IDENTITY FRACTALS: THE STRUCTURE OF MASS CONSCIOUSNESS AND THE CHALLENGES OF INTEGRATION IN AZERBAIJAN

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Abstract

This article proposes a fractal concept of mass consciousness. Based on an interdisciplinary analysis of sociological data and contemporary political narratives, key identity fractals in the Azerbaijani context are identified: language policy, the personification of power and historical memory. It is shown that the digital environment acts as a catalyst and amplifier of these patterns. It is established that the dominance of national identity, low levels of mass reflection and binary thinking are systemic barriers to macroregional integration. The article concludes that overcoming these barriers and transitioning to a positive regional development scenario is possible through the targeted development of mass reflection and the construction of new, integrative identity fractals.

Keywords

Fractal consciousness, social identity, nation-building, Azerbaijan, Caspian region, politics of memory, digitalization, mass reflection.

1. Introduction: Identity in the age of global challenges

The modern world confronts states with a difficult dilemma: on the one hand, the objective processes of globalization, Westernization and digitalization demand active integration into the international space. On the other hand, the response to these processes often involves strengthening national sovereignty and the desire to preserve a unique cultural identity. This universal problem is particularly acute in post-Soviet countries, which are simultaneously building independent states and seeking their place in a globalized world.

The Caspian macroregion is a clear example of this dilemma. Research shows that significant barriers to sociocultural integration exist here. Weak institutional structures, differences in digital development and most importantly, a lack of understanding among the population and elites of the meaning and benefits of integration all hinder the formation of a common macroregional "center of power". Identities associated with national sovereignty and territory remain dominant, which is natural for young states that value their recently acquired independence (Romanova & Morozova, 2025; Romanova *et al*., 2025).

Azerbaijan is a striking example of the active construction of national identity in these conditions. Focusing on creating a competitive, innovative society (Azerbaijan 2030, 2021), the country simultaneously relies on consolidation around traditional values, historical heritage and strong leadership. This process inevitably involves defining "us"

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and "them", where the image of the "Other" serves as a tool for national cohesion (Khlyshcheva, 2025).

The psychological basis of this confrontation between "us" and "them" is the deep-rootedness of basic values assimilated during primary socialization (Berger & Luckmann, 1995). Encounters with other value systems cause cognitive dissonance and a desire to return to "comfortable" cultural patterns, which often minimizes reflection and leads to a simplified, binary perception of the world. Under these conditions, the elites' task is to foster not a choice between polarized alternatives, but rather the development of mass reflection and the search for new, synthetic paths to development.

Existing theoretical approaches to the study of mass consciousness often fail to fully describe these complex, multi-scale dynamics. The purpose of this article is to demonstrate the potential of a fractal approach to mass consciousness. This approach allows us to analyze how the same patterns of perception, values and social behavior are repeated at different levels - from individual choice to national discourse and global trends - opening new possibilities for understanding the barriers and prospects for integration in the Caspian region through the lens of the Azerbaijani case. Next, we will outline the fundamentals of the fractal concept, analyze key fractals of identity in the Azerbaijani context and demonstrate the role of digital space as an amplifier of fractal patterns.

2. Fractal concept of mass consciousness

A fractal is an object, each part of which completely or approximately coincides with the whole; i.e., the main property of a fractal is self-similarity. It has been shown that natural objects and phenomena such as mountains, rivers, plants and living cells possess fractal properties (Tarasenko, 2018).

If mass consciousness is considered as a fractal system in which each level (individual, group and societal) repeats one another, then the study of mass consciousness can be conducted through an analysis of the interaction of four subsystems of the psyche: cognitive, emotional, value-need and communicative, while the integrative sphere, accordingly, will manifest itself in mass behavior (Chuprikova, 2007). In recent years, the Institute of Sociology of the Russian Academy of Sciences has been actively developing the field of geopolitical psychology (Zhuravlev *et al.*, 2020), which takes into account the influence of global processes, geopolitics and global world flows on the formation of mass consciousness.

Therefore, a global level can be distinguished in the content of mass consciousness. Mass consciousness consists of millions of individual consciousnesses, each of which, in turn, consists of a cognitive sphere (the total volume of knowledge, ideas about oneself and society), an emotional sphere, a sphere of values, motives and needs and a communicative sphere (communication "people-to-government", "people-to-people", "people-to-Internet"). The fractal structure of mass consciousness is manifested in such aspects as self-similarity (patterns repeat at different levels), nonlinearity and dependence on initial conditions (Tarasenko, 2018).

In the cognitive sphere, at the individual level, a person simplifies complex information; at the group level, a group forms myths and stereotypes; at the societal level, the media create narratives that can be repeated across cultures. At the global level, discourses such as "globalization vs. sovereignty" arise in the cognitive sphere, structuring the mass perception of events on an international scale. In the emotional sphere, individuals experience personal anxiety at the individual level, social panic at the group level (for example, in the form of panic buying during financial crises) and waves

of mass protests at the societal level. Global anxiety arises around climate change, pandemics and cyberattacks. These processes demonstrate nonlinearity and self-similarity, as the mechanism of emotional contagion is the same for both local panic and global anxiety, such as the threat of nuclear war.

In the value-needs sphere, a basic need for security and justice develops at the individual level. At the group level, this crystallizes into local value orientations (for example, the value of community or professional solidarity). At the societal level, it manifests as dominant ideals that guide mass expectations of government and determine the legitimacy of political policies. At the global level, a competition between value systems arises: "universalist values versus values of national-cultural identity". This value conflict is a fractal reflection, at the global level, of the domestic conflict between tradition and innovation.

In the communicative sphere, rumors spread through personal interactions at the individual level, social media at the group level and state-run media at the societal level. At the global level, the material carrier of the fractal is the hyperconnected digital environment, where information is instantly disseminated worldwide through international social networks. Thus, the global level represents a scale-invariant continuation of the same processes occurring at lower levels, confirming its fractal nature.

Protests are the most concentrated manifestation of mass consciousness. In its normal state, it is diffuse and unarticulated, but in protest, it expresses demands and establishes a self-identification between "us" and "them". The masses cease to be objects of influence and become subjects influencing reality, creating and disseminating meanings alternative to official ones and revealing hidden contradictions.

This logic can be applied to the phenomenon of protest movements, ranging from local protests to revolutions. A specific action by an out-group (government representatives, administration) is perceived as injustice on a cognitive level, triggering emotional anger. This then triggers a stream of rumors and social media reposts at the communicative level. With the presence of organizers, social media facilitates coordination among dissatisfied groups, ultimately leading to an escalation of negative emotions and at the behavioral level, to protest. Self-similarity then manifests itself in the fact that local conflicts, in accordance with the mechanism described, can expand to national levels. Something similar occurred during the Pugachev Rebellion, when the Yaik Cossack rebellion against the elders escalated into a peasant war.

If mass consciousness has a fractal nature, it can be studied using mathematical tools (Romanova *et al*., 2025). For example, the percolation formula can be used to analyze the speed at which ideas spread.

The occurrence of a mass effect can be calculated using the formula:

$$pc=1/\langle k \rangle,$$

where pc is the probability at which a mass effect occurs, $\langle k \rangle$ is the average degree of a node in the network (the average number of connections per individual). $\langle k \rangle$ = the total number of connections in the network/the number of nodes, where a node is a separate element of the network (an individual, a company, a city, etc.). Accordingly, the higher this indicator, the faster certain information/rumor/idea spreads, which may ultimately trigger mass behavior. In other words, the higher the average number of connections, the more vulnerable the system as a whole. In the context of historical events, nodes would be the settlements involved in protests. Then, the more nodes there are, the more difficult it is to predict the system, as the number of possible connections between them increases. The speed of propagation is also important. For example, in 1917, the number of nodes

was small (workers' clubs). Nowadays, the number of nodes is significantly higher thanks to social media, which facilitates the rapid emergence of protests. Therefore, the number of nodes is an important parameter for calculating the system's resilience to crises.

This model allows us to quantify society's vulnerability to the avalanche-like spread of information, since the denser and more connected the social environment, the smaller the initial "critical mass" of dissatisfied or panicked individuals that can trigger a mass effect.

Let's consider the nonlinearity of fractals, where a small event can trigger an avalanche-like reaction. This means that the dynamics of mass consciousness and behavior can be described using nonlinear equations such as the logistic map:

$$x_{n+1} = r x_n (1 - x_n),$$

where x_n is the proportion of the population sharing a certain idea at time n and r is an indicator of the social "contagiousness" of the idea (Turchin, 2016).

Another fractal property is dependence on initial conditions or the long-term memory of the system. In the context under discussion, we are talking about the influence of historical traumas on modern social processes, as mentioned by Russian researchers (Zhuravlev & Yurevich, 2012). For example, historical memory of 1917 and 1991 increases fear of chaos. In this case, time series analysis is used to calculate the Hurst exponent (H). When the Hurst exponent $H = 0.5$, the system has no memory; each new event is independent of previous ones. When $H > 0.5$, the system has long-term memory. This means that if discontent grows in society, it will continue to grow by inertia, fueled by past "grievances". This creates a cumulative effect leading to major crises. Time series can be studied, for example, by analyzing sociological survey data to identify long-term trends. Many post-Soviet societies live with the burden of past traumas, which influences their present (Assmann, 2016; Etkind, 2016; Suny, 1993). Thus, the fractal concept of mass consciousness suggests studying this phenomenon through critical thresholds of influence, nonlinearity (mood bifurcations) and system memory, which allows for closer mathematical forecasting of mass behavior.

3. Analysis of "identity fractals" in Azerbaijan

Language is certainly a fractal of identity. If we consider language and communication, then at the individual level, we can observe a mixture of languages (Azerbaijani, Russian, English) in everyday speech. At the national level, a policy of supporting Azerbaijani as the state language is being pursued, along with discussions about the roles of Russian and English. At the global level, a trend toward the revival of linguistic sovereignty is observed worldwide (Barber, 1995). That is, the self-similar pattern of "protection of the cultural code vs. openness to the world" manifests itself at all levels.

The most important fractal structuring mass consciousness in Azerbaijan is the personification of power and the archetype of a strong leader. This pattern demonstrates striking self-similarity at all levels of the social system. At the national level, it manifests itself in the phenomenon of the "nation-family", where the head of state fulfills the role of a protective father and guarantor of stability. Research shows that Heydar Aliyev and Ilham Aliyev are perceived as key symbols of statehood (Khlyshcheva, 2025). This demand for a "strong hand" is characteristic of many post-Soviet societies disillusioned with the chaos of the 1990s and associating democratization with a decline in living standards (Gadzhiev, 2025). At the group and local levels, this pattern is reproduced in the population's expectations of local authorities as "masters" personally responsible for

order in their assigned territory. At the family level, the archetype of a strong father-leader, whose authority is unquestioned, is a traditional and reproducible model. At the global level, this fractal is reflected in the growing demand for "strong leaders" in unstable conditions. Thus, the leader fractal links the micro-level (family relations) and the macro-level (public administration) into a single system, defining the population's stable expectations of the government and serving as a key element of political culture.

Let's consider historical memory. The country's traumas and victories play a system-forming role in modern Azerbaijani identity, serving as the core of national unity. For example, the Karabakh conflict unites all Azerbaijanis regardless of social, political and regional differences and shapes the image of a just struggle for territorial integrity. Victory in the conflict has become a key element of the state narrative and a legitimizing myth for the state. The very dynamics of this conflict create continuity between different periods of Azerbaijan's history. Conflict creates an "us/them" opposition, constructs the image of the Other, simplifying the complex geopolitical reality into binary schemes in the mass consciousness. It serves as a powerful mobilizing and consolidating instrument. Finally, victory in the conflict became a source of national pride and the basis for positive national self-identification, confirming the viability of Azerbaijani statehood.

Fractal analysis shows that the conflict, which began before the collapse of the USSR, is reproduced at all levels. At the individual level, these are family narratives and the personal stories of refugees. At the group level, the conflict led to the forced displacement of people and contributed to the formation of public organizations. At the state level, the Karabakh issue is related to increasing territorial size and population due to ethnic similarities, as well as to the restoration of historical justice, which is reflected in state propaganda and educational programs. On a global scale, the conflict is used in international diplomacy (Broers, 2021). Thus, Karabakh has transformed from a specific territorial dispute into a symbol defining Azerbaijani identity.

The historical memory of the population is actively constructed by states through cultural and educational programs using memory politics and the "restoration of historical justice".

Current events are perceived by the masses through these filters. Etkind (2016) brilliantly writes about this, noting that the interaction of repetition and remembrance of past events creates distorted images, where the study of the past is combined with its reproduction in transformed forms.

Historical memory preserves events that have particular significance in terms of a people's fundamental cultural values; therefore, the memory of the past contains not only facts but also ethnic myths. Historical memory is evaluative and selective, as it is filtered by culture, determining the worldview and self-identification of generations. This gives rise to a view of the present based on the past. And the greatest potential for integrating collective identity comes from events associated with collective traumas, which are either firmly entrenched in memory or conversely, consigned to oblivion for the sake of preserving national identity. There is negative oblivion, a form of censorship in which some will be heard and others will not and positive oblivion, the purpose of which is to resist negative circumstances despite disappointment. With positive oblivion, events associated with national guilt or shame can be distorted, hushed up or suppressed from the public sphere (Assmann, 2016). One of the most important tasks of the Soviet government was the formation of a memory policy, within which the past was presented as the struggle of the oppressed masses against their masters. Events that did not fit into this framework were suppressed from the people's historical memory. At the same time,

this shift in attitudes required an adjustment in views on history: from interpreting history through the idea of proletarian internationalism to an appeal to the patriotic feelings of the Soviet people and the "Sovietization" of historical figures of the past (commanders, princes and sovereigns). The factors and events of national history that unite the peoples of the USSR had to be brought to the forefront. Since the late 1950s, the national question has been declared fully resolved, as the USSR had built a non-ethnic community - the Soviet people. Potential conflicts between ethnic groups within the USSR were officially hushed up and unexplored, but they persisted in the mass consciousness of ethnic groups. Therefore, after the collapse of the unified sociocultural Soviet space, the elites of the newly independent states were forced to construct a new identity based on ethnocentric models. Memory politics became a tool for re-examining the past. The Soviet past is viewed as hostile, which the people courageously resisted. Tragic events (repressions, mass famine, deportations) come to the fore, viewed not as common to all the peoples of the USSR, but as the sacrifices made by a specific people (Egorova & Kalinina, 2025).

Russia, in this sense, demonstrates a similar memory politics, consigning its defeat in the Cold War to oblivion and using self-deception to feel morally secure. However, neither the withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan nor the transfer of Damansky Island to China were described as defeats. Since the time of the Russian Empire, the government has conveyed Russia's invincibility to the population. Even the events of the Crimean War were presented as a symbol of the unbroken Russian spirit. Invincibility was combined with a perception of reality as immutable (Akhiezer, 1997), which was manifested, for example, in the "eternally living" Lenin or the "eternal friendship of peoples". Contemporary Russia is once again resorting to great-power rhetoric, since the elite offers no other alternatives that would be widely accepted by the population, which complicates the search for a working national strategy. Great-power sentiments, from a psychological perspective, allow Russians to satisfy their need for security in a situation of geopolitical vulnerability, as well as to satisfy their need for status through identification with the emergence of a strong homeland leads to the emergence of stories about restoring historical justice in the Russian political narrative and discourse (Telin, 2025).

National identity is the basis for self-identification the population of Azerbaijan, defining the ideology of Azerbaijanism as a distinct system of values aimed at satisfying the specific interests of the people. From this perspective, national identity is viewed as a resource for development. Preserving cultural heritage becomes one of the tools for shaping such an identity. Within the framework of cultural and educational policy, the historical past is adapted to the tasks at hand by adjusting historical events to "restore historical justice" (Popadyeva, 2023). In education, children learn the thesis of national exclusivity, as well as the need to respect tradition and authority. History begins with heroic myths about the Guti, Lullubi, Su and Turukk tribes (Abdullayev, 2016), with whom modern leaders are associated, emphasizing the idea of continuity. This policy proves highly effective. Thus, in May 2024, a social survey showed that Azerbaijanis consider Heydar Aliyev and Ilham Aliyev to be the top symbols of their state (Khlyshcheva, 2025).

4. The integration challenge: From a national to a macroregional fractal

Let's highlight the characteristics inherent to the Azerbaijani mentality: the highly personalized nature of political institutions and consequently, the demand for a "strong hand", which is characteristic of most post-Soviet republics, whose populations associated improved living standards with democratization. When, instead of the

expected miracle, living standards plummeted, people became disillusioned with democracy, tired of chaos and longed for the order that a strong leader can bring. Traditional, conservative mass values cannot be quickly changed through political means. They take root over time, which carries the risk of political destabilization. In this sense, the head of state, as a unifying factor, must prevent a split between the elites and society by overseeing the course of political transformation. Therefore, Azerbaijan positions its development as two-pronged: a democratic state structure based on national customs and traditions, as well as historical and cultural heritage (Gadzhiev, 2025).

Thus, in forming a new national identity, Azerbaijan combines positioning itself as a developed country with preserving the ethnonational structure of a traditional society. This positioning poses a challenge to integration within the Caspian region. Most residents of the Caspian region doubt the need to develop a Caspian identity. The sluggishness of integration processes in the post-Soviet republics is explained by the significance of independence as the most important event in the country's history. Consequently, any integration can be perceived as a threat to sovereignty. The authorities of the Caspian region lack a common motivation and the population understands neither the meaning nor the basis for identifying with the macro-region. The only unifying factors present in public opinion are economics and ecology.

Currently, all citizens of the post-Soviet Caspian republics are dominated by an identity tied to their territory, demonstrating the importance of state construction, as well as a national identity formed through traditional values of culture, mentality and language. In the absence of a unifying principle, differences in cultural and everyday traditions intensify, creating yet another barrier to integration (Romanova *et al*., 2025).

Research shows that barriers currently exist that hinder the sociocultural integration of the Caspian macroregion. These barriers include: 1) a weak institutional structure, consisting of each state conveying its own narratives and declaring the need for integration in the absence of effective efforts to achieve it; 2) varying degrees of engagement of the Caspian countries in the global and regional internet space; 3) weak public motivation to obtain information about life in other countries in the region, which is due to an excessive focus on national and state narratives. The population of each country in the macroregion finds less reason to identify with other countries than to highlight differences with them. In the former Soviet republics (Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan), this is explained by the significance of gaining independence, so integration can be seen as a threat to sovereignty. Therefore, there is no motivation to intensify integration either at the level of the authorities or at the level of the population, which does not understand the meaning of such integration (Romanova & Morozova, 2025). These barriers, on the one hand, prevent the weakening of national traditions and help maintain state sovereignty and on the other hand, hinder the interpenetration of cultures and impede increased tolerance for otherness and the adoption of foreign experience. In the literature, one can find the opinion that it is possible. The concept of "nation" has lost its political significance and is being replaced by a different identity based on modernization values (Topchiev, 2025). Hence the desire to fight for the preservation of national values against the unifying effects of globalization.

From a fractal analysis perspective, the Caspian macroregion represents the next level of scale, but the system is "stuck" at the national level.

To steer public opinion toward integration, one can speak of recent good-neighborly relations and a shared past (which is now viewed rather as an aggravating factor) and the possibility of creating a new center of power. Such a center of power

would have common borders, shared interests and a common macroregional center uniting regional centers. Without the support of regional centers, the macroregional center will not be able to claim the status of a global player, but regional centers will also be able to strengthen with its support. Experts see three scenarios for the development of events. In the first case, a rather fragile status quo is maintained. In a negative scenario, each regional entity strengthens its national identity, distancing itself politically and socioculturally from its neighbors. In a positive scenario, the states of the Caspian macroregion find grounds for integration, which will make the region a true center of power. However, the development of such a scenario requires the efforts of both the authorities and the societies of all Caspian states (Romanova & Morozova, 2025).

Through the prism of fractal logic, a positive scenario will require the creation of new unifying fractal patterns of identity capable of competing with national ones.

5. Digital environment: Accelerator and amplifier of fractals

Particular attention is paid to the influence of the internet on mass consciousness, as each user (individual, company, state) becomes a participant in globalization processes, perceiving and transmitting information through the prism of their own worldview, thus shaping the structure and content of the global network. This allows us to define the internet as a reflection of the psychological characteristics of individuals, their connections and their relationships with each other. As a result, internet content influences people's values, behavioral patterns and needs, which affects the nature of social processes. The internet's communication capabilities influence the nature and dynamics of political processes, affecting all modern states. Moreover, the information environment is characterized by the high speed of information dissemination and the predominance of emotions over cognition, leading to a weak receptivity to arguments that contradict the attitudes of internet users (Zhuravlev *et al.*, 2020).

The inability to control internet content is becoming a problem for the legitimate authorities of many countries, including Russia and Azerbaijan. This is being exploited by both opposition representatives and global players, who are introducing specifically biased semantic content into the digital environment. Social networks have begun to shape new meaning-making trends and new cultural practices, in particular the values and identity of Western culture, which threatens national identity. Sociopolitical rifts are clearly evident in online communities, potentially leading to a crisis of traditional identity (Shestopal & Selezneva, 2018). Even if religious, social, political and ethnic contradictions are not openly expressed in everyday life, in online communication, an individual's sense of anonymity and security (often deceptive) leads to conflict (Kushneruk, 2025). Social media and instant messaging apps are an ideal environment for the rapid, nonlinear dissemination and amplification of fractal patterns (both constructive and conflictual). Identity crises are often linked to legitimation crises, when existing mechanisms for ensuring legitimation fail to keep pace with the need to legitimize power.

Social media shape public sentiment by focusing on the emotional sphere, reproducing and sometimes transforming identity patterns. Russian researchers, using quantitative and qualitative content analysis, studied patriotism in the digital environment (Martianov & Fishman, 2020). They found positive attitudes toward patriotism in 52% of mentions and negative attitudes in 48%. Patriotism correlates positively with nostalgia for the USSR, great power sentiments and pride in the country's military might, confirming the authors' hypothesis that pride in a country depends more on military might

than on economic success and the population's standard of living. Rozov (2006) also writes about this, arguing that Russia's geopolitical successes justify authoritarianism, while failures discredit the authoritarian state in the eyes of the population. Rozov identifies two core values in Russian culture: "order, tradition, a strong hand, service" and "freedom, independence, individualism". Disillusionment with order strengthens the desire for freedom and vice versa. The data obtained reflect a traditional system of values. Moreover, the greatest patriotism is characteristic of border and poor regions, while the lowest level is observed in capital cities and wealthy regions. This regional division also confirms Rozov's idea: capital cities and wealthy regions have greater degrees of freedom and a more pronounced individualism among residents, while residents of poor regions and small towns are more inclined to adhere to traditions and traditional values are always associated with order and stability. Echo chambers and algorithms reinforce self-similarity by grouping people with similar views, which intensifies existing patterns.

6. Discussion: Reflection as a path to fractal change

Ultimately, it can be said that post-Soviet societies lack mass self-reflection, which gives rise to sociocultural schisms and hinders the formation of a civic identity responsible for the development of their country and macroregion. The development of self-reflection allows us to move beyond previously established life strategies. However, the level of self-reflection that has developed in the mass consciousness prevents us from taking responsibility for our own history. We tend to place responsibility on forces beyond our control (external and internal enemies, good or bad rulers), failing to understand that we, as bearers of a particular culture and established social relations, are the subjects of history. The task of society in a situation of sociocultural contradiction is to overcome it. Society's inability to solve this problem leads to disorganization and the disintegration of historically established connections between parts of the whole. In such a situation, priority is given to local interests at the expense of the interests of everything outside the local community (Akhiezer, 1997).

A sociocultural schism in society arises when the accumulated culture ceases to correspond to established social relations (for example, between innovations and historically established practices).

Within the framework of an established culture, people evaluate current or potential phenomena from the standpoint of a generally accepted moral ideal. Society reproduces its social relations and its culture based on this ideal. The presence of a moral ideal creates the foundation for unification. The ideal includes social relations that are ideal for society and at a certain stage of society's development, an ideal state. Statehood, being dependent on the level of historical development and economic viability of society, establishes the political system and social order, as well as the internal development of society.

Today, the formation of national identity is becoming a crucial state task, fulfilled through cultural and educational policy. However, identity is formed along national lines. National identity presupposes that a people understands who they are and how they differ from other nations. This requires the image of a demonized Other/Alien, contrasted with the identity being formed. In the modern world, such a binary is outdated, leading to the emergence of an idealized Other as a role model. Clearly, the real Other is presented in a distorted form (Khlyshcheva, 2025).

In any culture, objects and phenomena in the surrounding world are evaluated based on internalized moral postulates ("good-bad", "good-evil" etc.). Each phenomenon

is assessed as belonging to one of the poles, which is determined not only by cultural demands but also by the psychological need to adapt to the environment. This assessment means that culture dictates an emotional attitude toward the world and determines the vector of behavior. But if phenomena and objects emerge in society that are difficult to identify in terms of established values (for example, the values of another culture), then homeostasis with the environment is disrupted, causing irritation and a desire to escape the discomfort. The assimilation of one's values can be compared to imprinting; they are perceived as absolute, natural and comfortable, since they were adopted by a person during the process of primary socialization (Berger & Luckmann, 1995). Society, wishing to restore homeostasis, will move toward comfortable values. However, if the resulting social tension is not relieved, the phenomenon begins to be reinterpreted, the pole of evaluation shifts to the opposite, causing a reversal in the other direction and minimizing reflection. In essence, such a reversal is a simple choice between poles, between familiar alternatives. Under such conditions, the task of the managerial and spiritual elite becomes the search for a middle ground between the poles, i.e., offering society new alternatives, new cultural elements, facilitating increased mass reflection and the development of new social relations. Low mass reflection, manifested in dichotomous thinking and the shifting of responsibility for statehood to enemies or personalized power (signs of archaic thinking), becomes a key barrier preventing the search for new alternatives.

The inability to reflect leads to an inability to make complex compromises, resulting in the launch of a self-similar cycle of "justice vs. order".

In each cycle, a self-similar conflict repeats: "Justice" vs. "Order", where justice = struggle against those in power, faith in a "good shah/tsar" and order = fear of chaos, a willingness to tolerate authoritarianism for the sake of stability (Akhiezer, 1997; Ismaylov, 2021; Rozov, 2006). When justice is violated, mass behavior tends toward riots; when order is violated, the need for a new "leader" arises in the mass consciousness.

The desire for justice generates a recognizable and repeatable pattern of social response, which is reproduced at different scales and can be described mathematically. Thus, it has been shown that the distribution of protest events obeys a power law $N \sim x^{-\alpha}$, where the number of protests (N) is inversely proportional to the level of injustice (x) raised to the power α (Turchin, 2016).

From a psychological perspective, this power law demonstrates a nonlinear perception of the infringement of values. The mass consciousness accumulates acts of injustice, perceiving them as an unpleasant but familiar part of life. But if x reaches a certain threshold of tolerance, the system enters a mode of avalanche-like compensation, whereby a new violation of injustice is perceived through the prism of previous ones, intensifying the emotional response. The traumatic experience of past upheavals is transmitted through generations in the form of cultural narratives and archetypes, which creates a heightened sensitivity to certain triggers in the mass consciousness.

Finally, if we consider mass consciousness as a fractal, we can calculate the fractal dimension (D), which determines the complexity of the system, allowing us to move from a qualitative description to a quantitative assessment of the complexity of mass consciousness.

A high D value indicates a diversity of ideas and the stability of the system, while a low D value indicates the dominance of simplified binary oppositions and the ideological fragility of the system. During crises, cognitive simplification is activated. In conditions of increasing uncertainty and the threat of chaos, the mass consciousness rejects complex, pluralistic models of the world and replaces them with binary schemes:

"Friends vs. Foes", "Justice vs. Arbitrariness". This reduces cognitive load and provides a mobilizing impetus. In times of crisis, the complexity of public discourse diminishes and simple slogans that ensure mass consolidation come to the fore.

Low mass reflection is the mechanism that maintains fractal cyclicality.

Breaking the cycle and moving toward integration are only possible through the targeted development of mass reflection, which will allow for a more complex consciousness (increasing D) and a rethinking of the traumatic past. The task of the elites is not to exploit old fractals, but to foster the creation of new ones - integrative and cooperative ones.

7. Conclusion

This study suggests that examining mass consciousness from a fractal perspective is an effective analytical tool. The application of this methodology demonstrates how universal value conflicts, such as "tradition vs. modernization" and "justice vs. order", are reproduced in self-similar patterns at all levels - from personal choice to public policy and global discourses.

The analysis revealed that the Caspian macroregion's current integration challenges stem not so much from economic or political competition as from a deep sociocultural reality characterized by the dominance of national-state identity fractals. Fractals such as language, historical memory and leadership figures serve a consolidating function within young states, but simultaneously act as a barrier to the formation of a supranational, macroregional community. The digital environment, in turn, does not create new patterns but rather acts as a powerful amplifier and accelerator of existing fractals, often pushing binary oppositions to extremes and deepening existing rifts.

The key systemic limitation sustaining this cyclical pattern is the low level of public reflection. This manifests itself in dichotomous thinking, the transfer of responsibility to external forces or personalized authorities and society's inability to recognize itself as a collective subject of history. This leads to a simplification of the fractal dimension of mass consciousness during periods of crisis, when complexity and pluralism are replaced by simple binary patterns.

Thus, the prospects for overcoming the integration impasse and realizing a positive scenario for the development of the Caspian region as a "center of power" are seen not in attempts to eliminate national identity, but in targeted efforts to enhance its complexity. A strategic task for managerial and intellectual elites is to promote the development of mass reflection, which will enable a critical rethinking of historical experience and the development of new, more complex and open patterns of self-identification. Only the creation of attractive "integration fractals" - common narratives, values and future projects - capable of competing with purely national ones can take the system to a new level of development, overcoming the inertia of centuries-old cyclicality. The fractal model convincingly demonstrates that the region's future lies not in a choosing between polarities, but in finding a creative synthesis, which is only possible with the growth of the reflexive capacity of society as a whole.

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