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## Manifestations of existential experiences during the collapse of the USSR in Kazakh society

This article aims to study the existential experiences of citizens of Kazakhstan during the collapse of the USSR. Researchers on this topic have not conducted a philosophical analysis. The relevance of the chosen topic is primarily due to the fact that the consequences of this period on citizens, their psychology and worldview, which were formed by the existential experiences of that period, have not been fully studied. This political event brought not only new socio-economic conditions to the lives of ordinary citizens, but also existential experiences that are associated primarily with the loss of life guidelines and ideology. In the Republic of Kazakhstan, for an entire decade (the 90–80years), a type of personality was formed that did not meet the Western standard. Thus, the experience of this period largely determined the worldview and values. People have experienced existential anxiety from the realization of their own lives. This is the basis of social relationships, which form the core and ensure the building of higher symbolic personality. The dialectical method allowed us to analyze the formation of personal experience as a complex and rather contradictory process, in which there is a clash of existential and socio-cultural determinants of human existence. The method of typology enabled the classification of certain aspects of personal experience by assigning them to certain types of philosophical teachings. The method of comparative analysis facilitated to identify the similarities and differences between different types of philosophical discourses about the personality and the experience of its development. The method of hermeneutical analysis of texts helped to reveal their general semantic context, in relation to the interpretation of personal experience in various philosophical concepts.

*Keywords:* consequences of the collapse of the USSR, existentialism, reflection, experiences, meaning of life, fear, struggle for life.

### Introduction

The collapse of the Soviet Union is the largest event of the 20th century, which brought not only new socio-economic conditions in the life of ordinary citizens, but also existential experiences associated, first of all, with a change in life orientations, ideology and values. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, a shift took place in Kazakhstan from the transparent clarity of social identifications of the Soviet type to group solidarities, where everything is decidedly ambivalent, unstable, devoid of any specific vector. The beginning of the spiritual crisis of the personality falls on the moment when a person loses the existential basis of life or its meaning, when the processes of defining sacred phenomena are violated. In other words, there is a loss of coherence between the earthly and the heavenly. A social crisis begins with the loss of social order, when heavenly moral ideals are not embodied in the real world.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, there were sharp socio-economic upheavals in all countries of the former USSR. People were in a state of “borderline situation” and moral relativism. Statehood in all countries was undermined, they experienced a constitutional and also a strong economic crisis. As a result of these events, suicidal activity increased sharply in some countries, as a rule, these were countries that had moved to a new Western individualistic system of society and the worldview of individualism. At the same time, an active experience of one’s existence could produce or intensify a personal conflict with external, objectified forms of culture and social organization of the moral universe.

### Experimental

Dialectics allows us to analyze the formation of personal experience as a complex and contradictory process, in which there is a conflict between the existence of human beings and the determinants of social culture.

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Typology method makes it possible to classify certain aspects of personal experience by referring to certain types of philosophical teachings. The method of comparative analysis enables us to identify the similarities and differences between different types of philosophical discourses on personality and their developmental experiences. The method of interpretative analysis of texts allows us to reveal their general semantic context, which is related to the interpretation of personal experience in various philosophical concepts.

*The collapse of the Soviet Union and the substitution of values: beginning of the existential crisis*

In fact, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics existed from December 1922 to December 1991 and left a deep mark in world history. The issues of the collapse of the USSR, its causes and consequences continue to interest not only historians and researchers but also a huge number of people living both in multinational Russia and throughout the post-Soviet space, as well as in other territories [1; 715–717].

Nothing is eternal. Ultimately, the system that worked in the USSR by the end of the 70s would have ceased to work. However, this could happen in different ways, at different times, in different world contexts. The Soviet system went through several historical stages, withstood many upheavals, including the Second World War [2].

This split is traditionally viewed in the world humanitarian discourse as one of the most acute global challenges of our time. However, it would be fundamental to understand how the modern world order is focused on solving the problem of inequality [3].

Existential experience is a unique and holistic experience of an authentic individual. “I come to my existence only through participation in the world in which I operate; I am only a link, and yet I, in a possibility, embrace the whole with myself”. Thus, the existential experience of a person is a grasp of the integrity of being, awareness of oneself as a microcosm, which can even be experienced as an identity with the Absolute (at least among representatives of religious existentialism) [4; 175–183].

To explicate an integral personality, but at the same time rather tense in relation to the socio-cultural environment, the existentialists introduced a specific terminology that is currently used by a significant part of modern philosophers. To comprehend this integrity, it is necessary to create new means — concepts of a special kind.

Heidegger’s such concepts — existentials — are “being-in-the-world”, “being-with-others”, “being-to-death”, “fear”, “determination”, etc. Existentials express the modes of the world’s being in its inextricable connection with the existence of human consciousness or the modes of human existence in its merger with the life world. Therefore, it is not surprising that the existential experience of a person is the experience of a person’s life, imbued with emotionally colored meanings. Nevertheless, such a personal experience in some cases does not exclude a detachment from everyday life and even a denial of excessive reflexivity.

The first thing the citizens of Kazakhstan faced after the collapse of the Soviet Union was the decline of culture. The new culture, which was imposed by the West and the loss of sense and value guidelines, began to impact our country immediately after the destruction of the USSR. Besides, this period of development of culture and society was accompanied by extreme instability. The western way of life advertised in all ways turned out to be inaccessible due to the lack of appropriate financial resources for the majority of the population. Moreover, many attributes of mass culture in Kazakhstan began to be perceived even as a kind of “elite” values.

There was a devaluation of previous projects of building a social order based on the desire for universal equality and solidarity, in which the primacy of the common good dominated the private interests (of the individual). Thus, during the massive criticism of the previous socio-political utopias, there was a value shift towards individualism [5; 420–421].

The very idea of building an ideal social order has lost its relevance. Nowadays it seems both unattainable and particularly unattractive. However, the impulse that fuels utopian thinking has by no means dried up. Now it sprouts on a different soil: instead of social utopias — individual utopias. The benchmark and measure of progress in this case is the ideally limitless expansion of individual human capabilities.

An externally imposed view of life has serious grounds, it also sheds light on the duality, ups and downs, and decentering of the personality of modern man. Thus, theories and spiritual-escapist practices that are focused almost exclusively on the individual development of a man (or “salvation”), are also becoming more and more in demand in culture.

It turns out that in the past, the development of the individual, its autonomy and freedom was threatened by the totalitarian order and the forcibly imposed collectivism. However, at present a harmonious personality, on the contrary, is threatened by extreme individualism and the loss of ties with the once strong customs

(obligatory for the majority), institutions and consciousness of collective values, which are now commonly referred to as “traditional values”.

Returning to the reflexivity of the experience of a personality, realized in the conditions of “late modernity”, it should be noted that the person himself is increasingly turning into an actor participating in a global performance. Thus, communication and human relationships themselves lose their immediacy [6; 106].

All this has led to the fact that, on the whole, personal experience is shifting towards an increase in man’s reflexivity, especially in terms of the construction of identities. In the post-Soviet “culture” of Kazakhstan, the risks of losing stable identities, which can lead to fragmentation and disintegration of an integral personality into many schizoid egos, also remain relevant. At the same time, the post-Soviet “culture” of Kazakhstan essentially institutionalizes the problems associated with personal pathologies and painful effects of loss of identity. Substitutes of Buddhist religiosity were also actively integrated into mass culture, which led to the spread of the opinion that the essence of an integral personality is emptiness, which, however, still needs to be realized.

*Fear as the basis of existential experiences during the collapse of the USSR in Kazakhstan*

The existential experience of a person is a largely mental (spiritual) experience, adjusted to its philosophical and anthropological understanding and cultural-philosophical explication. Thus, the strongest emotions, for example, “fear”, become one of the most important (and, perhaps, the main) subject of philosophical reflection.

It turns out that “fear” as an intermediary between biotic life (corporeality) and the experience of ontological categories (“being”, “nothing”), understood in its various modifications, helps to shed light on the process of invention and development of the entire human culture [7; 21].

Existential fear is an indispensable condition of being, which is realized in a double way. Overcoming existential fear occurs either in the process of becoming familiar with it, or in the process of opposition. Fear gives rise to other existentials — death, silence, loneliness, nothingness, noise, etc. It turns not only outside, but also inside, under the pressure of forces that threaten human existence, the integrity of everyday life [8; 166–170].

“The most peculiar discovery of existential philosophy was that fear was recognized in its truly fundamental meaning — as a condition for the formation of true existence” as noted O.F. Bolnov. It turns out that a person can not only experience “fear” of another “something” but also of an incomprehensible “nothing” (non-being), which gives his personal experience a special existential depth.

In general, “fear” can be expressed in its maximum form of horror or be presented in an irrational form of anxiety. “Horror reveals being in its presence to the most of its ability to be, that is, liberation for freedom of election and choice of oneself”. A strong personality is not just afraid of something, but is rather horrified of “nothing”, thereby rising above the animal world. Horror in this way (according to Heidegger and Kierkegaard) fulfills a positive, but no less radical function of enlightenment, it helps to turn to true being, at least, freeing oneself from oppressive everyday life (from falling into *das man*). At the same time, we know that when a person is terrified, he falls into a state of numbness, is able to lose consciousness and lose full control over the situation. Therefore, we are talking here about some specific experience (comprehension) of mystical horror, which in many ways resembles a religious detachment from the world of things [9; 46–56].

Such an important existential as “fear” (horror and anxiety) appeared due to the fact that the former ideals, to which the citizens of the Soviet Union, and in particular the citizens of Kazakhstan, aspired, at one moment were levelled. From TV screens, radio and the press, people were told that everything to which they devoted their lives was fundamentally wrong. The whole life of people has turned upside down dramatically. If earlier, all the problems of a person were solved by the state, now everyone had to solve their problems on their own [10].

As a result of the political pressure of new circumstances and the way of life with the collapse of the USSR, the individual began to move into the sphere of privacy. The less society gives an individual for the realization of external freedom, the lower the level of external freedom, the higher the level of internal freedom of individual individuals. In difficult external conditions, when little depends on the individual in solving, for example, state issues or there is a shortage of civil rights, a person can engage in self-education, to one degree or another orienting his future life towards the practice of escapism.

Control over the receipt of pleasure and self-control over pleasure, its dosage in accordance with accepted cultural norms can ensure the power of the individual over himself. It turns out that personal experience always includes components of power and violence.

In general, we can say that an integral personality, focused on the implementation of recognized sociocultural patterns, is a personality that is strong by definition. “Force is understood by us as the “pole of activity”, the possibility of action or action in the whole multitude of manifestations, aimed at preserving the subject, his integrity and freedom; in this dimension, one can consider all the phenomena of power management — from political to educational”. Another thing is that it is weakness, primarily spiritual, that can lead to personal disintegration, the loss of one’s own identity, the individual’s falling into a mental crisis [11].

At the same time, one cannot completely ignore the idea of the unconsciousness in a person and its influence on the formation of an integral personality. Not all mental processes can be easily realized and considered by man’s personality. Thus, for example, the fear of the future, of the unknown, which began to be observed among the citizens of Kazakhstan after the collapse of the USSR, contributed to the neurotization of citizens.

Also, certain existential experiences (the same “fear”) are always mediated in personal experience by the already established cultural patterns of their further understanding and evaluation. In different cultures, there can be various forms of overcoming basic existential fear and “working” with other existentialism. In the end, a different attitude towards death and the very existence of an individual can be formed (e.g., life is good, or on the contrary, life is suffering).

Thus, a person’s perception of the world, bearing the imprint of the era, is reflected in existential experience, the latter can also be institutionalized by means of culture and art. Therefore, the flourishing of the philosophy of existentialism coincided with the destructive consequences of two world wars, which significantly undermined the belief in progress and humanity of human civilization.

The moral experience of entire generations can be significantly corrected under the influence of the emancipation of various groups of the population, which, as a rule, were subjected to long-term discrimination in the past. So the existentials of personal life, such as “fear”, “anxiety”, “care”, “determination”, “experience of individual freedom”, are already included in the educational functions of culture in advance [12].

Moreover, it should be noted that at the point of intersection of socio-cultural norms and rules of human life, as well as of its specific emotional and existential states, that the ethical experience of a person is formed, without which a person could be recognized as just an individual. At the same time, a person himself is able to go to extremes of two kinds, that is, either completely follow his natural affects, or uncritically perceive cultural traditions and “blindly” try to fulfill their (sometimes extremely radical) prescriptions in his behavior, often recklessly merging with the totality of the social environment.

In the personal experience of a person, existential and sociocultural aspects are combined, which form the core of an integral personality, capable of action and social responsibility. The very attention to the personality is largely associated with the spread of humanism and, in a broad sense, liberal values, which, are opposed to totalitarian values that defend the primacy of the universal over the individual and substantiate the moral priority of minorities in relation to the majority.

As the leading aspects of existential experience, such experiences were identified that help a person to reveal himself as a person capable of a full-fledged act. Such an act can be directly related to the correct performance of one’s own socio-cultural functions and duties prescribed by society, and at the same time by a deeply internalized individual [13; 164–180].

The experience of one’s own existence (one’s own authentic way of existence) is often opposed to external culture and society. Here one can see a conflict between the need to be autonomous and permanent pressure in one’s actions, for example, from public morality or ideology. Therefore, the existential experience of an integral personality needs “determination”, the ability to make important and contradictory decisions, sometimes take risky and unpopular actions within the framework of the existing social consensus.

*Development of personal harmony in the process of existential transition after the collapse of the USSR in Kazakhstan*

The formation of an integral personality presupposes the experience of freedom as an important condition for its formation, which, however, should teach a person to act correctly in a necessary situation, that is, in a situation when the circumstances themselves induce to act in a certain way. Therefore, individual freedom should not turn into arbitrariness, which is capable of destroying the patterns necessary for the “normal” socialization of the individual in the dynamic space of human culture. At the same time, man’s personality cannot be completely reduced to a social-role model of behavior (for example, professional or class), which determines a person’s being. Since the freedom of a person and personality cannot be absolute, we believe

that it should be considered an ongoing process of harmonization of being at the “junction” of culture and existence. Each period has its own person who defines it.

The crystallization of the concept of “personality” in its modern meaning and the concept of an integral, harmonious personality, freely forming its cultural identity, is in close connection with the global development of human subjectivity itself.

It turned out that as a person in Kazakh society who strengthens the quality of such a “powerful” subject, his existence becomes more and more disharmonious, especially considering the weakening of the influence of religious institutions that served the function of harmonizing his relations with nature, space, life and death. “From now on, being a subject is a privilege of man, this is his most important characteristic as a thinking and representing being” [14; 62].

From now on, man is not just a measure of all things, but a man as a subject of cogitatio, that is, he makes himself, sets the measure of all measures, determines what is considered reliable, true and existing.

Nonetheless, the radical anthropocentrism of modern civilization, characterized by the capture of the natural world, a technocratic attack on the habitat of all living things, produces an additional series of anthropological risks and threats to the existence of man and his personal identity. On the other hand, it should be borne in mind that the human species has a high margin of safety and plasticity under the conditions of transformation of both culture and natural environment [15; 90].

Within the framework of philosophical existentialism, however, ethical problems related to human behavior in modern Kazakhstan were posed. Thus, man in the fundamental sense and in the long term continues to be a moral being. Another thing is that in the context of the liberalization of modern culture, the individual responsibility of a person for one or another ethical choice increases [16; 50].

The existential driver of personality development is the fundamental dissatisfaction of a person with himself and the surrounding reality. To one degree or another, people always strive for rebirth, unification with nature. People are “preoccupied” with the search for a transcendent “Other” and are busy with self-knowledge [17; 309–315].

In many ways, it is a person’s dissatisfaction with being in existence that acts as the source of his freedom, or rather, even to search for it, the desire to be free. “A person, possessing freedom, is an open self-transcending project, independently leading his life and constantly going beyond his present “I” [18; 160].

### *Results*

Thus, we have established that the existential experiences of the citizens of Kazakhstan during the collapse of the USSR are associated, first of all, with the loss of meaning and life guidelines, the substitution of value orientations, the lack of ideology, the development of fear for their future and the future of children.

Also during the collapse of the USSR, there was an introduction into the mass consciousness of personal pathologies associated with the splitting of an integral personality into many schizoid “I”.

### *Conclusions*

The developing and deepening shift in the consciousness of people, which began during the collapse of the USSR, is difficult to re-form and reproduce, so there is a desire to find a replacement. In this case, we are talking about a secondary cultural element and, as a result, regression, starting with the formation of existential experiences.

The collapse of the USSR for all post-Soviet states and their citizens has a serious destructive force that sweeps away the system of ideal values and leads to the degradation of society, returning to individualism without moral and ideal values and guidelines, when a person is able to implement progressive modern social principles. It is possible to overcome social regression by destroying the existing social foundations when a person rethinks his own place.

After the collapse of the USSR, a new culture and history arose, when the existing experience and legacy of the period of Soviet power became automatically negative. Therefore, many people faced the disappearance of ideal images, not having others in return.

Deep transformational processes in value foundations, moral principles, social value system turned out to be defenceless when the moral core could not support what was happening due to internal mutational processes.

Today, the desire for profit and quenching of thirst is the result of the collapse of the USSR, the absence of ideology as a result, the search for individual values where they cannot exist in principle. The events were

provoked by representatives of the western part of humanity, who possessed economic strength and influence sufficient to destroy the once powerful state of the USSR.

The collapse of the USSR did not become a final act, but launched a long-term process of creation and development of new independent states [19; 20–22].

Despite the spiritual crisis of the post-Soviet period, the revival of the Kazakh national identity and the renewal of the traditions and customs began.

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### **КСРО-ның ыдырауы кезеңіндегі қазақ қоғамындағы экзистенциалды тәжірибе көріністері**

Мақаланың мақсаты КСРО-ның ыдырауы кезіндегі Қазақстан азаматтарының экзистенциалды күйзелістерін зерттеу. Осы тақырып бойынша зерттеушілер философиялық тұрғыда талдау жүргізбеген. Тандалған тақырыптың өзектілігі, ең алдымен, бұл кезеңнің азаматтарға тигізген зардаптары, олардың психологиясы мен сол кезеңдегі экзистенциалды тәжірибелермен қалыптасқан дүниетанымының толық зерттелмегендігінде. Бұл саяси оқиға қарапайым азаматтардың өміріне жаңа

әлеуметтік-экономикалық жағдайларды ғана емес, сонымен бірге, ең алдымен, өмірлік бағдарлар мен идеологияның жоғалуымен байланысты экзистенциалды тәжірибелерді әкелді. Қазақстан Республикасында ондаған жылдар (80–90 жылдары) бойы батыстық стандартқа сәйкес келмейтін жеке тұлға типі қалыптасты. Осылайша, осы кезеңнің тәжірибесі көп жағдайда дүниетаным мен құндылықтарды анықтады. Адамдар өмірмәндік мәселелерді толғана отырып, экзистенциалық мазасыздықты бастан өткерді. Бұл сана сезімді қалыптастыратын және жоғары символдық тұлғаны құруға мүмкіндік беретін әлеуметтік қатынастардың негізі.

*Кілт сөздер:* КСРО ыдырауының салдары, экзистенциализм, рефлексия, күйзеліс, өмірдің мәні, қорқыныш, өмір үшін күрес.

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## Проявления экзистенциальных переживаний в период распада СССР в казахстанском обществе

Целью настоящей статьи является изучение экзистенциальных переживаний граждан Казахстана в период распада СССР. Исследователи на данную тему не проводили философского анализа. Актуальность выбранной темы обусловлена, прежде всего, тем, что последствия данного периода на граждан, их психологию и мировосприятие, которые были сформированы экзистенциальными переживаниями того периода, до конца не изучены. Данное политическое событие принесло не только новые социально-экономические условия в жизнь обычных граждан, но и экзистенциальные переживания, которые связаны, прежде всего, с потерей жизненных ориентиров и идеологии. В Республике Казахстан целое десятилетие (80–90-е гг.) формировался тип личности, не соответствующий западным стандартам. Таким образом, опыт данного периода во многом определил мировоззрение и ценности. Люди испытали экзистенциальную тревогу от осознания собственной жизни. Это является основой социальных взаимоотношений, которая формирует ядро и позволяет строить высшую символическую личность.

*Ключевые слова:* последствия распада СССР, экзистенциализм, рефлексия, переживания, смысл жизни, страх, борьба за жизнь.

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