in the letter was a part of this propaganda and in reality some of its means were used for military purposes as well, which is why especially religious organizations criticized it. One of the most visible working spheres for the international clubs were the World Festivals of Youth and Students held in various, mostly socialist, countries all around the world.¹²¹ Again this letter depicts the great responsibility the Soviet people had towards the other peoples of the world.

All in all these letters show that Soviet youth had a relatively wide range of international connections, despite limitations. Because of the political situation the Soviet youth had most connections with the member countries of the communist bloc. The picture of different forms of cooperation presented in the letters is varied, yet the setting is always the Soviet people helping other peoples of the world. As these letters show, there was no equal friendship between the Soviet people and other peoples of the world. The Soviet society as the only society in the world with a system of developed socialism had the responsibility to teach the other societies.

On the other hand Yunost also published three letters to writer Grigoriy Medynskiy from a young Soviet Jew living in Vienna. The emigration of Jews due to anti-Semitism was the only type of emigration the Soviet state approved in large scale since the 1970's. The letters and the replies to them are connected to this phenomenon as well as to the rise of a more active and open public sphere and to the possibility to express increasingly independent opinions when compared to the years of Stalinism.¹²² The letters did not give a very positive image about life in the capitalist world:

Five years ago me and my parents left our Motherland and headed somewhere, for some reason. You have probably heard that a group of Soviet Jews expressed a wish to leave their true Motherland and moved to Israel. Unfortunately, we were also among them. We spent half a year in Israel and now we have been in Vienna already for 4,5 years. --- Believe it or not, it's not easy to live in the middle of our political enemies for five years already. They are happy for all our failures and ignore all our successes. I discuss with local

121 Weaver 1981, 119-120, 129; Zhuk 2010, 198.

122 Brooks 2001, 242; Shlapentokh 1989, 22.

*people a lot, I fight and argue. It is very difficult to find a person who wouldn't have any prejudices about the Soviet Union, but it's even more difficult to find a person who would understand my will to return. The insensitivity strengthens loneliness and longing. You cannot imagine how important it is to have similar-minded people around you – a collective, striving towards one common goal. How could I talk about collective here, when the whole society consists of individualists or in best case, crowds. Everyone is only working for themselves, for personal benefits. --- I don't work worse than others, but lower my prospects. It wouldn't be hard to work better, but for whose benefit?! After all, the money earned swims back to the pocket of the owner. I don't get any benefit or satisfaction from my work. Back home it's all different! There you know for whom you are working. But Westerners cannot understand it, of course.*¹²³

*It hits your eyes, for example, that we are living better every day and they are struggling more day by day. A clear example from my own life: since we have lived in this apartment (3 years), its rent has grown by half. And there are a lot of examples like this. --- I am trying to demonstrate my opinion of Soviet lifestyle. But it is hard, as the transmissions on radio and television are filled with anti-Sovietism. I pass on Soviet literature, talk with people and this increases the amount of good will towards us. It becomes harder when people start to tell me what is going on in the Soviet Union. Then my opinion is not taken into account at all. I say to them, for example, that there has been no unemployment in the Soviet Union in the past 40 years. --- How hard it is to be a communist here! It can cause great amount of troubles especially at work.*¹²⁴

These letters showcased the main values of the Soviet society: patriotism and appreciation towards the Soviet Union and its political system of collectivity, which gave life and work of an individual a meaning. The life of an individual was closely connected to the collective. The capitalist system, on the contrary, consisted of individualists, who were simply 'wrong' and not willing to listen to 'the truth'. The

123 Yura Kovrigar: A never-ending correspondence, Yunost 3/1978.

124 Yura Kovrigar: The correspondence continues. Yunost 6/1978.

letters were presenting an example of personal struggle of the writer: he had abandoned the Motherland, which was the worst thing an individual could do for the collective. The letters also represented an interesting example of the typical image of the West that was spread in the Soviet media: people, who knew what it was like to live in the Soviet society and work for the collective, could not be happy under capitalism.

Yura, the author of the two letters above, received hundreds of answers and nine of them were published on the pages of Yunost. Some of them were compassionate and understanding:

*These letters encourage you to analyze your own life, to value and protect those things that we sometimes don't even notice – how important it is to have a Soviet citizenship since birth. I would love to help Yura, even just mentally support him. You shouldn't think that it's mercy. No. It is a natural character of soul for a Soviet person.*¹²⁵

*I feel sorry for Yura. 'What we have, we don't save, the things that we've lost, we cry for.' Of course, in our daily chores we don't always feel what the Motherland is, what a joy it is - to be a Soviet person.*¹²⁶

*In my opinion, there is nothing harder than this kind of longing and life in a foreign, non-native land. Because our land, our air, our sky are not something that one can forget. And even though in everyday life this 'feeling of the Motherland' doesn't easily manifest, it's always inside a person.*¹²⁷

These letters describe patriotism, which was one of the most typical features for the Soviet worldview. Love for the Motherland was connected to the character of Soviet citizens, the landscapes and the overall mentality of the people. All these features seemed to form one entity of the country and its citizens, and these two could not be separated from one another. Compassion toward 'the black sheep' was seen as an

125 Natasha Butakova: About our correspondence. Yunost 9/1978.

126 Ol'ga Reyfman: About our correspondence. Yunost 9/1978.

127 Polina Itkina: About our correspondence. Yunost 9/1978.

essential feature of a good Soviet citizen. On the other hand some of the answers were less compassionate:

I read in 'Yunost' the correspondence with Yura Kovrigar. And I started to feel bitter for Yura. I wouldn't write to him. No! Yes, he gave away Motherland. And Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya he gave away. And all of us, the Soviet people. It's good that he understands it now. But when he moved away, what was he thinking? From the letters of Yura you get the impression that, possibly, he and his family would be allowed to return to the Soviet Union. But what if it was nice in there? (in the West) Would he then write these letters to you? No! I am personally against his return. And on the other hand, what if something happens to our Native Land? Where will Yura be? Sorry, I am very very worried, even my hands are shaking.¹²⁸

I have heard that some Jews, and not only they, leave the Soviet Union and head to 'a capitalist heaven'. I have never been able to understand such people. At school we prove the priority of the socialist system ourselves. We are brought up with principles of bravery and heroism, in the name of love towards the Motherland and we all truly believe in our readiness to feats of valor not only during wartime, but also in busy everyday life.¹²⁹

These latter opinions portrayed Yura as a betrayer of the Motherland and fellow citizens, and pointed out that his deeds should not be forgiven. The first writer even expressed her fear that Yura's sympathy towards the capitalist system might harm the security of the Motherland. In these letters compassion was not stressed in a similar manner as in the ones above, but instead the emphasis lied on the security of the Motherland.

The ideal Soviet citizen was hostile towards the West, its policy, ideology and lifestyle and rejected Western views of Soviet Union and other socialist countries. These ideals were all present in Yura's letters. The ideal citizen should not have displayed any special interest toward Western movies, exhibitions or cultural events,

128 Lena Popova: About our correspondence. Yunost 9/1978.

129 Anna Knyazeva: About our correspondence. Yunost 9/1978.

or desire to make contact with Western tourists or businessmen. If contact was made, it should have been at the request of the authorities and always in the presence of other Soviet people. If a Soviet citizen traveled to the West, he should have brought back only negative perceptions of Western lifestyle. A Soviet citizen was also expected to condemn publicly those who wanted to emigrate.¹³⁰ The last two letters fulfill this ideal by expressing strongly the animosity toward Soviet emigrants and emigration is general.

130 Shlapentokh 1989, 30-31.

4. HUMAN RELATIONS

4.1. Love and Marriage

In the Soviet society even the most private spheres of human life, such as family, were controlled by ideological factors and the party. According to the party program, the individual must observe communist morality, based on the moral values of all humankind and the rules of behavior which emerged in the process of the struggle for socialism in the private sphere. It meant that a person must lend active support to the family as the agent responsible for the health and education of new generations as well as the place where the character of the individual with his or her attitudes towards work, moral, ideological, and cultural values were molded. An individual must also assert genuine human relations among people: comradeship, friendliness, honesty, and modesty in personal and social life.¹³¹

In the period from the 1960's to the 1980's Soviet citizens got married at an early age and often after just a short acquaintance. This is also visible in Yunost, where marriage-related problems were widely discussed in dozens of letters, whereas pre-marital dating was an almost nonexistent phenomenon. Also friendship was discussed only in two letters during the whole period of my study. Marriage and its problems were the most popular themes discussed in the magazine and most writers were young women. Overall maturation took place early, as the following writer depicts:

*After two months I will turn 19, so it's not anymore the age when 'the whole life is ahead'. --- In my opinion specifically at the age of twenty talents determining the character of a human should come out, if there are any.*¹³²

On the other hand inadequate education on human relationships led to some young people being very innocent when they got married. Courses on sex education first started in Moscow schools only in 1980.¹³³ Two of the writers expressed their worries as follows:

131 Shlapentokh 1989, 19.

132 Valentina K.: How to move forward from here? Yunost 4/1979.

133 Weaver 1981, 167.

I am eighteen years old. I still don't know what is love or family life. I read a lot, but I can't find answers from books to questions that worry me, such as: can the girl be the first to confess her love? Is it possible to get married after a short acquaintance or should I first date the man longer? How does one start a family? Please advice me what books to read: not just Tolstoy and Turgenev, those are recommended by everyone, and still they don't help at all. After all we are very different from them and our lives are different.¹³⁴

I am only 17 years old. They say that I'm not stupid and anyway the boys like me – that's for sure. But after all I have to think serious issues: marriage and how to build a strong family. And at this point I start to feel that there are many things I simply don't know. How to, for example, find out which one of my acquaintances will make a good husband and which – a bad one? At the moment I like cheerful, smart and athletic ones. But is all that needed for family life? I would like to know more about marriage, starting from the basics.¹³⁵

It is interesting to notice that the idea of collectivism was visible in these letters as well: the goal of these writers was not to create a good relationship, but instead to build a strong family. The ideal of strong family was very much present already during the period of Stalinism. As these and other letters show, education on relationships was needed and demanded by the young people themselves. Still, sex remained a major taboo in the Soviet society and when Yunost dared to publish an article on relationships and sexuality, it raised a wide discussion for and against sex education. Young people were glad that the theme was finally discussed, whereas the opinion of their parents varied:

I am not a young man. I have three grown-up children – two daughters and a son, and the older daughter just got married. For a father it is embarrassing to talk about sexual themes with one's daughter; with the son it might be easier. But the best way of all is the production of deeply scientific and specialized

134 Liza K.: What to answer to Liza? Yunost 7/1964.

135 Natasha V.: The wait. Yunost 4/1974.

*literature, which is essential for young men, women and spouses.*¹³⁶

*If my 16 year old daughter will be sexually inexperienced when she finishes school, I will be happy, not sad, just like most of mothers.*¹³⁷

*True love doesn't have anything in common with sex and can totally get by without it.*¹³⁸

Attitudes towards sex were very puritanical in the USSR: marriages with long-term, monogamous, heterosexual relationships were the only appropriate form of sexuality. Abstinence until marriage was a means of both to preserve young people's energy for the tasks of socialist construction and to prevent the corruption of socialist principles by sexual hedonism. In reality extramarital relationships were common. Authorities attempted to repress sexuality and bring young people up as platonic 'comrades', future builders of communism. Still, for example in the city of Perm 32% of children were born outside marriage or during the first few months of marriage. Unwanted pregnancies often led to marriage as the position of children born outside marriage was weaker than the position of children born within marriage.¹³⁹ Some of the writers described their difficult positions:

*And after some time, I started to live such a life: all the time dating new guys. To be honest, it didn't make any difference whether they were good or bad. I got so used to all of this that I didn't know how to live in another way. --- And now I am pregnant. I haven't told anyone about this. And after all, I'm not even seventeen years old yet.*¹⁴⁰

I became friends with a soldier; fell in love, even in a very special way. I trusted him and made a terrible mistake. He had already forgotten me, when I told him that there will be a baby. And now it's already the second month when

136 A.: After all, it is necessary! Yunost 6/1974.

137 M.: After all, it is necessary! Yunost 6/1974.

138 G.: After all, it is necessary! Yunost 6/1974.

139 Avdeev&Monnier 2000, 24-26, 29; Dobrotvorskaya 1992, 146; Hoffmann 2002, 92-94.

140 Marina: Eight letters. Yunost 9/1969.

there is not sunshine in my days. I don't blame him for this, after all, now I love him more faithfully and miss him. Dear editors, what can I do? How to get rid of the baby? I don't want anyone I know to find out, not to mention my family.¹⁴¹

I am nineteen years old and already a mother. My son is one year and nine months old. I am happy that I have a son and I am very proud of him. Still, some people complain that he is born outside marriage. Why is it like that? After all, I love my son; he is more precious to me than anything. For him I am ready for anything. After all, for me he is just like all the other children, even though he doesn't have a father.¹⁴²

For many children born outside marriage life remained hard even in youth and adulthood, as this letter shows:

I remember one incident. It was a long time ago, I was still at school. My friend had sent me a banner. When I got to the post I presented my certificate of birth and the form. And a woman who passed by, glancing at the certificate said aloud for some reason: 'Presumably born outside marriage'. I didn't answer anything then, and what could one answer in such a situation? But when I returned home I cried a long time. And called for my father. I prayed him to come to me and to tell the whole world that he is my father. But he didn't hear me.¹⁴³

As all of these examples show, even very delicate issues could be discussed openly on the pages of Yunost. The subjects that could be discussed this way were mostly connected to human relationships: the letters concerning work, studies or Komsomol were often far more constricted and mostly did not discuss personal issues in such a detail. Probably these letters were a way to promote the educational goals of the magazine. By providing the readers with sad stories about these types of difficult

141 No pseudonym: Eight letters. Yunost 9/1969.

142 No pseudonym: Eight letters. Yunost 9/1969.

143 Larisa Marinina: Maybe my father will read... Yunost 12/1973.

situations, the editors of *Yunost* were able to promote acceptable models of behavior, such as abstinence. The amount of these types of letters also shows how typical unwanted pregnancies were and how far-reaching consequences they had. The attitudes toward children born outside marriage remained negative and even hostile, even though the problem was fairly common in the Soviet society.

Traditions encouraged young people to get married. Marriage after military service or education was an essential part of Soviet youth's maturation process. This tradition started to withdraw only in the late 1980's. Nevertheless divorces became more common at the same time and young couples did not necessarily stay together when facing troubles. There were also practical reasons for early marriages. College and university graduates were expected to work for three years wherever their services were most badly needed, as a repayment to society for the free education they had received. Usually this meant employment in remote and underdeveloped areas where it was difficult to attract voluntary labor. By marrying a person who already had a job in a large city with a permission to reside there it was possible to avoid these employments. Soviet law provided that husbands and wives must be assigned to the same area. After the partner had found a job in the city, divorce often took place. According to a sociological study conducted in Perm, 70-80% of young people married for love, 15-20% because 'everyone was doing it' and 3-10% out of rational calculation.¹⁴⁴

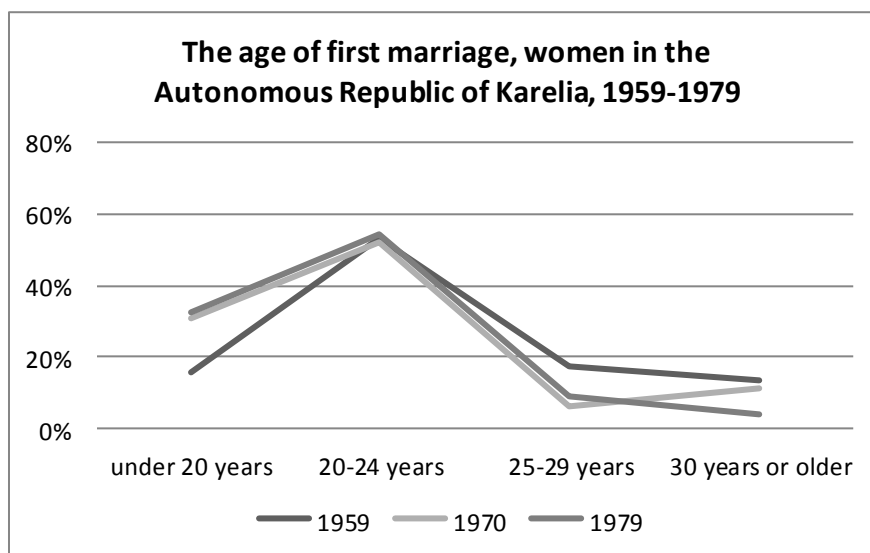


Chart 1 (Birin 1992, 43)

¹⁴⁴Avdeev&Monnier 2000, 25-26, 29; Mouly 1976, 231-232; Weaver 1981, 168.

During late socialism Soviet women got married for the first time at the age of 23 on average and men at the age of 25. This number got lower and lower until the breakup of the USSR in the beginning of 1990's. Also divorces were common: in the 1970's as much as 30% of marriages ended in divorce after lasting on average only for five years. The age of marrying depended greatly on the place of residence: in 1970 51% and in 1979 already 70% of 20-year-old women living in the countryside were married, when equal numbers for women living in cities were 31% and 38%.¹⁴⁵

A more detailed description of the phenomenon can be found from a sociological survey conducted among the rural population in the Autonomous Republic of Karelia. Charts 1 and 2 describe this phenomenon: the horizontal line shows the age of entering one's first marriage and the vertical line shows the percentage of the generation that entered their first marriage. The survey showed that in general young people got married at the age of 20-24 years, but over 30% of women were even younger when they first got married. The age of marrying varied in different decades: in 1959 young men got married most typically at the age of 23, whereas in 1979 the average age was 21. For women the most typical ages were 20-21 in 1959 and 20 in 1979. From the statistics it can also be seen that women got married later in 1959: the amount of marriages was relatively high until 25 years of age, whereas in 1979 almost 33% of the women got married before the age of 20.¹⁴⁶

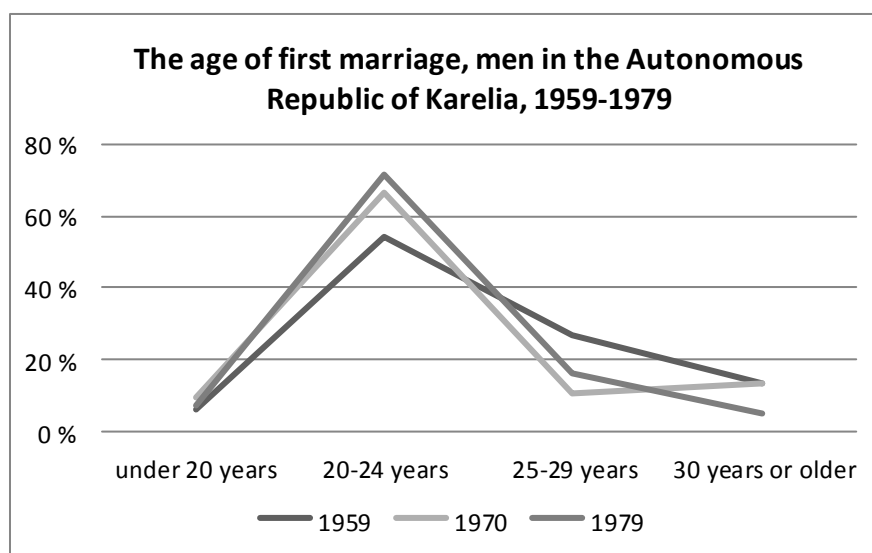


Chart 2 (Birin 1992, 43)

¹⁴⁵Avdeev&Monnier 2000, 25-26, 29; Mouly 1976, 231-232; Weaver 1981, 168.

¹⁴⁶Birin 1992, 39-43.

After the Thaw the average age of mothers had also been falling steadily. This was one of the reasons of marriage, because pregnancy and birth of children were acceptable reasons for getting married before the legal age of marriage, which was 18. Young people in the countryside were usually in working life by the age of 18 and also sexually active, which often led to unwanted pregnancies.¹⁴⁷

One cannot wonder why so many marriages ended in divorce or why the amount of unwanted pregnancies was so high. Problems that led to divorce were visible in the letters in many ways. People often got married after only a short acquaintance:

My husband was a very sweet and thoughtful young man. He could immerse himself in all kinds of little things – he was, as they say, full of knowledge. He bought new books all the time (it was in a bookshop that we first met) and knew all the novelties of cultural offerings. In one word: he stayed in my mind even though that special feeling, you know, as in novels, never existed. I got married literally on the second week of our acquaintanceship.¹⁴⁸

In many cases the partners did not actually know each other when they got married. Couples often had to move to the home of either the wife's or the husband's family after the wedding and share the flat with the parents-in-law. In most cases people also started their independent lives only after marriage, which led into problems in everyday chores. Inna, a reader of Yunost, describes this phenomenon in her letter:

During my honeymoon I, to be honest, was most of all worried that I can't cook. Now those difficulties seem amusing, but then they were very burning. I had to make breakfast and dinner, to wash clothes and iron, to clean and buy groceries... And there was no mum to save me: we moved away after finishing the institute and started to live completely independently.¹⁴⁹

As the letter above describes, roles in the family were patriarchal and it was the

147 Birin 1992, 44-46; Newth 1978, 82-83.

148 Yelena Kotelskaya: I got married one year ago. Yunost 5/1978.

149 Inna N.: Love and routines. Yunost 9/1965.

woman's responsibility to take care of household chores. Soviet women had a double role: they were encouraged to work full-time outside home, even in heavy industry. At the same time they were depicted as mothers, whose main task was to take care of the household and give birth to as many children as possible. Gender equality was not common, and in most cases Soviet women were described as subordinate to their husbands. In official rhetoric Soviet women gained gender equality and human fulfillment through labor after the shift from capitalist to socialist economic relations. In reality women did not achieve equality in work places. They were recruited mostly to low-status, low-paying positions, especially in agriculture. This meant that women ended up with the double burden of work outside the home and uncompensated domestic labor. According to a sociological survey, chores like washing, cleaning, buying groceries and cooking were mostly done by women, whereas men took care of renovation of the house. Usually men and women took care of the children together. By the end of the 1970's it had become fairly typical for men to help their wives in everyday chores. This shows that gender roles were changing. In addition, 38% of women and 30% of men said that they did not have any leisure time in their everyday life.¹⁵⁰

The same composition became stronger after the first child was born, even though according to the state propaganda women were expected to work. A sociological survey shows the women themselves wanted to work outside home. 80% of women and 65% of men said that women should work outside home, even if it was not essential for the household economy, but was rather an important way for her to prove her competence in the society.¹⁵¹ The problems of unequal distribution of household chores and strict gender roles were some of the most typical themes in letters sent to Yunost. It often came as a surprise for young, independent women that they were expected to take care of the home and children, just like their mothers and grandmothers. Inna describes her life after the birth of her first child:

Two months went by and a truly difficult question comes up: what to do with the work? It is not only a question about finishing the maternity leave. I want to work. I love my work, my laboratory. After all, my primary interest lies

150 Birin 1992, 216-219; Hoffmann 2002, 115-117.

151 Birin 1992, 221.

there. And now for three months already my husband has been telling me what is going on in the institute... In kindergartens there are no places available yet, it is impossible to find a babysitter, mum cannot come to help us, we cannot work in shifts because of the nature of work. It all finishes so that I take more leave. I stay at home for five more months, as it is not our turn to get a place in the kindergarten yet. --- Yes, we have already started to argue a bit. Probably I am guilty for this. I cannot talk openly and I feel anxious about running around the dull circle of diapers – shops – feeding – lunch etc.¹⁵²

The letters above repeat the same problem that was present in the letters of most female writers: the state expected them to work, but it was often difficult to return to working life because of the lack of places in kindergartens and the patriarchal family roles, which made the women responsible for household chores. These problems were even more difficult in the countryside, where there were less state-run services, such as kindergartens. Again, the importance of networks and close family ties was repeated: those who did not have a grandmother, who could have taken care of the children, were often forced to remain housewives. Inna received hundreds of answers, eight of which were published. Some of these letters repeated traditional roles:

No matter what kind of an ideal husband you have, he could never orient into household chores in a way that a woman does.¹⁵³

Do I even need to ask such a question: what is more important in human life – human-made things or a human itself? An answer to this question already exists: women, who devote their lives exclusively to motherhood, are named heroes in our state.¹⁵⁴

In some answers it was also remarked that Inna should be happy with her life, as there were many people, who did not have all the amenities Inna did:

152 Inna N.: Love and routines. Yunost 9/1965.

153 Margarita H.: One side of equality. Yunost 2/1966.

154 A. Fedorov: The role of mother in the family and social spheres. Yunost 2/1966.

This Inna from her Akademigorodka (a suburb built for academic workers) calls her natural and unavoidable daily chores (diapers – shops – feeding the family) a challenge for love. But it is hardly a challenge, when you have a work that you like, a good apartment, a loving husband and a child, kindergarten around the corner, shops where you can buy everything you need, and even a washing house? What else could you gripe about? I am living with my husband in a small village in Kalmykia, where we were sent after finishing higher education. There are no washing houses, nor apartments with amenities, nor kindergartens in here. And there are not enough groceries in shops.¹⁵⁵

I live together with my mother: we have a small room in a common flat. The problem is that my mum is chronically ill. --- I work during the day and study in the evenings. With my mum's small pension and my wage it's possible to get by if we're frugal. --- Me and my boyfriend love each other. But if we would get married, he'd have to leave his family that lives in a small apartment. He recently got back from the army and now he's working and studying in the evenings. We'd love to get married, start a family, and get a son. But now we can only dream about that. I love my mum dearly and I will never leave her: my boyfriend knows this and also wants to have mum always with us. But it's not possible for us all to live in one room. Yes, we need more flats, kindergartens, boarding schools, so that women wouldn't completely wear themselves off working and serving their families. Sometime this will surely happen. But our lives are ticking by! And one desires happiness! Common and own, personal happiness!¹⁵⁶

These letters describe vividly the social conditions of late socialism, such as the lack of apartments, inadequate social support and value of work. They also describe values of the time: old people were respected and taken care of at the expense of one's own happiness. Inna's letter and the replies it got describe social change: in larger towns and cities women started to demand rights to work and more equal division of

155 Zoya and Ivan Sh.: You are responsible yourself. Yunost 2/1966.

156 Yelena M.: Happiness is a relative concept. Yunost 2/1966.

household chores. In other parts of the country, especially in the countryside, the lack of even the most basic services led to a situation where people did not complain about the same problems but instead asked for more basic amenities. It is interesting to notice that Yunost's publishing policy allowed discussion even on such delicate issues as the lack of groceries in shops.

There was also a difference between the views of different generations. Older people hanged on to the traditional family values, while younger generations were demanding more equality between genders. Also the combination of collectivism and individualism remained an essential feature of the mentalities of Soviet individuals: as the plea of the last letter shows, common happiness was not enough, also individual happiness was demanded. Individual happiness, on the other hand, could be reached through common efforts, such as building new kindergartens and schools.

In late socialism the standards of living grew significantly. A sociological survey from Taganrog shows that in 1967-68 only 13% of workers lived in apartments with all or almost all the main amenities. In late 1970's this number had risen to 46%. Still, people were increasingly dissatisfied with their housing conditions until Perestroika. The situation was especially difficult for young people. In Taganrog in 1978 only 6% of young workers and 33% of newlyweds had their own apartments.¹⁵⁷

There were also other reasons for divorces besides the lack of knowledge, the patriarchal family roles and the lack of state support for families. Alcoholism was a serious problem in the society, especially among the inhabitants of the countryside and working class. According to a sociological study conducted in Kiev, 61% of divorces were instituted by wives and in 47% of these cases drunkenness or alcoholism was given as the main reason for divorce.¹⁵⁸ One of the writers depicted her life with an alcoholic:

I had to finish school and we agreed that Volodya works in night shifts and takes care of the baby during the day, when I'm at school. At first everything went well, but then it happened twice that when I got home the child was screaming and he was sleeping and drunk. Our daughter was then four months

157 Shlapentokh 1989, 62, 68.

158 Weaver 1981, 175.

*old. And he just continued drinking.*¹⁵⁹

The letters show us that there were several sources of problems in marriage. Some of these were social, such as housing shortages that forced young people to live with their parents even after getting married and harsh competition for places in higher education that forced many young people to combine work and studies. Traditional models of behavior led to people getting married after a short acquaintance and to uneven distribution of household chores. The process of changes in societal values and gender roles was clearly visible in most of the letters describing the life of young families. Especially young women in the cities were demanding more possibilities to combine work and family, more support from the state and more equality within the family.

4.2. The Generation Gap

There are several letters describing bad manners of youth in comparison to older generations, and contradictions between young people and their parents. Traditionally respect towards old people is an essential part of Russian culture. So when some young people tried to break these traditions by being impolite towards older people, they were severely judged:

*I was standing on a bus stop; next to me were some old people, an old woman among them, and some young people a bit further away. The bus came and instead of helping the old woman, one of the boys heartlessly pushed her. And when she fell, unable to do anything, these young people laughed loudly. We helped the woman to sit down. I saw that she was crying. And when we asked these young people to apologize her, nothing! They didn't even want to listen. Suddenly the old woman turned around and said: 'I don't have any protectors now, as my son died in the front, but surely this cannot be right?'*¹⁶⁰

It was not only the elder people that were traditionally respected. Also the traditional gender roles required young men to help and be polite towards women and girls. If

159 Larisa B.: How to fight with this – I just don't know. Yunost 6/1978.

160 Nadezhda Kozhan: Where do these come from! Yunost 6/1975.

these rules were broken, it was considered hooliganism:

For the first time I felt myself a 'weak woman' and I enjoyed it. Never could I have imagined that it is very nice when someone offers you his hand to help you get on or off a train car, brings you water and helps you to open the window – as you know, it's very hard to open them in the train. Of course these are vanities, but nice vanities. I cannot say that the boys in our class are horrible, but when I returned, I entered another world. I had become estranged from the rush in the canteen, when the boys, trying to get a cup of tea, use their elbows with all their strength. I had become estranged from how nobody greets me and that people rip books off my hand.¹⁶¹

I would like to ask from boys: do they let themselves rampage on the street in front of familiar and unfamiliar girls and elder women, most of whom are mothers? And if so, did they ever think that the girls passing by may have felt hurt for a long time?¹⁶²

In these examples the contradiction between traditional models of behavior and the behavior of young people was clearly visible. Similar definitions for hooliganism existed already during the Thaw years. A hooligan was an individual who was immoral, cursed and refused to work. Revelation about imperfections of Soviet youth increasingly undermined the Stalinist self-perception of Soviet youngsters as 'the chosen ones', the constructors of socialism and the beneficiaries of life in the Soviet Union.¹⁶³ Also negligent attitude towards common property was condemned, as it was seen as bad behavior, opposite to the communal state ideology:

It surprises me that often, when I take a book needed for the classes or just an interesting one from the library, open it and – several pages are missing (and in textbooks whole chapters, tables, bibliographies), the illustrations have been ripped off, many pages have been smudged with ball-point pens. --- What

161 Alla I.: Letter to a friend. Yunost 4/1968.

162 Lyusya Koroleva: Is it easy to be a girl? Yunost 2/1967.

163 Fürst 2006, 144-145.

*are these egoists thinking about as they don't respect themselves, other readers or the literature?*¹⁶⁴

Swearing was also described as a part of youth culture and it was seen as a sign of lack of discipline in the mind and as well as in the body. According to the state ideology, the language had to be as clean and pure as the society on the whole.¹⁶⁵ The following writer connected rude language to lack of education and adult control:

*I am very upset about the inextinguishable clamor of rude language. You hear speech filled with disgusting words at work, on the streets, in trolleybuses and cinemas. Young people 'curse' especially loudly, not even noticing the presence of women and children. When listening to them you start to non-intentionally wonder what did they learn at school or did they ever go to school at all? Or is it because of the lack of control and negligence of adults (who, especially at work, often use rude language themselves), which started the conviction in youth that this behavior is acceptable and it has always been like this.*¹⁶⁶

In several letters the youth demanded more freedom and their parents frowned on their liberal ways of behavior. The letters above show that the rebellion of Soviet youth was not very different from its Western counterparts. The ideals of collectivism and patriotism are visible in these letters: an ideal Soviet person was not expected to offend other people or break common property. Older people had built the society and for this they should be respected. Mothers and young girls as future mothers were described as heroines of the state in the official rhetoric, which was why they should have been helped and supported by the men. An ideal Soviet person was always supposed to behave well, as breaking the codes of behavior meant harming the collective.

On the other hand the unofficial youth culture went through major changes during late socialism.¹⁶⁷ The language, dancing styles and what was generally

164 Yelena Gusynina: Love books and take care of them! Yunost 10/1976.

165 Hoffmann 2002, 42.

166 Yuriy Romanenko: Why do we stand this? Yunost 6/1974.

167 On the unofficial youth culture and music scene in Dniepropetrovsk, Ukraine, see Zhuk 2010. On Leningrad youth culture and music scene, see Huttunen 2012.

considered bad behavior of youth were described in several letters. The contradiction between conservative and modern values was clearly visible among the Soviet youth. One of the writers described her free time:

*I study in the institute a few hours a day; the rest is up to me to decide. What to do? Still, me and my friends haven't really worried about this problem – there is always someone to visit, sit down, chat about life, listen to 'disks' and of course solve a lot of common problems. But when I get back home, I always see the unhappy faces of my parents.*¹⁶⁸

The values of youth and their ways of behavior were in many ways different from their parents, as this letter shows:

*... I decided to read two letters from different senders (addressed to the writer's daughter) and so I did. These letters were written by boys from the army to my daughter. She has just turned fourteen and she is on eighth grade. Both letters end with words 'with love' and the other seriously writes about his love and longing for her. --- ... she is not dishonest just with me, but with them as well. First of all, she gave promises not to one, but straight away two, secondly, she told me that they are just friends and thirdly, I can see that she is clearly not serious with either of her pen pals.*¹⁶⁹

On the other hand some younger adults saw the traditional values and ways of raising children as too restrictive and old-fashioned, as this young teacher depicts:

*But here's an example: parents of my student Ira acted differently. She is not allowed to do anything. If she comes home at seven o'clock it's a scandal. If she has a new hairdo, not a braid, it's also a scandal. There's no question of dancing or meeting young people.*¹⁷⁰

168 Ira Novikova: Your free time. Yunost 6/1977.

169 A.G.: Trust must be earned. Yunost 8/1968.

170 Ye. Mukhina: To forbid? To allow? Yunost 3/1974.

The latter letter shows that the writer was open-minded toward new values and ideas. She would have allowed young people to do all kinds of things and condemned parents, who limited their children's lives too much. The first letter, on the other hand, shows the clear dissatisfaction of a mother about her daughter's immoral behavior. This further underlines the fact that the attitudes toward young people's relationships were often puritanical.

The Soviet youth culture developed during the Thaw, when the young people got the opportunity to express themselves more freely. The literature that was banned during Stalinism became popular, as did songs that were distributed as magnitizdat-copies¹⁷¹. This development was arrested during late socialism, which caused a massive response from the youth. The actions of older generations were seen as fake and dishonest. Some of the youth isolated themselves from the society more than before, which led to clear distinguishing between official and unofficial youth culture. At this time also influences from the West started increasingly to arrive to the USSR, which led to a change in external features, such as long hair of young men, wide legs of jeans and girls' miniskirts, and in traditional values.¹⁷² The gap between official ideology and the reality widened during late socialism and many young people reacted to the lack of individualism in official ideology through different types of subcultures.

The contradictions between different types of youth cultures are visible in discussion about behavior and looks. Two 22-year-old young men, Lesnoy and Raslov, who are finishing their army service judge the modern youth with harsh words:

*We hate those girls and boys who are internally empty. This is supported by their looks: the long hair of boys and legs of pants almost half a meter wide. --
- From this group it's difficult to find a boy or a girl with whom to talk seriously about something. We always remind ourselves about the youth of the 1930's and the 1940's. What a shame it is that we are not living with them!
How strong they were in spirit! No, we do not judge all our peers, just the*

171 Magnitizdat ('to publish on tape') = homemade, unofficial cassette tapes that were sold via black market

172Frisby 1989, 4-5.

*stupid part. But this 'piece' is visible on every step! We will soon move to reserve and then we'll have to socialize with them and it doesn't make us too happy. We decided to head North! We shall build Siberia! Strong youth is needed there.*¹⁷³

Rhetoric used in the letter shows the separation of youth into those who supported traditional values and those who had absorbed Western influences. The writers described the differences between these two groups as fundamental. Nostalgia towards the 1930-40's describes also the overall atmosphere in the society during late socialism. Criticism towards liberal youth combined with the wish to build Siberia can be considered as a sign of official ideals being adopted.

This critique was nothing new. Similar discussion was going on during Stalinism and the Thaw. Morality and public behavior were constantly subjects of concern. Especially during the Thaw traditional moral values started to loosen and for example the number of single mothers increased. At the same time consumption of alcohol rose and distinct Soviet youth culture started to develop among young people. In the post-war years the 'youth problem' had three different forms. Young people were seen as hooligans, as stilyagi, and as ideological critics and non-conformists. This was frowned upon by the elder generations and widely discussed in public. The problems were caused by several reasons. Young people were not only expected to apply for a Komsomol membership and keep their behavior within the socialist framework, but were also scrutinized for ideological faults even in their personal lives. These demands were similar during Stalinism, the Thaw and late socialism. The aim of the CPSU was to build a new society by raising new men and women. The youth was expected to behave in a socialist way and to think, feel and dress in ways considered appropriate for a future Soviet citizen. Almost identical tones of voice could be heard in the 1980's, when young men who returned from Afghanistan placed harsh critique toward their peers, who in their opinion had forgotten real values of life. These groups of 'afgantsy' were often violent and put great emphasis on military values and the military-patriotic education of youth. As the freedom of speech grew stronger during Perestroika, more extreme groups of youth culture, such as neo-

173Arkadyi Lesnoy and Vitaliy Raslov: They're not even sixteen yet. Yunost' 7/1974.

stalinists, neo-fascists and 'afgantsy' emerged.¹⁷⁴

The letter of Lesnoy and Raslov got several replies, which defended the young people's rights to wear fashionable clothing and pointed out that their abilities to build socialism did not depend on their looks and clothing:

... because of stylish pants and colored eyes many older people judge the moral qualities of young men and women. --- Right after finishing school and even when I was still at school I wore stylish clothes and had long hair. Long hair suits me. I worked at a factory and worked well. 'Your son is wanton' said the neighbors to my mother. 'A scarecrow!' yelled some potbellied geezer in the trolleybus. When I entered the university I cut my hair. Somehow I got bored with stylish pants and blazers. Then I really became a scarecrow, didn't take care of myself at all and it was horrible to see myself in the mirror. The neighbors said to my mother: 'Now he is in his right mind again'. Nobody flickers an eye on me or calls me a scarecrow. But I am still the same, just changed my clothes and cut my hair. --- I cannot see any kind of connection between fashion, even exaggerated, and hooliganism. Why some adults judge fashionable youth as loose and empty? Isn't it harsh that a girl in a miniskirt and with a little bit of make-up in her eyes may be slandered by a stranger for no reason at all. --- According to Pharisees, the shorter the boy's hair, the wiser he is, and the more old-fashioned the girl's skirt, the cleaner and humbler she is. Isn't it true that they often judge you like that?¹⁷⁵

We are not going to argue that the youth of the 1930-1940's was not strong in spirit, we agree completely in this. But let us take examples from the life of the youth of the 1970's. And what do we see? We see that they have long hair, they wear pants with wide legs and miniskirts, and they are interested in pop music. In one word, they don't lag behind from the world fashion. And at the same time these long-haired, 'empty from the inside', in the words of Raslov and Lesnyi, young people go to build the BAM (Baikal-Amur railway), to face the

174 Fürst 2006, 135-137, 149; Livschiz 2006, 122-125; Riordan 1989b, 123, 130-131, 134.

175 Pavel Novak: I want the discussion to be continued! Yunost 4/1975.

*troubles and difficulties.*¹⁷⁶

From the active discussion and tone of voices in the letters it is visible that fashionable clothing raised strong opinions for and against. Writers who supported traditional values and ways of behavior saw that morals weakened with fashionable clothing, while liberals pointed out that the spirit of earlier generations and Komsomol was still alive; traditional values were still highly respected and fashionable clothing was just surface.

The infatuation of Soviet youth with the West, its style of life and culture, was one of the most sensitive political and social issues in the USSR. According to a sociological survey conducted in 1987 one third of all teenagers declared that ‘imitation of the West’ was one of their main values. 58% of these teenagers said that obtaining Western goods was among their life goals. Rock music was admired by 67%. This was also visible in another survey conducted in 1971. Then the most sought-after objects of young people in Moscow were tape recorders, guitars, motor cycles, movie cameras and cars. Even more popular were Western clothes, especially jeans, and rock music records. Clothes, hairstyle and music were the most important ways for Soviet youth to show their independence and even hostility towards their parents and the regime. The desire of Western consumer goods combined with a total lack of revolutionary zeal was typical for the Soviet youth of the era.¹⁷⁷

For Soviet citizens themselves it was not always clear who was a dissident and who was not. One of the research subjects of Alexey Yurchak, Inna, was a teenager who listened to the recordings of a famous singer-songwriter Vladimir Vysotsky and read samizdat-literature. She was clearly considered as a dissident by the surrounding society. She did not want to take part in Komsomol-activities, study or work, and preferred to stay outside all social activities. Still she did not consider herself ‘anti-Soviet’ or ‘anti-system’ and actually disregarded the critics of the society, such as the writer Solzhenitsyn. Instead of criticism towards the society, young people similar to Inna simply found political activities ‘not interesting’. These people described themselves as non-Soviet, meaning that they were not pro-Soviet or anti-Soviet, but instead were just not interested in politics or social issues. This apathy was the core of

176 Several writers: I want the discussion to continue! Yunost 4/1975.

177 Mouly 1976, 223-225; Shlapentokh 1989, 142.

Soviet underground culture. Most young people were not trying to change the society and even Soviet rock lyrics were mostly non-political. The complete lack of interest in politics and ideology among the Soviet youth was also visible in other ways. Courses on history of the CPSU, Marxism-Leninism and political economy were compulsory for all students of higher education. These courses suffered from high rates of absenteeism: sometimes more than half of the students were absent.¹⁷⁸

The strong reactions raised by the letters depicted also the overall ideological atmosphere of the society. Dissidents, who were openly against the official ideology, were seen as potential threats towards the stability of normal life and society.¹⁷⁹ In the letters it is possible to read between the lines that fashionable clothing was easily connected to dissidence and was seen as a threat for the society by some people. Writers that defended their right to wear fashionable clothing tried to point out that they could be as good communists as anyone else, no matter what they wore. This shows that at least to these writers it was important to be recognized as a good communist and a member of the society. They did not want to rebel against the society or come across as dissident because of their clothing. For them, clothing was a non-ideological feature.

Another point of view to the issue is offered in sociological studies that were conducted among Russian émigrés from the Soviet Union by the University of Harvard in the 1950's and 1980's. In these surveys about 80-90% of all respondents supported the idea of state ownership in heavy industry and transport and the Soviet welfare model. 60% of the respondents also appreciated the Soviet education system, health services and cultural achievements. At the same time respondents considered themselves as opponents of the Soviet system.¹⁸⁰ This is another example of the fact that the question of dissidence in the Soviet society is not a simple one.

The subcultures of young people in the Soviet Union were rich and varied. The earliest group, *stilyagi*, emerged already in the 1940's and continued its existence throughout the 1950's. They were a relatively small subculture and got their influences from American films. Their clothing style was Western, with clothes bought from the black market and home-made copies of Western clothes. They

178 Easton 1989, 59, 63; Mouly 1976, 233; Yurchak 2006, 128-132, 138.

179 Yurchak 2006, 106-107.

180 Shlapentokh et al. 2008, 120.

listened to jazz (and later rock'n'roll) and danced twist and boogie-woogie. Their culture formed a cultural parallel to the official world of the Komsomol. The stilyagi saw themselves as members of the society, not necessarily anti-Soviet or anti-collective. One could be a stilyaga, a worker and a Komsomol-member at the same time. These different identities were not in contradiction with each other from the point of view of these young people. The state, on the other hand, condemned strongly all types of subcultures and saw them as a threat for the socialist system.¹⁸¹

Later the stilyagi were followed by hippies in the 1960's and later rockers, punks and so on. All these groups were seen as abnormal by the surrounding society. The members of these subcultures were often described as uncultured, which was why many young people who were interested in Western fashion, music and films, but also in high culture and science distinguished themselves from the subcultures. Also the state concentrated on criticizing the most visible representatives of the subcultures and this led to the fact that moderate interest towards Western culture was seen as an acceptable part of the identity of a good Soviet person. It became acceptable for a Soviet person to express himself moderately through clothing and other items, such as books or records. Examples of this phenomenon were the foreign films shown in the USSR: in the closed city of Dnepropetrovsk in Ukraine almost 60% of all films shown were of foreign origin in 1966 and 50% of them were from the West. In 1975 almost 90% of the films were foreign and almost 80% from the West. Also some Western music, such as songs by Bob Dylan, Peter Seeger and Joan Baez were seen as critique toward the capitalist system. As these examples show, some Western cultural products became little by little accepted in the Soviet society, while others remained forbidden.¹⁸² The people who were 'good communists': worked, studied and were members of Komsomol were allowed to express a moderate interest toward Western culture, whereas the dissidents, members of subcultures who refused to work or take part in the public activities, such as demonstrations and Komsomol-meetings, were seen as a threat for the society.

The new spheres of youth culture raised questions and misunderstandings among the older readers of *Yunost*. At the same time these letters depict the influences of Western popular culture that were visible in the everyday life of the Soviet society:

181 Fürst 2006, 138-139; Kharkhordin 1999, 289-291; Yurchak 2006, 170-171.

182 Kharkhordin 1999, 289-291, 340-342; Yurchak 2006, 173-175; Zhuk 2010, 166, 255-256.

I have a young relative. A good boy, studies well, does sports and listens to the radio. But his most important hobby is modern music. He has collected many records and tapes of estrada (popular music) singers and bands, both domestic and foreign. His classmates, boys and girls, come to visit him often: they listen to records and dance. They talk about the novelties of that music they like so much and change records with each other. I know that many young people today are interested in beat music and the friends of my relative are no exception. --- I am not against listening to beat music. I think its fits the young people well with its temperamental nature. Even in the factory where I worked, in the garrison where I did my military service and in the institute where I am studying now – everywhere there were big beat bands.¹⁸³

And what do young people do at this time? They dance, if this horrible parody of dancing can be called dancing at all. The young people often go to dances drunk. And what do they dance? Shake and shake again. And shake, foxtrot and tango they all dance wrong. After all, there was a time when dance was taught in schools and military institutes. When they came to an evening gathering, everyone knew how to behave, had fun and didn't feel ashamed. And what is happening now?¹⁸⁴

These letters show that the features of modern youth culture were not always understandable for the older generations. It must be noticed that in Yunost the published opinions on the subject often came from older people, not from the youth. The letters of young people discussing popular culture were probably not published for editorial reasons: it was inappropriate to discuss such themes in public, which is another example of the fear of dissidents and subcultures of youth. Yunost published very few articles connected to popular culture, so the letters above are an exception among the contents of the magazine.

According to Soviet propaganda there was no distinction between low and high or mass and elite cultures in the USSR, but in reality cultural organs placed fine

183 Sergey Burmistov: What is big beat? Yunost' 2/1974.

184 Oleg Arbushin: Again about dance. Yunost' 8/1973.

arts and especially literature above the mass cultural products that were not defined as art. As the whole cultural life of the country was based on masters and mastership, it was often elitist and pedagogical by nature: Soviet culture was full of lessons to teach, typically via heroic role models and it was the authorities' task to teach them.¹⁸⁵ The discussion on popular culture did not fit this framework of educational journalism.

As it became acceptable to be a Komsomol member and show interest toward Western popular culture at the same time, most of the young people writing to Yunost were combining the values of socialism to influences of Western popular culture without any difficulties. The letters of anti-Soviet youth or dissidents were not published at all, but also the difference in the amount of radical dissidents and other young people must also be taken into account: the most radical subcultures existed mostly in larger cities when in comparison Komsomol had approximately 20 million active members all over the USSR.¹⁸⁶ Radical dissident subcultures were a minority among Soviet youth, while the majority of youth was combining social ideals and Western influences in their everyday lives without stressing the contradictions between these two.

4.3. Studies and Leisure

Music, socializing with friends, dancing and reading novels were mentioned as the most typical leisure activities in my sources. According to the letters these activities were not highly appreciated among older generations. Only reading was somewhat accepted even though the young people's preference for adventure novels and other types of light readings was criticized. It would have been better if the youth would have spent their leisure time in a more cultured way in clubs or palaces of culture, where they would have been under supervision. This state of affairs would have been similar to Stalinism, when pastime activities, such as drinking, dancing, playing cards and billiards, were condemned by the officials and tried to be replaced with more 'cultural' activities, such as films, plays, public readings, art circles and physical culture. These activities took place in special buildings, such as workers' clubs, palaces of culture and houses of leisure. In reality these clubs often had poor facilities and they lacked resources to organize activities. The goal of the Soviet government

185 Roth-Ey 2011, 3-4.

186 Pilkington 1998, 370.

was that all aspects of life should have been orderly and rationalized. Soviet leisure was a part of balanced lifestyle that improved the health and vitality of human organism.¹⁸⁷ In smaller towns and villages the conditions even for the most civilized leisure activities were poor, as Yuliya, a reading enthusiast from Nizhnevartovsk in Western Siberia, described:

*In our town there is only one bookshop. There you can buy maps, reproductions of paintings that have already for a long time hung on the walls of periphery canteens, teach-yourself books on how to play the accordion, some books on pumping and processing of oil and gas products. And that's all.*¹⁸⁸

The appreciation for studying was traditionally high in the USSR and education was also seen as an important way of political socialization. This socialization took place through certain school subjects, such as history and literature. The Soviet school system also emphasized shared values and collective pursuits. Learning, cultural knowledge, collectivism and non-material values were important.¹⁸⁹ Still, everyday school life was not a popular subject among letter writers. There were no descriptions about average schooldays; instead the letters on this theme concentrated on various problems between teachers and students:

*Our teacher in physics does not prepare herself for the class at all, she reads aloud from the book the chapters she gave us as homework and asks questions. And if you ask her a question a bit off the point, she has such a panic and confusion in her eyes that it would be better just to sit quiet.*¹⁹⁰

I will never become like her (the teacher). About such people they say that 'they have education but no upbringing'. It frightens me, because I get such a characterization that I won't be able to get anywhere (to study). At the moment

187 Hoffmann 2003, 32-37; On activities and problems of the worker's clubs in the 1920's, see Hatch 1994.

188 Yu. Lapshin: And I love to read... Yunost' 6/1976.

189 Kuebart 1989, 103; Yurchak 2006, 138.

190 Viktor B.: We are not adolescents anymore... Yunost' 5/1982.

I am forcing myself to stay quiet by biting my tongue. The only thing that helps me stay quiet is that I feel very sorry for my mother. Every time she goes to school she comes back crying. At those moments I hate myself. --- Finally, there are only two teachers (in the English language and literature), whom I really respect. To answer to them coarsely doesn't even come to my mind. I respect them most of all because they are good people. That is the thing that I appreciate above everything else.¹⁹¹

Today I completely by accident heard the discussion of two teachers during the break. The teacher of mathematics said: 'The class 6B is like a grave, it cannot be compared with 6A. Only two put their hands up, from others there is no point to ask.' The teacher of literature and Russian language answered: 'Yes, that is true.' But to the fact that 6B is a 'grave' also the teachers are guilty. I know this class and I have an impression that the teacher of mathematics only asks from these two students. Two are working, the rest do not exist...¹⁹²

The writers of these letters were almost 10 years younger than most of the other writers, which explains the certain naivety of these letters. The hierarchical structures of Soviet education system were repeated in the letters. Children were not encouraged to learn independently, but instead they were very reliant on their teachers. Teachers were seen as something superior and if they were not acting as exemplary people and builders of communism, the children reacted by criticizing them in their letters. Soviet children went to school at the age of seven and finished eight or ten grades depending on their plans for the future. After eight grades it was possible to enter a vocational school, a 'tekhnikum' or a military facility, which offered specialized secondary education and chance to finish a secondary education there. To enter a university or an institute one needed to have completed ten grades or a tekhnikum or a facility of specialized secondary education.

Another sphere of school life -related material were the letters of young people from difficult backgrounds. These letters illuminate the positive sides of Soviet education system, in which everyone was able to change the course of their lives. In

191 Ira G.: How to be? Yunost 6/1973.

192 Zhenya N.: Two letters to the editors. Yunost 5/1969.

her letter Lyudmila, who suffered from disability, described her life:

I stayed at the Leningrad institute of Turgenev. Between the pain and misery of ill children the medical and pedagogical personnel created the healthiest atmosphere, an atmosphere of activities, creativity and intellectuality. There my intellectual formation took place, there I wanted to find myself, my task, and be useful and needed. Then I entered the faculty of drawing and painting of the National University of arts of N.K. Krupskaya in Moscow for distance learning. Not because my talents brought me there. Rather, there was very little talent, but that was the only choice I had.¹⁹³

Later Lyudmila became a professional artist and found her place in the society. Her letter is interesting, because the disabled and their position in the society were rarely discussed in public as they did not meet the requirements of an ideal Soviet person. Instead, the handicapped were kept out of sight in different types of institutions.

Another example of the successes of Soviet education system is the lengthy correspondence between the writer Grigoriy Medynskiy and the young people from class 9A of an ‘educational work colony’, which was an educational unit for young people who had committed crimes. In their letters students described their efforts to reach a better life and leave behind former problems:

There are 43 of us in class and all of us have committed some kind of crimes and got punishments, each one according to what we deserve. Now that we are in the colony we start to realize that in freedom we had a wrongful way of life. But after all we were not isolated from the society when we were free. Both people with good lifestyles and others – thieves, drunkards, vagrants – had their impact on us. We have changed our opinion that a ‘friend’ is a person who approves all human weaknesses, teaches you to drink vodka, to smoke and to work less. Now in the colony we found ourselves with outcasts of the society, who have committed different crimes. There are few who have ended up here by accident. And now we have to leave these drags, to cultivate all

193 Lyudmila Kiseleva: I was lucky... Yunost 3/1979.

*good human qualities in ourselves: love toward work, ability to be systematic, honesty. Now we have to give away our previous life and with will start living again from the beginning.*¹⁹⁴

The emphasis of the two letters above seemed to be on individuals and their actions. The society was described as good and caring, taking care of the handicapped and giving new opportunities to criminals. On the other hand some individuals still decided to stay outside the society and continue committing crimes. This pointed out the dual nature of collective and individual in the Soviet society. The society was good and offered equal opportunities for everyone, but the individual had to set goals for himself and compete in order to become a good citizen. The letter above was a rare example of letters where problems connected to crime were discussed, as officially there was no crime in the Soviet Union.

194 Several writers: A serious discussion. Yunost 8/1974.

5. WORKING LIFE

5.1. Choice of Profession

Number of letters concerning choice of profession and working life emphasizes the early maturation of Soviet youth. These letters are also an example about the process of self-training, which was an important part of the Soviet ideology. Self-training included individual self-criticism, hero-identification, and working out a program of personal development by answering questions like: How well do you know yourself? What kind of person are you? Do you know your own strengths and weaknesses? Do you like yourself? Can you correctly evaluate your conduct and actions and listen to just criticism? Can you look at yourself from all sides? By constantly thinking and discussing what to do with one's life it was possible to live out the social ideals by choosing a career that was promoted by the state. According to the ideology it was very important to find an aim for one's life and work for common good. The choice of profession was also stressed in school education: from the first grade onwards pupils had two 'work lessons' a week, which familiarized them with different professions. They were also encouraged to spend their summer vacations in labor camps in order to gain more experience about work. Ideals were mostly of the heroic type of the 1930's with the aim of creating a new Soviet man.¹⁹⁵

Workers were arguably the most important pillar in the Soviet society and the socialist ideology encouraged young people to work in factories or construction sites. As the party program said, a Soviet individual must respect work as the basis of the communist personality, his social prestige and observe the collectivist moral which was incompatible with egoism, selfishness, and self-interest and combined national, collective and personal interests.¹⁹⁶ It is no surprise that the choice of profession was one of the most burning questions for young people:

The thing is that this year we are leaving school, and in front of us and all our peers is the question: 'what to become?'. In school we had some events, where our parents told us about their professions. That is how we found out many new and interesting things about the work of a cook, a driver, a nurse and an engineer. --- I ask you, 'Yunost', to continue the discussion about the choice of

195 Kharkhordin 1999, 238-239; Weaver 1981, 162-163, 196-197.

196 Shlapentokh 1989, 19.

*one's course of life, to tell on your pages about other professions. This, in my opinion, will be interesting not only for me, but for all those who start their journey to real life this year.*¹⁹⁷

In its articles on different professions Yunost stressed working-class professions in agriculture and industry, which was connected to the political situation. Also the letters chosen to be published supported this state policy. More and more people received higher education, whereas industry and agriculture suffered from a lack of workers. Also the socialist ideology stressed that industrial and agricultural workers were the highest class in the Soviet society. These interests of the society were pointed out by M. Levinov in the following letter. It was not easy to enter an institute and also the job market was demanding, as he pointed out:

It is forecasted that in 1969 about 6 million students are going to finish 9th grade. The amount of study places in institutes is about 700-800 thousand. As a result, only every sixth or seventh student will enter an institute. In these circumstances it is ridiculous to say that one shouldn't hurry to enter an institute, it's good to gain working experience and choose the profession by heart etc. --- One shouldn't give a negative image about something positive and stress that the most important is to realize one's talents. No, the most important is to enter an institute, to enter a world of interesting, creative professions, to leave behind the group of people who work to live and enter the group of people who live to work. We mustn't forget that national economy needs and will have in 1970 10 million engineers, 20 million shoemakers, 30 million agricultural workers and only 5 million academic workers, pilots, geologists, doctors, artists and writers. And to this 'demand' will answer the 65 million students of today, of which 50 million think that they have a calling for intellectual work. --- What you become doesn't depend only on you, but also on many factors that don't depend on you: where you study – in a city or in the countryside, who are your parents – wealthy, intelligent or poor, workers or farmers, will the destiny be good for you: the element of happy

197 V. Kirillov: We want to know more about different professions. Yunost 8/1977.

*coincidences decides very little in life.*¹⁹⁸

The letter points out facts that were usually not discussed in public. According to the official ideology everyone had equal possibilities in the Soviet society, so by claiming that the place of residence or the wealth of one's parents had a role in determining the future of an individual the writer is radically opposite to the official view. Also the claim that the position of farmer or worker is not eligible for the young people is opposite to the propaganda. All in all, the letter offered very radical opinions in its own context and it naturally raised wide discussion.

The preference of overwhelming majority of young people for jobs that existed only in limited numbers and their reluctance to take in jobs where there was a great need for manpower were a matter of increasing concern to educators, economic planners and political leaders. It was also one of the aims of Soviet educational policy to improve young people's attitudes towards manual labor and encourage them to find a job in industry. The 'correct' choice of career was seen as a proof of patriotic consciousness. In a sociological study conducted in the early 1970's in Novosibirsk it was found out that the most popular professions for high school graduates were for example doctor, chemist, physicist and engineer. Careers in agriculture, construction and services were far down on the list. Komsomol tried to impact on the situation by indoctrinating the idea that all work is honorable, but parents and other family members often persuaded the youth to acquire a 'respectable' career with material advantages and social esteem. It must also be noted that the state was not interested in changing the situation by removing social benefits from the intelligentsia or increasing them among the working masses.¹⁹⁹

Certain groups in the society occupied privileged positions. Some of these groups were also able to stay outside political activities regardless of their high social positions. One example of these groups were researchers of natural sciences, who had the possibility to work in prestigious research institutes, receive high salaries and bonuses and enjoy considerable social prestige without too many ideological, financial or bureaucratic constrains. The faculties of natural sciences and mathematics-mechanics were the most popular ones in Moscow State University in

198 M. Levinov: We continue the discussion on professions. Yunost 12/1968.

199 Kuebart 1989, 104; Mouly 1976, 225-228.

the 1970's. Both of them accepted approximately one out of eight or nine applicants.²⁰⁰ This shows that higher education could also be connected to independence from the state and its politics, which must have been alluring to many young people. This perspective does not emerge in letters of Yunost.

These preferences were also visible in the immense rise of education level in the USSR. From 1959 to 1985 the number of people with higher education rose from 36% to 69%. During Perestroika almost every Soviet family, urban or rural, had children or other close relatives who had graduated from a college or university. At the same time appreciation toward education changed during Perestroika, when the difference in wages between people of the highest and lowest educational levels diminished. Engineering, mathematics and physics all lost popularity, whereas 'easy' occupations in humanities gained popularity.²⁰¹

The Soviet political elite realized that people actually chose their professions based on material incentives such as wages, housing, quality of services and climate, but still they expected that the interests of the society should have some influence in the choices people made in the economic sphere. Essential ideological demands were the willingness of young people to become workers in agriculture or industry, to work in non-prestigious and poorly paid branches of economy, their will to stay in the same job location and their readiness to relocate permanently to the eastern and northern parts of the USSR.²⁰²

These ideological demands were often visible in the replies to Levinov, who had in his letter strongly criticized the idea of postponing one's studies in an institute or a university in order to gain working experience first. Most of the published replies were written by young people who were willing to become workers and work for the Motherland:

I would probably agree with Levinov if I had entered an institute right after school. I didn't do it: I went to work in a factory. I haven't changed my profession and now I'm working as a mechanist-instrumentalist for the seventh year. --- Our country is great and everyone has a chance to find a place in life.

200 Mouly 1976, 229; Yurchak 2006, 139.

201 Shlapentokh 1989, 63, 81.

202 Shlapentokh 1989, 25.

*One doesn't have to be an academic in order to think creatively. One can be satisfied in any work, if it is his right place. I have found my place, even though I'm still planning to study. I don't have to disengage myself from people; after all I live surrounded by people. I live to work and work to live.*²⁰³

*We shouldn't argue if it's more interesting to be an artist, a writer, a physician, a pilot, or on the other hand to be a caretaker or a salesman of tonic water. I think that the existence of such professions as a caretaker, a trucker, a worker on the assembly line, a salesman - is a question of time. In the future there will be no physically demanding or simply boring work. Automatics, telemechanics and the human mind will free people from the necessity to do such work. There are only two 'buts'. The first one is that still today all these demanding professions are needed and it's not possible to avoid them. After all nobody will build us the future without hard physical or simply uninteresting work. That future is connected with this hard work, which should not be called uncreative. Now it is needed and one cannot avoid it, so we have to respond to it as creative and with respect! Another 'but' is connected to the fact that not all people (and they are the majority) are able to be nuclear physicists, mathematicians, cosmonauts (by the way, it is nowadays also physically demanding work!), significant medical specialists, composers, writers, journalists, artists, actors. It demands talent, health, perseverance, knowledge – in one word, given abilities. And it is useless to demand more from a person than he is able to give.*²⁰⁴

Levinov is not alone. There are people who are willing to enter any institute. At school we organized a debate 'Your dream'. We had fierce arguments. We talked about the importance of profession in life and about how to make one's dream to become reality. One girl, who was quietly listening to our arguments, suddenly said calmly a few words that many stopped to think: 'I want to enter any university, to be one of the students and to have a higher education.' It became quiet. I think that I know what everyone was thinking. After all, these

203 V. Bogrdanov: I live to work and work to live. Yunost 6/1969.

204 Nina Motorina: Romance is difficulties. Yunost' 6/1969.

*thoughts have lately come to my mind as well. If I won't be accepted where I want to... What to do? Waste a year or even several? Enter a university where there is less competition? But then how to combine this with discussions about the importance of a profession, about romance and nobility? --- This is why from institutes graduate agronomists, who don't love the earth, doctors, who don't love the ill, pedagogues, who don't love children. They waste their diplomas, they waste five years of their life and demanding studies.*²⁰⁵

The discussion handled most of the problems the Soviet system of higher education had. Traditional appreciation of higher education remained and many of the writers that were occupied in working-class jobs thought that their position was weak when compared to their peers, who continued their studies in the university. University students condescended to them, even though the workers should have been the highest social class. This is an example of the contradictions between ideals created by the socialist ideology and reality. These contradictions were naturally very opposite to the officially promoted ideal, which stated that in the communist society all distinctions between mental and manual labor would be eliminated and intelligentsia would cease to exist. In reality only 3% of secondary school graduates wanted to start working immediately. The young people who found themselves working in factories usually wanted to leave their job and go through additional education. It was only during Perestroika when the prestige of working-class jobs rose because the shortage of workers led to higher salaries.²⁰⁶

On the other hand a survey measuring the values of young people in the USSR in the 1960's showed that young people wanted their profession to bring them respect, a good salary and a chance to express themselves. Popular professions among young men were for example engineer or academic, whereas working-class professions were far behind. Most of the young people said that they were completely against the idea that workers would be the highest social class. Numerous sociological surveys showed that societal and individual interests were completely opposite. Soviet youth were very reluctant to join the working class, which was ideologically considered as the leading social force of the USSR. In the 1960's and 1970's only 15% of young

205 Galya Levitskaya: Go where your dream leads you! Yunost' 6/1969.

206 Roth-Ey 2011, 3; Shlapentokh 1989, 73-74.

people wanted to become industrial workers, while the workers made up 62% of all employees in the country. The appreciation of agricultural workers was even lower than industrial workers. This led to the fact that Soviet secondary school graduates were ready to attend any kind of higher level school, which accounted to a situation that only one third of the people with higher education liked their occupations.²⁰⁷

Some young people rebelled against the social hierarchy and the expectations from their parents and decided to become workers. Their letters were often published in Yunost as they promoted the state ideals, which the majority of youth did not adopt:

In the ninth grade we got a new, young teacher of technology. He succeeded in awakening the interest of students and inspiring us with his stories about the life of factory workers, about socialist competition between work brigades. He took us to visit factories. Because of him we decided to continue our studies in the technical institute after secondary school. --- It cannot be that we are less appreciated because we don't study in the university, but instead learn all the difficulties of mechanical work?!²⁰⁸

I study in the municipal technical vocational school here in my hometown. But my parents are against my studies in this school. And I don't know why. Maybe it is shameful for them that their daughter, who finished 10 grades, goes to construction sites and will be walking around in dirty workers' overalls? Every day they are looking for a job for me – a clean one, such as a nanny in the kindergarten. And my mum is a builder herself. Isn't it funny? She tells me: 'You will be sorry and cry'. But I like my future job! I will be a painter-plasterer. After all, how many young men and women are working in the youth building projects! After I finish school I want to go to a Komsomol building project.²⁰⁹

Parents demanded their children to study in the universities whereas the children themselves had in some cases adopted the ideals of working-class professions and

207 Shlapentokh 1989, 72-73, 404-405.

208 Several writers: Why such appreciation? Yunost 8/1975.

209 Maya A.: Why such appreciation? Yunost 8/1975.

applied to various professional institutes. The discussion in the letters was often focused on working-class professions, which was in line with the aims of the party: its politics included the support of vocational education according to the needs of labor market.²¹⁰ Several writers pointed out that many applied to universities just because of the pressure from parents:

*I chose my way too. But it is not the case that in my heart would be the white coat, in which my mum sees me, or the walls of pedagogical institute, where I wanted to go earlier. It was already two years ago, when I made my choice. I grew up in a town by the sea, in a town where almost every boy sees himself in the uniform of a captain. But it's easy for the boys; a dream today is reality tomorrow. But when I told my family that after school I want to go to a vocational school and become a radio-operator, mum wasn't shocked at all, she just said shortly and simply: 'No, you are going to the institute.' And grandma did not take it seriously at all. She said: 'She will change her mind, there is still time.'*²¹¹

*When I studied in school, I was interested in literally everything, from literature to radiotechnics. And in addition I graduated from music school. But after ninth grade I went to practical training in a machine-building factory, in the construction office. There I copied drawings, but in this blunt work I tried to put my whole soul, so that my drawings would go to production and not to trash. And they went to the workshop. This working rhythm caught me and on tenth grade I realized that the factory means everything for me. I graduated from school with an average of 4,6²¹². Everyone thought that I will go to an institute to study full-time, but I decided: in order to be a real professional one should not only study, but also work. I started with a lithe and now I am already an engineer-technologist.*²¹³

210Kuebart 1989, 104.

211 Yuliya Slavskaya: Choosing a direction. Yunost 4/1977.

212The scale of grades in Soviet schools was from 1 to 5, five being the best grade.

213 Sonya Snezhko: About choice of direction. Yunost 8/1978.

In the institute I meet people, who want to come there to study. First come the grown-up school graduates: those who had served in the army or those who had worked for a year or two and seriously decided to study specifically here. There's no point to ask them: 'what do you want to become?'. But others come as well, straight from school. Among them are different types of people. There are those who are really ready to study, and those who were sent by mum's and dad's acquaintances or whose grandma went through all institutes until finally found an old friend among the teachers. Now already raises a question: 'Who will study? Sons and daughters or maybe their fathers or builder-uncles?'.²¹⁴

In reality the large majority of Soviet youth wanted to continue their studies right after school. A study conducted in the 1970's shows that 80% of high school graduates wanted to pursue full-time studies immediately. Only 8% wanted to take a job and 12% wanted to combine work and study. In another study conducted in the area of Sverdlovsk shows that 91% of high school graduates wanted to pursue higher education. The desire for higher education was similar in all social classes, in all cases more than 75%, while in reality only 35% of high school graduates entered higher educational institutions in 1976.²¹⁵

The following letters depict careers in professions that had no connection to industry or agriculture. These types of letters formed a clear minority among the letters published in Yunost, as the magazine strongly concentrated in promoting working-class professions in all its material. These letters show that according to the social ideals also professions in education or healthcare were suitable, especially for females:

I am planning to enter a pedagogical institute. Why? I answer with a quote from K.D. Ushinsky: people take care of their offspring and that is why they are interested in pedagogical questions. Yes, I want that people, our offspring, will be honest, good, fair and considerate toward each other. For this one must know how to educate. And somewhere deep in my soul I know that it is my

214 Anna T.: 'From now on only red...' Yunost 9/1973.

215 Mouly 1976, 229.

*calling.*²¹⁶

*I work as a nurse. A dream about this profession existed already a long time. I love to take care of everybody. I finished eight grades and entered a medical vocational school. After that everyone encouraged me to go to an institute, because the work of a nurse is demanding and the salary is small, but I did not agree. In my soul I have only this work.*²¹⁷

People also describe their unsuccessful choices of profession, which were usually connected with the insufficient knowledge about the professional field before starting the studies:

*My name is Zhenya. I study in the polytechnic institute in the faculty of chemistry. I live in the boarding house. In two days the headmaster will sign my letter of resignation from the institute. It is so that when I started in the faculty 1,5 years ago (it is already my second year here), I knew practically nothing about my field. During the first year we were told nothing about it. They said that we will work in industry, chemistry laboratories and chemical factories. --- When I said that I want to resign from the institute, my class teacher said that it is insane and that I should definitely finish the studies, of which there was very little left before I would graduate as a professional. But what kind of a professional will I become, when I am not interested in my field at all? I can hardly work well, if I don't like my work?*²¹⁸

*I study in the shipbuilding faculty and, to be honest, I don't study with interest. To be more precise, I study badly! --- I finished school and entered the Far East Polytechnical Institute. I knew very little about my future profession. I only had to 'enter' somewhere, because almost all my friends did. And only now I regret it.*²¹⁹

216 Olga T.: About choice of direction. Yunost 8/1978.

217 Natalya Sanko: About choice of direction. Yunost 8/1978.

218 Zhenya K.: Three letters on one theme. Yunost 1/1968.

219 A.V.: Choosing a direction... Yunost 4/1977.

Even though the students received a significant amount of education preparing them for the choice of profession, it still seems like the lack of knowledge was the main problem with unsuccessful choices made. The pressure from parents and the society led to the fact that in some cases the young people chose their fields of study according to external opinions, even though self-education was one of the main features in the life of a Soviet citizen.

One of the possibilities for anti-Soviet young people uninterested in politics or social issues and passive toward the society was to give up sophisticated professional career for occupations that offered more free time. Such jobs included boiler room technician, warehouse watchman, freight train loader and street sweeper. These jobs required working for only two or three night shifts a week and left the workers plenty of free time for pursuing other interests. These jobs were undemanding and the worker was spared the need to attend meetings, parades and other public events, because only people with stronger institutional affiliations were required to attend such events through their jobs. These occupations allowed people to pursue various interests and amateur careers, from scholar of ancient languages to rock musician.²²⁰ Yunost did not publish letters connected to this type of dissident lifestyle.

5.2. Working Conditions in Industry and Elsewhere

Letters describing the problems of young workers can be divided into three groups: people had ended up in jobs that did not correspond to their education, they saw the appreciation of their work very low or the working and living conditions were poor. The problem of poor living and working conditions was most visible in letters concerning life in the countryside or in Siberia.

In general it was not very typical type of public behavior for a Soviet individual to criticize his working conditions since work was, according to the ideology, a patriotic duty. The political elite expected the workers to be conscientious. An average worker was expected to have professional pride and be concerned about the quality of his work. Moral rewards, such as commendations for success in official socialist competitions among workers in making high achievements in their work,

220 Easton 1989, 61; Yurchak 2006, 151-154.

were important. In cases where personal interests and the interests of the enterprise were in conflict, the worker was supposed to be ready to sacrifice personal interests. Also patriotism was a factor in productivity; the state expected the workers to see their jobs as an important activity for the country. In cases of conflict between local and national interests the workers were expected to secure the interest of the whole society. The workers also absorbed these ideals and described labor as a vitally important value for themselves personally and for the society. 95% of the respondents of a sociological survey conducted in various towns in the 1970's supported the following statement: 'Labor is the source of well-being for the Motherland and each citizen.' Work was also an area of personal autonomy, through which an individual was able to express himself with personal achievements, which was not typical for the Soviet society. On the other hand labor ethics deteriorated since the late 1950's. This was caused by two main stimuli in the post-Stalinist society: mass repressions and promotion of ideology were diminished. Other factors included weakening of the whole mechanism of administrative control over work and the loosening of bureaucracy.²²¹

Some of the writers described their professional pride and saw their work as a patriotic duty. They were annoyed by the fact that other people did not appreciate their work as highly as they would have expected:

*Some might think that cooking is easy. Not at all. In our group there were 35 people, of which 30 graduated and maybe 10 people started to work in this profession. Our work is physically demanding. From 7 o'clock in the morning until night – few people realize this.*²²²

And the attitude towards our work (the writer was a housekeeper) is varied, often dismissing and condescending. It sometimes happened that our girls felt themselves completely humiliated. You come with an intention to help people (who have ordered a cleaning of the apartment) and the housewife, a young and healthy woman, lies on the couch and makes remarks, without lifting a

221 Kharkhordin 1999, 339; Shlapentokh 1989, 24-25, 37, 61.

222 Rustam Kadyrov: Maybe you know the secret? Yunost 1/1979.

*finger. There is such a smirk on her face that one loses all desire to help her.*²²³

As both of these letters demonstrate, work in the service field had very low appreciation in the Soviet society. It was seen as something that anyone could do. As mentioned earlier, in the official rhetoric work in industry or in the countryside was seen as the basis of the whole society, whereas in people's personal associations academic professions that demanded long education had high prestige. Professions in services belonged to neither of these groups.

Some writers also described the situations, where they ended up in professions that had nothing to do with their education:

*It all happened like this. I finished vocational school with excellent grades and with an orientation on 'general lathe operator'. I studied hard. I looked forward to meet the factory. I was worried: maybe I won't succeed in work.... Finally, the first day at work. I had worried in vain. Everything was very straightforward that day. To begin with they gave me a new uniform, a broom, a shovel and a bucket. They said: 'We have to bring order to the site, garbage has piled up...' Why not, cleaning is cleaning. I have never been afraid of dirty work. I cleaned the site... A week passed, then the second, and I stayed in the position: a cleaner. I hinted the master: wouldn't it be time for me to get to the drill? I can be more useful there. And the state put a lot of money to my education... Master said to me: 'Don't hurry. Are you working now? Yes, you are... You will have time to work at the drill. You will have plenty of time...'.*²²⁴

This letter brought up a contradiction between the social demands and reality. Industry suffered from lack of educated workers and at the same time the young writer was forced to work in a profession that had nothing to do with her education. The letter also shows the hierarchical structures present in working life: young workers had difficulties in having their opinions heard. The idea of hierarchy was visible in all levels of the Soviet society, from the party to schools and working places and gender roles inside families.

223 Svetlana Afliyan: It's so good, when people need you! Yunost 8/1976.

224 Lida K.: Sacked by my own wish. Yunost 11/1973.

The concept of work had a major importance in the late socialist society. In sociological surveys 40-50% of respondents saw labor as socially useful. There was usually a high correlation between productivity and satisfaction with work. About 50-80% of respondents were satisfied with their work and it was in the interests of both government and individuals to keep this number high. In the 1960's and 1970's it was first recognized that creativeness of work had a major impact in determining labor attitudes. The letter above is a typical example of a displeased worker, as they were often young and lacked working experience. On the other hand from the 1970's onwards Soviet sociologists started to stress factors such as lack of discipline and social life in the workplace, which were undesirable from the official point of view, as reasons for work satisfaction. Young workers were violating labor discipline twice as often as older workers.²²⁵

On the other hand when workers were asked whether they would continue working if they got the same amount of money without doing anything, about 20-35% of respondents said that they would prefer not to do anything. In other surveys the importance of work was preceded by personal life, material well-being, family, health, friends, love and personal happiness. Still, work was usually mentioned among the five most important values. Work was often described as interesting, but still it had only a secondary role in the lives of most Soviet citizens.²²⁶

To Soviet citizens it was stressed since childhood that they were the builders of socialism and distributors of Soviet values, such as equality, communality, helpfulness, self-sacrifice and hard work. Young people were seen as the maintainers of collective property, social equality and world peace.²²⁷ This was also visible in the letters of Yunost, in which the young people had adapted to the social ideals of the importance of work and especially factory work. The early maturation of young people is also visible in the letters discussing working life:

I work on a steam freighter as a boatswain. I sail in the Dnyepri, Desna and Pripryati. I am nineteen years old. --- After finishing eight grades most of us went to work in the sovkhos. I had already at the age of fifteen a certificate of

225 Shlapentokh 1989, 39-40, 46, 53.

226 Shlapentokh 1989, 42-43.

227 Shlapentokh et al. 2008, 120.

tractor-worker-mechanic and at the age of sixteen a certificate of electronics mechanic. Now I am sailing on a steamship as a boatswain. --- I love to be a boatswain because here, in the fleet, they don't see me as a child, who is still young and cannot be trusted because of the fear that he will do something wrong. Here exists an unwritten rule: once you came to work in the fleet, you have to work just like everyone else, young age doesn't give any extra benefits. And I like it. Sometimes it happens that we work around the clock, even two days in a row, without sleeping. And nobody tells me that I should go and sleep. And I like this as well. I feel like in 'the seventh heaven', because these people trust me, believe that I can work as much as them and survive without sleep as long as everyone else.²²⁸

As this letter shows, there was again clear dualism between the conditions in the countryside and in cities. In the countryside most people finished minimal education and started to work at an early age. They also started family life and got married early. The concepts of 'youth' and 'youth culture' did not exist in the countryside in the same way as in towns. The subcultures and leisure activities of youth were mostly urban phenomena, because in the countryside the amount of cultural services was limited.

5.3. Work in the Countryside

An important theme present in letters describing working life was work in kolkhozes and sovkhoses. Agriculture was in a weak state after Khrushchev era of experimental farming, so its improvement was one of the main goals during the more stabilizing Brezhnev period. Brezhnev ended the reorganization of farming and different kinds of cultivation campaigns. He also started to restrict individual farming in order to secure better profits for kolkhozes and wages for workers and more investments on agriculture.²²⁹

Agriculture had a major impact on domestic affairs and clearly on the writers as well. One of the published letters described life in kolkhoz 'Ilyich's way' in the oblast of Kalinin:

228 Vasiliy G.: I want trust. Yunost 2/1968.

229 Nove 1978, 5.

*Life is good in the kolkhoz: there's a big culture house, dormitories for young specialists and big mechanics workshops. One thinks that everything is smooth. But the youth is moving to town. And those, who remain, wonder: what to do? The specialists that came to work in the kolkhoz have to sit at home.*²³⁰

The writer referred to young mothers, who had to stay at home with the children due to the lack of kindergartens and other services in the countryside. Another writer brought up the same problem. He was just about to get married and dreamed about moving to the countryside with his wife. But the situation of close-by sovkhoses and kolkhozes worried him, and in his letter the writer pointed out many of the most typical problems of life in the Soviet countryside:

*There are many kolkhozes and sovkhoses close to Borisoglebsk. But the building processes in them go on very slowly. It's not even possible to talk about organization. Most of the inhabited places are reached only by tractor in spring and autumn... And the young are moving to towns. The way of life in the village does not satisfy them. They are tempted by the asphalt on the main streets in towns and the 8-hour-long working day. --- Comrades representatives and leaders! Build more kindergartens (they are very much needed), build more organized villages (how many projects have already been developed!), build roads (it is not acceptable to be isolated from town and medical services during the period of frost). Your expenses will be compensated a hundred times with our strong young hands, our Komsomol will! We can build a domestic animal production complex in Komsomol voluntary Sunday work, on free time! After all, we are going to build for ourselves and for the Motherland!*²³¹

In another published letter a young girl described her decision to stay and work in the sovkhos even though she had finished school with good grades. The writer's experience about work and life in the sovkhos was very positive:

230 Aleksandr Miroshkin: What to do? Yunost 1/1975.

231 Aleksandr Kononov: Earth attracts toward itself. Yunost 9/1975.

*It is great – to make others happy with your work. When you take care of your favorite chores, working is easy. --- The management of the sovkhos takes our initiatives very seriously. Not only our superintendents, but also the manager of the sovkhos - all of them were with us during the first days and helped us. We don't lack anything; the management of the sovkhos purchased us a refrigerator, washing machine, radio, television. --- We live in a boarding house, in all friendship and joy. There's enough time for reading and going to the cinema and dances. --- The most important thing is that when staying and working in the village, we understood the price of our bread and how hard it is to produce these drops of milk. --- I like to work in the farm, even though to be honest I never thought I would choose this profession for myself. Earlier I prepared for entry exams at the philological faculty of Kaliningrad University, but now there has been a change in my life. I am planning for distance studies at the agricultural institute. I want that my whole life would be connected to the countryside, where I was born and where I grew up!*²³²

As these examples and sociological data from the 1960's and 1970's suggest, collective farmers were more oriented towards work content than material incentives. In this aspect they differed from other groups of workers. Results confirming this idea were collected from all over the USSR.²³³

Parents and mothers in particular influenced often on the decisions of young people whether to stay in the countryside or to move to cities. In most cases parents encouraged their children to study and move to cities as working conditions in the countryside were difficult. The prestige of agricultural work was very low also among young people. In a sociological survey conducted in the 1960's male graduates from secondary schools in Novosibirsk gave academic workers an average score of 6,61 on a 10-point scale. This made scholars as the most prestigious group in this survey. Agricultural workers had the lowest score in the survey, only 2,50. Traditionally men were mostly working as tractor or combine drivers or agricultural machine operators, whereas women mostly took care of the dairying and fieldwork. These were

232 Vera Garmayte: I stay to work in the sovkhos. Yunost 11/1976.

233 Shlapentokh 1989, 41.

considered more demanding than the men's work. The heroic figures of female tractor drivers as a sign of gender equality in the USSR were not reality.²³⁴

Living conditions described by the writer of the letter above were very different from the average situation in the countryside of the USSR in the 1970's: most of the kolkhozes and sovkhozes worked without plumbing or running water, the roads were unpaved and services, such as culture, medical services and shopping possibilities, were extremely limited.²³⁵ It is not surprising that also critical voices were present on the pages of Yunost:

We have educated young people and they look for acknowledgement for their knowledge. But they are asked to milk a cow – by hand, collect potatoes – by hand, mow hay – by hand and pick linseed – by hand. --- A young person never gets appreciation because of his knowledge. People fly to the cosmos and he is offered a shovel as the main productive means! --- A normal day at work... that's what a kolkhoz worker dreams about. Cowshed workers shouldn't work for more than eight hours per day. Still cowshed workers in the countryside get up earlier than anyone else and come back home late at night. A cowshed worker doesn't have a possibility to go to the movies and has no chances to wear her newly purchased dress anywhere.²³⁶

The cooperation of stables serves us badly; often there are no necessary items. In order to buy a suit, you have to go to town. For a long time there was no tobacco or cigarettes in the village. --- The workers in town have possibilities to finish secondary education and distance study in technical universities or institutes without resigning from work. In our village there is no such possibility. And still we, the young people, have finished seven grades and would like to study further.²³⁷

Many want to continue their studies after 8th grade. But because of the

234 Bridger 1989, 86-90; Shlapentokh 1989, 60.

235 Bridger 1989, 89; Kelly 1998, 255.

236 A. Orlov&L. Frolov: The writers answer, think, argue... Yunost 3/1965.

237 Several writers: The writers answer, think, argue... Yunost 3/1965.

unsuccessful organization of work in the village it's difficult to take part in evening classes: there is no time. For cowshed workers, for example, the evening milking at the farm begins at the same time with the classes. And in summer they have to go milking in the fields. And after that one has to wash and change clothes. The organization doesn't inspire people to study further, either: isn't it all the same, whether a field worker, a cowshed worker or a mechanic will have eight or ten years of education? The salary is the same, depending on the working hours. --- We come to the club and before the movie we dance in felt shoes and fur coats: there's no coat room. Is this right? We, just like townfolk, would like to dress fashionably, to sit in cafés and play games... --- For some reason people think that the most important role of countryside clubs is not culture, but propagandization of progressive production methods. Wherever you go, the walls are filled with posters about chemistry and fertilizers etc. A cowshed worker comes from the farm to club and even in there you have an udder staring at him from the wall. Shouldn't there be some kind of a difference between work and leisure?²³⁸

These citations describe vividly the various shortages of services in the countryside. Living conditions were improved by establishing clubs, where dances and film showings were organized. These clubs promoted the idea that culture was used to relax after work and restore energy for building a communist future. The cultural products had also educational goals, but on the other hand it was acknowledged that the majority of workers preferred show tunes to opera.²³⁹ Despite the effort put on culture and education, it was difficult to study further than eight grades of elementary school in the countryside; work was hard and cultural activities for leisure almost non-existent.

It is important to notice that these critical letters were written in 1965, when the agricultural reforms were just beginning. By 1975 many kolkhozes had been turned into sovkhozes and the salaries of agricultural workers had risen faster than industrial wages and salaries. When the income from private plots was added, there was only a very small difference between rural and urban incomes. On the other hand,

238 Several writers: The writers answer, think, argue... Yunost 3/1965.

239 Roth-Ey 2011, 4.

the work remained physically demanding, as still in 1979 65% on agricultural work, such as dairying, feeding the cattle and production of vegetables, was done manually.²⁴⁰

Until the 1960's a majority of Soviet citizens lived in the countryside. Urbanization was a distinct phenomenon of 1960-70's and the amount of rural population decreased significantly. The government intervened by the end of 1970's by improving the standards of living in the countryside, which slowed the urbanization process. Still, the standards of living in the countryside remained lower than in cities and population moved from villages to regional centers and onwards to Moscow and Leningrad. Also dissatisfaction with agricultural work was a major reason for migration. Already since the first five-year plan in the 1920's the Soviet authorities tried to prevent rural inhabitants of small cities from leaving their place of residence by closing Moscow and dozens of other big cities in the country. This was done by requiring a stamp in the internal passport (*propiska*) indicating the approved address of permanent resident, thus regulating the number of new residents.²⁴¹

The migration processes within the Soviet Union were different from other countries as there were no universally desirable or undesirable areas in the country. In general, there were three nodes for migration: the extreme east and north-west; the south-centre (North Caucasus) and the Far East. The areas of west-centre (Volga area) and western Siberia lost migrants to these areas. The middle-sized towns of 10 000-75 000 inhabitants grew fastest. This can be explained by the fact that fully rural population usually moved first to smaller towns and then to larger ones, where a certain degree of training and skill were required. A substantial part of the differential growth in larger cities was brought by movement from one major city to another. Until the mid-1960's, the majority of migrants were young men, who could find work in industry. By the 1980's the situation was the opposite: the majority of migrants were young women, which caused a shortage of staff in livestock units of *sovkhozes* and *kolkhozes*. The main reason for women's migration was the lack of skilled, mechanized work for women on the farms. Operation of farm machinery remained a male preserve and the sexual division of tasks was strict.²⁴²

240 Bridger 1989, 87-88; Nove 1978, 6-7.

241 Bridger 1989, 83, 88; Shlapentokh 1989, 86-87.

242 Bridger 1989, 92-93; Newth 1978, 91-92.

One of the letters pointed out some practical reasons for urbanization:

Ask any boy or girl in our village: which one is better? They will surely answer: 'Town..' There are thousands of professions to choose from. And in the village? A mechanic, a cowshed worker, a field worker... In town there are clubs and cinemas for every step. Roads of asphalt, cleanliness. And in our village you cannot cross a road without rubber boots in spring. And where can one go? In the club there are only younger people. I have read all the books from the library already during school... It is difficult to understand my parents: they lived in the village all their lives. And what kind of a life is that – the field, the farm, your own household... From morning 'till night! I don't want to live that way!²⁴³

The tone of voice in most letters describing the life in the countryside was idealistically patriotic. The last letter brings up a more realistic view on the everyday life in the countryside. Also the statistics show that the urbanization process became even stronger in the 1970's. Only a small minority of people fulfilled the social ideals of working in the countryside.²⁴⁴

5.4. Work in Siberia – A Social Ideal

One of the major Soviet ideals in the 1970's was the participation in mass building projects of Siberia, such as the Baikal-Amur railway (BAM), which according to a Soviet myth was started by members of Komsomol in 1974. Even 10-14-year-old pioneers were involved in the building of BAM by collecting scrap metal.²⁴⁵ This subject was discussed in several letters. One of the writers described his wish as follows:

I want to build houses, houses and cities. And I want to build there, where they have never existed. There, where the dark forests hum and wild animals roam. Of course in the Far East and East Siberia. --- But I don't know where. The

243 Valentina Gavrilov: In the village and in town. Yunost' 8/1977.

244 Shlapentokh 1982, 405.

245 Weaver 1981, 101-102.

busiest building has ended in Abakan-Tayshet. The hydal powerplant of Sayano-Shushenkaya is already being built, there is already a city in Ust-Ilim. Please help me: give me some advice, where in Siberia the building work is just about to begin? Where only the bunkhouses and sticks stamped to the ground mark the future industrial and residential areas? Overall I want to start the building process of the north and Siberia, where there's frost, mosquitoes and gnats. No, I'm not afraid of troubles, and it's not just talk. I am 19 years old and I have never built anything, while my peers once built Bratsk and Komsomolsk-na-Amure (cities in East Siberia). I want to do that too, when I'm still young and when hot blood is still running in my veins.²⁴⁶

Other letters about building processes in Siberia also described production competitions of factories, so that the needed amount of components could be delivered to Siberia. Patriotic commitment had a major role as a motivator of youth. Also the writers of letters published in Yunost saw the work in Siberia as their patriotic duty. The majority of them also seemed to have an idealistic idea about work in huge building projects in the far north. Romanticism was a major motivator for many of the workers: the image BAM and the work in Siberia had in the media was very romantic and encouraging. This image encouraged young people to apply for work in Siberia and in some regions there were up to ten applicants for each place available in the construction sites of BAM. Many of the young workers returned home soon, realizing that work in Siberia was too harsh for them.²⁴⁷

It was an important goal for many active Komsomol-members to take part in the building projects of Siberia:

For our honeymoon we did not travel to the Black Sea coast, but to Yakutia, to the town of Lensk, with the students' building unit from the Tallinn Polytechnical Institute and the University of Tartu. We were in the same brigade with Kolya, as always. In the village of drillers we built a cement-manufacturing unit, then a warehouse for the chemicals and apartments for the workers of the gas plant. There was a huge amount of work, but still we

246 Kolya Popov: Hurrying to the beginning, Yunost' 3/1973.

247 Shlapentokh et al. 2008, 117; Weaver 1981, 109-111.

went there, knowing that slacking would be out of question. Every day – working hard and sometimes finishing at eleven o'clock in the evening. Of course, we earned some money during these two months in Yakutia. But it was not only because of money the members of our students' building unit worked every day one and a half shifts. We saw how the drillers and the gas plant workers crammed into their wooden houses, how they lacked working hands in these places. So no meetings or agitation was needed: the results of our work were not measured with diagrams and percentages, but with the gratitude of the people who got new apartments in the houses we built. I think that one of the reasons for the popularity of students' building units among the youth is that people know the results of their work: houses, cowsheds, granaries, hospitals and clubs. One sees and can even evaluate his contribution to common projects, and this is very important for reinforcing self-confidence of a young person, as I know from my experience.²⁴⁸

Last summer I went to BAM with my work brigade. I worked at the Baikal for a month. Time goes by fast working in the factory building routes and oil pipes – they write about these people on the newspapers and talk about them on the radio. I became interested and went there. In a month it is, of course, difficult to internalize all the niceties, but I liked it on the BAM. Only the sincere guys work there. Not long ago they sent me a letter, in which they asked me to come there with my whole family. I haven't decided yet...²⁴⁹

In reality work in a construction project was not an important goal for most Soviet young people. In a sociological survey from 1969 it appears that the most typical short-term aspirations were 'to get an interesting job', 'to get higher education', 'to visit other countries', 'to achieve material well-being' and 'to acquire good housing', which were all mentioned by over half of the respondents, whereas 'to work on a construction project' was mentioned by 18,4%. One of the most important reasons for young people to take part in a construction project was money. In Siberia, salaries were often at least double compared to other parts of the country. After a few years of

248 Lyuba Petina: Everything is still ahead... Yunost 6/1978.

249 Valeriy Tselera: I work as a machinist. Yunost 4/1978.

work, young people were able to return home with their earnings.²⁵⁰

People were encouraged to move from Central Asia, where the birthrate was three or four times higher than in other parts of the Soviet Union, to northern and eastern parts of the country that suffered from labor shortages. Already since the 1920's the ruling elite had considered the economic and demographic development of the eastern parts of the country an extremely important part of the Soviet economic program. Persuading people to move to east was an essential part of pre-war propaganda. Still, living conditions remained poor and housing situation was much worse than in the European part of the country. In 1984 50% of inhabitants in Siberia were strongly dissatisfied with their housing conditions. Even though people in Siberia received a higher salary than in the western part of the country, it did not compensate for the hardship of life in Siberia or the Far East.²⁵¹

The intense housing projects had already begun under Khrushchev, who wanted to fulfill the revolutionary promise to provide to the proletariat all fundamental human necessities. The policy of the 1950-1960's marked a return to the 'normal' development of socialism, in which material progress and concern for the populace were the two most crucial components. The question of housing had been important since the October Revolution, but it had waned in the 1930-1940's because the capital and resources were used to industrialization and collectivization of land. The question of housing was also closely connected to the problem of urbanization.²⁵²

One of the writers described his living conditions in Siberia very lively:

*It is by no means understandable, why the living conditions in Tyumen are so poor. We live together with my wife in separate rooms in a boarding house, but that's ok as long as the accommodation is permanent. --- There's a lot of disorder in the boarding house. There are no cultural activities or sports available. It is possible to take a shower only after 12 pm. --- And right next to us is a boarding house of pharmaceutical factory workers where everything works normally. We are almost jealous.*²⁵³

250 Mouly 1976, 222-223.

251 Shlapentokh 1989, 86-89.

252 Varga-Harris 2006, 102.

253 Gennadiy Akimov: I came here seriously. Yunost 1/1974.

The quotation above is a good example of the overall care that factories usually took of their workers. Besides accommodation leisure activities, such as music, dancing, a library and sports, were available. In general the standards of living notably improved during late socialism: housing shortage was managed through building of huge suburbs, in which apartments were more comfortable than factory-owned boarding houses. As production of consumer goods improved, more and more people had the opportunity to purchase a refrigerator, a car or a television. In addition sports and cultural activities were developed and an increasing number of people had the opportunity to travel on holidays to the Black Sea coast.²⁵⁴ It is no wonder that the writer of the quoted letter was disappointed with his austere living conditions.

On the other hand, according to a sociological survey from the 1970's, the most typical reason for discontent in working life were bad housing conditions, which was the main reason for discontent according to 27% of respondents. Already during Stalinism and the Thaw poor working and living conditions in industry had led to increased levels of violence. Major reconstruction sites and mobilization of vast amounts of young people into ill-equipped industries combined with the conservative living code propagandized by the Komsomol led to various problems. The main task of Komsomol was to promote the values and ideology of the CPSU in order to improve the economic condition of the state. These values were in some ways contradictory to the people's individual hopes and desires. The promoted ideals alone, such as building communism by working in Siberia, were not enough to satisfy the people's personal needs, which included demands of adequate housing and reasonable working conditions.²⁵⁵

254 Kelly 1998, 254.

255 Fürst 2006, 138; Shlapentokh 1989, 76.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The goal of the study has been to analyze the representations of everyday life and worldview of Soviet youth in 1964-1982 and the borders of individual expression in a Soviet youth magazine during the period. This has been done by analyzing the letters from readers sent to the Soviet youth magazine Yunost. The themes discussed rose from the material itself and were very similar to the topics which are present in the existing studies on Soviet youth. These included work in Komsomol, choice of profession, life in the countryside or in Siberia, and changes in popular youth culture. With the research literature it was possible to place the letters into a wider historical and cultural context and the letters were treated as examples of the everyday phenomena and values. Their role as part of their writer's public performance was also noted in the analysis, as the Soviet society was strictly divided into private and public spheres. The public sphere was strictly controlled, not only through censorship, but even more through the acceptable modes of behavior that were determined by the surrounding society and its dominant ideology.

The theoretical background of the study lies in the hermeneutic knowledge theory, the goal of the study being to understand the individual as a representative of his own culture and era. Also background information on the Soviet media field and changes in the society were discussed in order to provide a wider context for the letters and to enable hermeneutical understanding. The language used in the letters reflects the official rhetoric commonly used in the public sphere of the Soviet society, which is why also the most common features of this type of rhetoric were discussed. It must be also pointed out that the goal of this study is not to analyze the rhetoric or language used in the letters, but instead to place the letters into wider contexts.

Before discussing the contents of the letters themselves it is important to notice the importance of values, ideology and the dual nature of public performance and private self for the Soviet individual. The letters published in Yunost belonged to the sphere of public performance, which is why it was important to pay attention to the ways of describing phenomena by using ways of self-expression that were accepted in the society. This is why central concepts, such as the collective, the creation of a new Soviet person and the duality of private and public, which was visible in all levels of the society, are discussed in the study.

One of the main sources for collective memory and identity was the Great Patriotic War, which was discussed in several letters. Most of these letters were memoirs, written by the older readers of Yunost. The young people were mostly discussing war through their own experiences from popular culture, Komsomol activities or stories from older generations. This shows that the Great Patriotic War was an essential element of collective memory of the society. Through various realms of memory the war was present in the everyday lives of the youth. The war was an important element in the unification process of the 'Soviet family of nations' and it was also used to raise patriotism among the people. As patriotism was one of the central values promoted by the state ideology, it was also beneficial for Yunost to promote patriotism by publishing letters discussing issues connected to war. Even though military-patriotic education was an essential part of the Soviet education system, it must be questioned whether patriotism was an important part of the internal mentality of the people or whether it was more an element of external public performance.

The various activities organized by Komsomol were discussed in several letters, which is understandable when the central role of the organization both in the lives of the young people and in the state hierarchy are taken into account. Some of these letters were critical, describing the low enthusiasm toward Komsomol. In these types of letters one of the central elements of the Soviet mentality was visible: the critique was never pointed at the organization itself, but instead at the people working in the organization. The system was perfect, but the individuals working within it were imperfect and prone to mistakes. The same pattern was repeated in the letters concerning social problems: the society was good and offered each individual equal opportunities, but the individuals themselves were weak and unable to seize the opportunities the society offered them. The majority of writers describing Komsomol saw it as a significant actor in their lives, which offered the life of an individual content and meaning. In most of these letters Komsomol was described as something that was able to save individuals from the negative factors in their personal lives. Here the binary nature of the Soviet view on humankind was repeated: the collective was always good, the problems were caused by the individual himself. The thematic concerning the importance of self-discipline and self-training were central elements in

these letters. In the descriptions concerning concrete activities organized by Komsomol, non-ideological issues such as making friends or other activities were combined without trouble with the ideals of communism-building. The writers were not just describing how they made friends with new people at the camp, but how they solidified their comradeship with new people in order to promote communism. This is an example of the phenomenon which is fairly typical for the letters: personal experiences and opinions were combined with the larger canon of ideology and collective memory.

International solidarity was also one of the main value-related themes discussed in the letters. Friendships with other nationalities were mostly described as help to other nations so that they could reach a similar level of socialism the USSR had already reached. The writers were not only Soviet, as Yunost also published letters from foreign young people describing the importance of the Soviet Union and its citizens for the rest of the world. The composition was strictly hierarchical, which was another typical element of the Soviet system. When discussing the relations between the Soviet Union and its allies, the allies were always below the Soviet Union, both in the descriptions of the Soviet and foreign writers. The Soviet Union was a helper, supporter and savior, whereas its allies were eager to learn but somewhat primitive. Also vivid descriptions about hardships of life in capitalist countries were published. These letters pointed out that an individual who had experienced the life in the socialist system could not be happy living under capitalism. In the Soviet Union the life was organized into collectives, which made life meaningful for the individuals, whereas in the West the people were either selfish individuals or meaningless grey mass, depending on the context. The letters concerning international connections are also deeply patriotic by nature. The respect and love towards the Motherland and the good natural qualities of Soviet individuals were in many cases described far more vividly than the interest toward other countries and cultures. This is a sign that in reality patriotism was a far more important value for the Soviet people than internationalism, or at least the relation of the Soviet Union and the rest of the world was always based on hierarchy, not on relations of friendship or equality.

According to my research it seems that themes connected to human

relationships, especially marriage and problems connected to it could be discussed fairly openly. Even problematic themes such as unwanted pregnancies and alcoholism are present in the letters. The seemingly free publication of these types of letters can be explained through the educational goals of Yunost. The sad stories from real life were an effective way of promoting the state ideals which were described as a key to happy and stable life. On the other hand from these descriptions it is possible to distinguish various social problems, such as unequal gender roles inside the family, lack of knowledge on sexuality and relationships among the youth, and lack of governmental support for young families, such as the insufficient amount of places in kindergartens. The writers were discussing these problems by using the rhetoric absorbed from public discourse. Individual happiness could be reached through common effort, which is why the writers were often appealing to the officials to promote projects that would enhance the common good. The opinions presented were considered to be more competent if they were supported with ideas of socialist struggle and work for the collective instead of individual wishes and desires.

Also changes in youth culture and problems connected to the generation gap were discussed fairly openly. The behavior of youth was often presented in contradiction with the deeds and behavior of previous generations, which raised protest among many young people. They were denying these contradictions by describing their own lifestyle, in which long hair and beat music could be easily combined with hard work for socialist values. Most of them were pointing out that one could be a good communist and at the same time show a moderate interest toward Western popular culture. These writers wanted to distinguish themselves from hooligans and anti-Soviet people that were acting against or being indifferent toward the predominant social values. The question on who can be defined as a dissident and what kind of activities can be described as dissidence remain open and problematic, as these concepts were highly context-bound and their definitions varied according to the opinions of individuals. The generation gap is visible in the process of defining what kind of behavior was acceptable for a good Soviet citizen and what was not. The levels of acceptable and unacceptable behavior formed a hierarchical structure. The ideals came mostly from the past, from the events of the October Revolution or the Great Patriotic War, or from the future of a truly communist society, whereas the

opposite for these ideals was formed from dissidence. Between these two extremes the forms of acceptable behavior varied. The state condemned dissidence and features connected to it, but in reality it became gradually more acceptable to combine elements of underground cultures to successful performance in the society. This meant that for the young individuals themselves it was part of their everyday reality to listen to foreign rock music and be an active Komsomol member at the same time. This loosening of values was a gradual process which reached its peak in the 1980's.

School, studies and leisure activities were rarely discussed in the letters. The letters concerning school life and studies repeated the hierarchical structures of the Soviet system. In some letters the role of the society was stressed: the Soviet educational system helped even the handicapped and those who had committed crimes. Again the composition of good and supportive society and individuals who were weak and prone to mistakes was repeated. The letters concerning leisure time were mostly repeating the same phenomena as the letters discussing the generation gap: the importance of Western cultural influences in the lives of young people and new ways of spending leisure time, and on the other hand the society's desire to control the citizens' leisure time by establishing clubs and organizing various activities. The relatively small amount of letters concerning school and leisure resulted partly from the fact that the maturation process of Soviet youth took place relatively early and most readers of *Yunost* had already finished basic education. Issues such as work and marriage were more current for them than school life and issues related to it.

On the other hand one of the most widely discussed themes in the letters was choice of profession, which was a turning point between school and working life. It was an important part of the Soviet ideology of self-training, self-criticism, hero-identification and working out a program of self-development. Choice of profession showed for its part how well the individual had adopted social ideals. Professions discussed were mostly working-class occupations, which were described as the basis of the Soviet society in the official rhetoric. The promotion of working-class professions was beneficial for the society as the Soviet industry and agriculture were suffering from a lack of workers during late socialism, which was also visible in the publishing policy of *Yunost*. This way they were in sharp contradiction with the

reality, as according to the sociological surveys conducted during late socialism academic professions were far more popular among young people than work in the industry or in the countryside. Also the ideal of entering working life directly after school was strongly promoted in the letters, when in reality only a small fraction of youth was willing to enter working life right after finishing school. All in all the letters concerning the choice of profession were repeating the themes that were important for the state and very few alternative views were presented.

The letters discussing problems in working conditions could be roughly divided into three categories: the general appreciation for one's profession was low, the writers had ended up in jobs that did not correspond to their education, or the working and living conditions were poor. The professions that suffered from low appreciation were mostly found in the field of services. These types of professions were seen as undemanding and easy, whereas professions in industry and farming were highly praised in official rhetoric and the people themselves appreciated most professions that belonged to the academic field. Professions in the field of services did not belong to either of these groups. The hierarchical structure of the Soviet society was also visible in these letters, as the people complaining about working in a profession that did not correspond to their education were usually placed in this position by a higher authority and the writers found it difficult to oppose the authority. Also the position of young workers in the hierarchy of the working place varied: some of the writers felt that they were not given the appreciation they deserved because of their age, while others felt that they were sovereign members of the working community despite their young age. By publishing these types of letters Yunost was promoting its educational goal that all work should be valued, regardless of the field or the age of the employee. Work, like most other fields of life, was based on hierarchical structures that remained fairly stable as they were based on the key values and ideologies of the Soviet system, which did not change during late socialism.

The living and working conditions both in Siberia and in the countryside were described vividly in several letters. Some of these descriptions were very idealistic with descriptions of the various conveniences the state provided the workers. On the other hand several problems were also pointed out: there was not enough support from the state for those living in the countryside. This was visible in various ways,

such as in the lack of places in kindergartens, in the poor educational possibilities, in the lack of products in shops, in the amount of work compared to the salary paid, in the lack of machinery in kolkhozes and sovkhoses, and in the poor traffic connections. All in all, it seems that the various problems connected to work in extreme conditions could be discussed fairly openly in the letters. Often the solution to these problems was that individuals were encouraged to work harder for the society and endure the hardships they were facing on the way toward a great future. Again the in general system could not be criticized directly, but the critique was directed toward separate functions that could be changed through collective action. The majority of letters were describing the positive and rewarding sides of work in Siberia or in kolkhozes and sovkhoses in an idealistic way. As work in these places was one of the main ideals of the society, Yunost tried to promote positive and idealistic discussion connected to work in Siberia or in the countryside, because in reality only a small minority of the Soviet youth was willing to follow these ideals.

In general it can be said that the themes discussed in the letters were fairly varied. In some topics, such as human relationships, problems were discussed very openly in order to promote the educational goals of the magazine. In others, such as topics related to work, the social ideals of working in industry, in Siberia or in the countryside were strongly promoted. In connection to these topics also critical voices were present, questioning the unrealistic ideals that were in sharp contradiction with the reality of working in the industry, agriculture or in the building projects of Siberia. The critique was directed toward minor social factors that could be changed through individual effort. The critical voices were rare when discussing the most essential features of state ideology and collective memory, such as the Great Patriotic War. The war was mostly described as something so sacred that its value simply could not be questioned. This shows that patriotism was undeniably the most important social value of the era and it is visible also in most of the other topics discussed, such as work, choice of profession and even human relations.

This study was based on the letters from readers that were published and on the other hand on the wide amount of research literature from different fields and periods of time. In my opinion this amount of material has been adequate to analyze the letters themselves and place the phenomena discussed in them into the appropriate

political, cultural and social context. From the letters it was also possible to point out most of the essential features of the Soviet society and ideology, such as the dualism of individualism and collectivism or public and private. Possible further studies in the topic could concentrate more on Soviet journalism and archival sources would be needed to analyze more thoroughly the system of publication or rejection of letters from readers and the overall publishing politics of Soviet youth magazines. Also comparisons to other Soviet youth magazines of the era could prove to be productive. On the other hand also concentration on the everyday life and values as themselves would require interviews or other types of new sources to complete the image presented in the letters.

The letters from readers are still a rarely used source in the field of Soviet history, even though they were the most important way for the Soviet citizens to express their opinions and demand changes in the society. They also remain representations of the people's thoughts, opinions and values, situated in the cultural, social and political context of the era. Through them it is also possible to examine the publishing policies of Soviet media. As my study shows, these two features cannot be separated from one another. The letters that were chosen to be published were supporting certain types of values and ways of behavior, either directly or through the educational goals of the society and the magazine itself. Analysis of these letters supports the idea that all the opinions published in them promote the same common goal of achieving an ideal Soviet society, even though some of the letters were fairly critical. They also offer an interesting insight to the everyday life of Soviet young people. The letters as representations of experienced reality point out things that were seen as valuable, interesting or problematic according to the people themselves. This means that my study provides the field of Soviet historical studies new type of analysis about the society and its ideology and about the individuals operating in the society through media. The study depicts these issues by discussing several relevant features of Soviet journalism and its internal systems of control, everyday life in a totalitarian society, and the values and mentalities within the Soviet society.

7. SOURCES AND LITERATURE

7.1. Sources

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