

Veinguer, Aurora Alvarez

Narratives of belonging. Pupils' discourses from Tatar and non-Tatar gymnasias in Kazan

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Narratives of belonging. Pupils' discourses from Tatar and non-Tatar gymnásias in Kazan

Aurora Alvarez Veinguer



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Veinguer

Abstract

The principal aim of this work is to illustrate how different institutions, more specifically in this case, educational institutions, can produce relatively concrete and unidirectional discourses that pupils incorporate and can reproduce and transmit. These discourses offer a 'framework' which configures and consolidates their narratives of belonging. In this research there were two different discourses reproduced by pupils: one associated with Tatar gymnásias' pupils, and another, quite different discourse, among non-Tatar gymnásias' pupils. They are two clearly defined discourses derived from the institutional context.

Keywords: Migration, school, adolescence, identity, belonging.

Zusammenfassung

Das Ziel des Beitrags ist es aufzuzeigen, wie Schüler die vergleichsweise konkreten und unidirektionalen Diskurse pädagogischer Institutionen verinnerlichen, reproduzieren und weitertragen. Diese Diskurse bieten einen Rahmen, der die Vorstellungen der Schüler von Zugehörigkeit konfiguriert und verfestigt. In der vorliegenden Untersuchung zeigen sich zwei Diskurse, die einerseits durch die befragten SchülerInnen tatarischer und andererseits nicht-tatarischer Herkunft reproduziert werden. Es wird argumentiert, dass es sich hierbei um Diskurse handelt, die dem institutionelle Kontext entstammen.

Schlagwörter: Migration, Schule, Jugend, Identität, Zugehörigkeit

Introduction

The breakdown of the Iron Curtain has been the subject of a variety of interpretations and numerous speculations; since then both inside and outside academia scholars have predicted the possible direction or destiny of the so-called 'post-Soviet' societies. Moreover, the 'post-Soviet' amalgam contains idiosyncrasies often unknown and particularly strange to many observers due to the relative absence of international research conducted within the Russian Federation. However, undeniably, one of the main issues that symbolised the year 1989 was the simple fact that a multitude of people entered the horizons of the Western

world, causing an intensification of interest and the development of a new “curiosity” about people, nationalities, cultures, ethnic groups, that before, were simply non-existent, silenced or ignored. In particular, it generated more awareness of diversity and showed that it is inadequate to subsume the immense diversity (in every sense) in one single concept such as the ‘Soviet bloc’, ‘communist’ societies or ‘post-soviet’ societies.

there cannot be a transparent and concise interpretation of identization processes in Tatarstan

Since identities cannot be read in ‘isolation’, I will refer throughout this work to concrete places and spaces, to concrete moments and circumstances which have produced fragmented and highly complex and diverse identities. Taking the above into consideration, there cannot be a transparent and concise interpretation of identization processes (vgl. Melucci 1996, S. 77) in Tatarstan, since the past combined with the present is formulating completely ‘new’ and ‘unclassifiable’ discourses of belonging and representations for the future.

there is no cultural, ethnic or national essence

The leitmotiv of this work is the assumption and claim that there is no cultural, ethnic or national essence, and that any attempt to naturalise and present them as essential features should be seen as a response to institutional, historico-political and individual interests. However, primordialism cannot be rejected *ipso facto*, because it exists as data in the constant reference to primordial ties made by the participants in the research. Hence, I will stress the need to operate not only in terms of a constructivist approach, but also to consider the evidence for constructed primordiality. Such an approach requires us to focus ‘on power as well as on authority, and on the manner in which different modes of domination are implicated in the social construction of ethnic and other identities’ (Jenkins 1997, S. 73), as well as the manner in which people are adopting and incorporating these dynamics in their representations through an internal and external dialectic (ibid, S. 20). Identities are malleable, flexible and negotiable, but to paraphrase Jenkins: ‘the recognition that ethnicity is neither static nor monolithic should not be taken to mean that it is definitively and perpetually in a state of flux. There are questions to be asked about how and why ethnicity [or other social or collective identities], is more or less flexible in different places and time’ (ibid, S. 51). They lead to further questions such as under which circumstances some identities are more vulnerable and liable to be redefined and reformulated or why under conditions of threat or instability, references to the past and historical justification ‘become’ manifest using ‘history’ (its specific narratives) as an indicator of authenticity and legitimacy.

I will stress the need to operate not only in terms of a constructivist approach, but also to consider the evidence for constructed primordiality

However it is not only relevant to observe how the past is represented in the present, but also how the constructed memory of different policies, which were applied in the past, for example, Russification and Sovietisation, are directly affecting and influencing the current dynamics. These external definitions and categorisations strongly affect the process of identification. ‘(...) actually identities are about questions of using the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being: not ‘who we are’ or ‘where we come from’, so much as what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves’ (Hall 1996, S. 4). But the differences between the ways in which history can be read, the differences in representing or in marking the ‘Others’, cannot be reduced to the ethno-cultural or national groups without paying attention to institutional sites, since they play

a notorious role in this process by reinforcing and promoting specific attitudes and representations.

I will develop the idea of classification and categorisation, and its relevance in the process of identification. I will show how ethnic and national identities (notions that have a particular resonance in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union which do not always correspond with their meaning in “Western” perceptions) have been presented as ‘primordial’ and ‘essential’ ties, as an indispensable mechanism to achieve ‘social integration’. This categorisation and classification has not always been a response to popular demands but is rather a political strategy designed specifically to reinforce power relations and to consolidate a strong ‘sense’ of ‘Otherness’ as well as ‘complexes of inferiority’ among the non-dominant groups. Dynamics of classification and categorisation that play a crucial role in the way pupils reproduce and formulate different discourses about their adscription.

I will show how ethnic and national identities have been presented as ‘primordial’ and ‘essential’ ties, as an indispensable mechanism to achieve ‘social integration’.

In the case of Tatarstan, the history has not disappeared, and since communism “collapsed” a permanent process of (re)writing and remembering the past has been part of the agenda. It has involved a (re)definition of the relationship between the Russian and the Tatar populations in the territory of the republic through concrete political agreements, (for example the agreement signed between Moscow and Kazan in 1994) or language policies (the recognition of Tatar language as the second official language), which indicated a concrete attitude and response to the past. Consequently, it is not adequate to draw a rigid division between the past and the present, because although the present is incorporating ways of dialogues, conditions and characteristics new to the republic, nevertheless in many ways it is also a response to the past.

Soviet heritage: demarcation and classification

The Soviet Union, as *Brubaker* (1996) indicated, was a multinational state in terms of its ethnic heterogeneity, but also in institutional terms. The Soviet Union was not conceived as a nation-state, since it promoted a codification¹ and institutionalisation of nationhood and nationality exclusively on a sub-state rather than a state-wide level. Paraphrasing *Brubaker* no other state has gone so far in sponsoring, codifying, institutionalising, even (in some cases) inventing nationhood and nationality on the sub-state level, while at the same time doing nothing to institutionalise them on the level of the state as a whole (vgl. 1996, S. 29). Thus the Soviet process of institutionalisation of nationhood and nationality has two different dimensions; one operates in terms of territorial organisation of politics and administration (ethnoterritorial federalism)² and the other involves the classification of persons (ethnocultural).³ Furthermore, this complex administrative classification was accompanied by a personal classification. It is important to bear in mind that in the USSR there were two different passports, the main one being the internal passport used inside the territory of the USSR. People only applied for the external passport when they were travelling abroad, something that few were able to do that

easily because of the strict bureaucratic control. The system of internal passports was introduced in the 1930s, and it depended on parental ethnic nationality (*natsional'nost*). People's *natsional'nost* did not depend on the place where they were residing, but was based on descent. Even today, *natsional'nost* is carried by people and is not ascribed by being born or being resident in a territory. Consequently *natsional'nost* was then, as it is now, considered a 'given' dimension but not an 'ascribed'⁴ one (without many chances of being modified), that a person kept throughout his/her life regardless of the place of residence or place of birth.⁵

Once an official *natsional'nost* was entered in the passport, 'no subsequent change in *natsional'nost* entry is permissible'. Thus, legally, *natsional'nost* is an immutable ascriptive characteristic of every Soviet citizen (Karklins 1986, S. 32). *Natsional'nost* was not only a statistical category; it was an obligatory and mainly ascriptive legal category, a key element in an individual's legal status (Brubaker 1996, S. 31). Ironically it represented a contradiction to the claimed aim of consolidating the new Soviet people, a-national by definition, by strongly reinforcing the differences between the groups.

The production of the demographic census created nationalism in regions where it did not previously exist (vgl. Hirsch 1997, S. 277). The official classification of the population by *natsional'nost* was to a large extent what made the category a highly politicised marker of identity. In this way, a double regime was created which distinguished between citizenship and nationality, a regime of dual affiliation (vgl. Giordano. 1997, S.182). Regardless of people's *natsional'nost*, whether Russian, Tatar or Jewish; everyone was also recognised as a Soviet citizen. This model of double affiliation consolidated Soviet ethnocracy, and it helped to establish (and cement) a social hierarchy based on an ethnic dimension, where Russians played the dominant role.

The rapid industrialisation, (one of the main objectives of the Soviet policies, promoted by the quinquennial plans) had a considerable impact on the national composition of many cities. Indeed, it created new cities where they did not exist before; new cities that attempted to promote inter-group relations. The best examples of these processes in Tatarstan are Nizhnekamsk or Naberezhnye Chelny, where most of the population were Russian speakers who came from different areas of the USSR to build the 'Soviet Project'⁶. Nevertheless, the inferior ethnic status was institutionalised in everyday life, not only in terms of language, but also in establishing and defining relations between Tatars and Russians. As Kondrashov indicated, it was this established cultural order that created situations where a Tatar would be insulted by Russians' off-handedness (vgl. Kondrashov 2000, S. 33); but the perception of being treated as inferior was not necessarily connected with any experience of being personally victimised or insulted.⁷ One of the important dimensions is that the Tatar population accepted their inferior ethnic status, an acceptance that created a vicious circle. On the one hand, this feeling of inferiority was instrumental in promoting the acceptance of the established social and cultural order, that of growing Russification and partial assimilation of urban Tatars. On the other hand, the progressing Russification and assimilation reinforced the perception of national inferiority amongst the Tatars (vgl. 2000, S. 51).

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According to *Brubaker* the Soviet regime deliberately constructed the republics as national policies “belonging” to the nations whose names they bore; they institutionalised a sense of “ownership” of the republics by ethnocultural nations (vgl. 1994, S. 66). Conversely, the Soviets limited the domain in which the republics were autonomous. The consequences of this contradiction (it must be stressed) started to re-emerge at the beginning of Perestroika and Soviet disintegration. Ethnic and cultural revival of the titular groups in each republic began to claim what they considered had been taken from them (their cultural and linguistic heritage) at least for decades, and in some cases, even for centuries. Sometimes these demands took the form of revenge, although on other occasions the approach was non-violent (as was the case in Tatarstan). However, it is also important to emphasise that not everything was formulated in terms of antagonism. In everyday interaction people developed strong mechanisms of solidarity that broke through the lines of institutional differentiation and segregation. The vast majority often had to face similar hardships and these conditions created an underground economy and an unspoken code of solidarity which transgressed ethno-cultural or national differentiation. During periods of economic instability the boundaries were easily crossed and people established mechanisms of exchange and mutual support which did not operate at the political or institutional level, but functioned in everyday ‘transactions’.

At the beginning of Perestroika and Soviet disintegration ethnic and cultural revival of the titular groups in each republic began to claim what they considered had been taken from them

Tatarstan sovereignty. Current dynamics of “Tatarization”

Tatarstan’s sovereignty within the Russian Federation was achieved through different steps, firstly the declaration of the State Sovereignty, two years after the constitution’s approval, and in 1994 a bilateral agreement that was signed between the Federation and the Republic of Tatarstan. It is important to stress that Tatarstan had for a long time nurtured the ambition (even before Perestroika), of achieving the status of a republic.

Earlier – on 30 August 1990 – Tatarstan had issued its Declaration of State Sovereignty, proclaiming itself to be the sixteenth Union Republic of the USSR (vgl. *Hanauer* 1996, S. 70). Tatarstan’s leaders never demanded absolute independence, because of Tatarstan’s geopolitical situation; it is not just that the republic is situated in the heart of Russia, but also there is a long history of strong interdependency between Kazan and Moscow.

Perestroika launched an active struggle to achieve national identity rebirth, national culture and language. One of the main goals of the government became Tatar language incorporation into everyday life, not only for Tatar people, but also for the Russian population. The purpose of the above was to create or promote bilingualism in both directions; the goal being that not merely Tatar but also Russian pupils would have to study the Tatar language as a compulsory subject, and for the same number of hours as the Russian language. National schools were re-opened⁸, where Tatar language became the medium of teaching, classes of Tatar language were promoted again, and the main idea was to return to the same conditions as at the beginning of the twentieth century when the active Tatar culture and language

Perestroika launched an active struggle to achieve national identity rebirth, national culture and language.

development was taking place. In the early 1990s, with the burgeoning cultural-national movement, the meaning of ‘national’ schooling changed significantly. The previous concept of the national school as a place for a standard education delivered through a language other than Russian was overtaken by the idea of a new type of elite national educational centre, the Tatar *gymnásia*. These new schools were perceived as a potential vehicle for Tatar culture and language development. Today, in Tatar gymnásias Tatar language is the sole or main medium of instruction, (whereas in non-Tatar gymnásias Tatar is taught as a second language). In Tatarstan, as elsewhere in the Russian Federation, there are ‘new type’ or innovative centres, including *gymnásias* defined by particular subject specialities, language or ethnicity. The main difference between *gymnásias* and other schools is the level of specialisation (vgl. *Alvarez/Davis* 2007).

Data Production: Tatar and non-Tatar gymnásias

The endeavour and main purpose of this work was an attempt to develop appropriate tools and elaborate an approach to the study of identitization, specifically by attempting to operate through this work an understanding of identities as a multidimensional process, taking place within the concrete areas and social spaces of both Tatar national gymnásias and non-Tatar gymnásias in the Republic of Tatarstan. For that purpose I claimed that it is necessary to focus attention on the dialectic and interaction between at least three different areas in the process of identities representation, transformation, reproduction and formation, namely: i) political discourse, ii) institutional praxis and iii) everyday life. The three areas present and represent identities in a rather different manner; nevertheless all of them are equally relevant and involved in the process.

Data generation consisted of semi-structured and unstructured interviewing and long term participant observation supported with a personal diary.

Data generation consisted of semi-structured and unstructured interviewing, or what Merton/Kendall (1967) called focused interview, and long term participant observation supported with a personal diary.

The method is ethnographic, reflecting the study’s emphasis on the process of schooling, interaction between teachers, pupils and parents, and the discursive construction of Tatar and Russian belonging. Formal aspects of curriculum planning, language policy or pedagogical technique are included as background to the main body of data, which comes from a variety of sources: observation of classes, extra-curricular activities and informal interaction in the school setting; open-ended interviews with pupils, parents and teachers; informal conversations individually and in groups with these participants; and more formal, semi-structured interviews with experts. The research was based on 57 unstructured interviews (additional to 14 interviews from the pilot study) conducted in Russian. All interviews were recorded and transcribed. (vgl. *Alvarez/Davis* 2007).

Pupils are the direct and main recipients and ‘beneficiaries’ of the education system. Thus any project aiming to understand this issue, will necessarily cover pupils’ angles and perspectives. How do they perceive it? Do they incorporate

in their everyday life what the schools are transmitting? Are they reproducing the same discourses?

This research was conducted during three separate periods of fieldwork in Kazan between 1999 and 2000, following the 1997/8 pilot study. I selected the pupils and teachers in different ways depending on the school. On some occasions the selection of pupils was based on the idea of a 'tree system', i.e. once I met someone, this person introduced me to someone else, and that person would introduce me to another classmate, and so on; a technique that has some similarities to snowball sampling. Sometimes I just asked the pupils if they wanted to be interviewed, without knowing who they were or without having any reference; trying to avoid the limitations that a pure snowball sampling can have, because 'it may lead the researcher to collect data that reflects a particular perspective and thereby omits the voices and options of others who are not part of a network of friends and acquaintances' (May 1997, S. 120). In the two non-Tatar centres the teachers or the headmistresses usually chose the first pupil and that was the starting point. But in some centres, the teachers were introducing me to the pupils directly, therefore after two or three conversations I asked them to introduce some pupils using the alphabetical list of pupils that they have for each class, trying to avoid the preconditioning of the selection.

Although this research began with a concrete theoretical standpoint, the theory was concluded after the data analysis was finished. The data and the theory development constantly depended on each other, and the theoretical standpoint supported the production of the data, and the data allowed the theory to come together.

Data was collected from two different types of institutions, Tatar and non-Tatar *gymnásias* (vgl. Alvarez 2002). The research was conducted in two different districts in Kazan, one Tatar and one non-Tatar *gymnásias* in each district. In *Moskovskii raion* (district) the educational institutions were Tatar *gymnásia* No. 2 and a non-Tatar *gymnásia* No. 9, and in *Privolskii raion* (district) a Tatar *gymnásia* No. 16 and a non-Tatar *gymnásia* No. 52. In the Tatar *gymnásias*, the sample consisted of 6 teachers, 14 pupils (aged 14-16 years) and 3 parents. In the non-Tatar *gymnásias*, 6 teachers and 21 pupils were interviewed. Seven Headmistresses from different *gymnásias* were also interviewed, and 13 experts including the Minister of Education and the State Adviser to the President on Political Affairs.

Tatar *gymnásias* No. 2 and No. 16 are effective instruments for Tatar culture and language rebirth, something that is detectable because of the strong encouragement and support that they receive from the political Tatar elite. They are institutions that officially define the Tatar language and cultural revival, and the development of national culture and consciousness as their main purpose. Whereas the non-Tatar *gymnásia* No. 52 has a pedagogical profile. This does not mean that all pupils have to go to pedagogical faculties when they finish the school, but the *gymnásia* gives special attention to pedagogical issues, and some pupils chose that option. In non-Tatar *gymnásia* No. 9 pupils can specialise in: a) social sciences, b) natural sciences, or c) physics and mathematics. They have special classes on Saturdays, specialised in French, Russian, or Ecology.

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Tatar gymnásias are mono-ethnic and monocultural centres, in non-Tatar gymnásias there is a very similar proportion of Tatars and Russians

One of the differences between Tatar and non-Tatar gymnásias is their ethnic composition. Tatar gymnásias are mono-ethnic and monocultural centres because almost all of their pupils and teachers are Tatars, whereas in non-Tatar gymnásias there is a very similar proportion of Tatars and Russians (almost half and half,) and also some pupils and teachers from other groups.

Some of the interviews were focused on pupils who were fourteen, fifteen and sixteen years old, since I assumed that this would be the best age because they were more articulated than the younger pupils, had more practice in expressing their opinions, so their points of view would be stronger and more elaborate, and also because they were more familiar with the school. Between the age of fourteen and sixteen, pupils usually were able to talk on a number of different topics and issues, and they had gained considerable experience in their school.

Inside Tatar-gymnásias: non-inclusive narratives of belonging

Patriotism is not merely a passive and unconditional love or respect, but the motive to improve, spread and elevate the language and traditions.

Inside Tatar gymnásias, language, traditions, respect and love for your mother tongue, your people, are duties that pupils acknowledge; they are part of what they describe as *patriotism*. As well as being perceived as a positive attribute, it is also naturalised in pupils' discourse. Patriotism is not merely a passive and unconditional love or respect, but the motive to improve, spread and elevate the language and traditions. The assumption is that if only you respect yourself, 'Others' will also respect you. The respect takes a concrete form: love for your language and your people; like a life-pledge or solemn promise, almost as a rite of passage that all pupils have accepted and incorporated during their stay at school. It is a form of patriotism that does not only emphasise the group's attributes and characteristics, but also expresses the conviction of superiority. 'They said that Tatars cannot write. I think Tatars were more literate than Russians'. (Renat)

In all the various conversations that I had with pupils from Tatar gymnásias, not one pupil presented Russia as his or her *rodina* (homeland), furthermore, they all expressed a strong sense of patriotism. On some occasions the sentiment was expressed directly by use of the word patriotism; at other times it was by reference to the relation between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Tatarstan. The 'wish' was frequently emphasised, real or unreal, to achieve complete independence from Russia. It was often expressed as open and 'unquestionable loyalty' to Tatarstan, rejecting the option of moving abroad for good, regardless of the economic and social crisis currently being faced.

I asked Zulfiya and Albina what would they answer if they were abroad and someone asked them where are they from? Both of them insisted that they would never say that they were from Russia, and they would always respond that they were from Tatarstan. Zulfiya said that even if she needed five hours, she would explain where Tatarstan was, so people could learn.

'When I went to Turkey, I said that I was Tatar, but they didn't understand, and they said: Kazakh? But I replied: No, Tatar. Of course, many people don't know. But I will explain that Tatars are a people, and of course I will not feel embarrassed of being Tatar.' (Alfiya)

These young generations do not want to become politicians or dedicate their time to politics, and they have similarly strong opinions about the relationship between the Republic and Moscow and they are absolutely sure what Tatarstan independence means.

'I think if Tatarstan separates from Russia, everything will be different. Because we have such a strong dependency on Russia, on its politics (...) But perhaps one day, somehow we will be a separate state and everyone will acknowledge us as Tatarstan, not as part of the Russian Federation, but straightaway as Tatarstan. And Tatar language will be the most important language, and all Russians will be able to speak in Tatar (...)' (Zulfıya)

However, not everyone agrees that achieving Tatarstan independence should be an aim. For instance, Liaisan says:

'I think there is no way we can become independent because we are in the middle of Russia, there is no way that we can get out of it. They can only drown us, let's say; we are a small state. I don't think there is any way we can be independent although we have sovereignty, but it is only on paper, we cannot exist separately.'

This opinion was commonly expressed. Some pupils have quite a realistic attitude, and although they would like to be an independent republic, they do not think that it is a very realistic option. However, they do not deny the wish, even if it is not an achievable goal.

'Of course, we would like to see Tatarstan as a totally independent state, but I don't know, in the end, geopolitically it is in the heart of Russia, I think it will be very difficult.' (Gulnara)

In the context of Tatarstan, the emergence of Tatar national schools cannot be looked at or understood in isolation from the specific circumstances of communist disintegration, or more generally from the concrete dynamic of more than five hundred years of interaction and cohabitation of different people in the same territory. The historical process and circumstances do not only influence the current strategies, demands and purposes, but also present the rhetorical and theoretical justification for the current tendencies. In other words, the past not only conditions the emergence of the present, in the sense that the present is quite often a reaction to the past, but the past can also offer justification for the present. Therefore the management and exploitation of the past can be based on concrete interests and demands.

Thus the pupils can see that the dream of independence has mythical status and cannot always be visualised as a real option for the foreseeable future. At some point in our conversation I asked a history teacher, whether she thought current pupils have a sense of patriotism or not, to which she responded:

'Yes. I try and introduce such a conversation, on purpose, I try to confuse them – final year pupils – on purpose, to see how they will get out of this puzzlement? Children, I told them, you can see: today here, we have a crisis in the country, a breakdown, it is difficult, it is lasting many years, we cannot find the direction in which we should go. It is becoming more and more difficult to live. I said, perhaps, you should leave? Somewhere

abroad, where it is easier to live, perhaps you can get your education over there or live there (...) No, we will not leave our country, this is our *rodina* – children said to me – This is our *rodina*, no, it's not right what you are saying, we will not leave. And how we will build up this country, recreate our country? We can go somewhere to study – they also say – they compare universities, faculties, and they say that in many aspects our institutes' curricula give them more knowledge (...) I will study here. The level abroad is very low; we have anyway, very good experts. I asked them, because there are some very bright pupils, are you planning to go abroad to study? – No, we will get the knowledge here.' (History teacher)

One of the things that attracted my attention was the security and confidence that pupils seemed to display in relation to what I would consider a quite delicate issue in Kazan, and generally in the old USSR, namely, any possible plans to live abroad. Many of them seemed to have a realistic attitude, being aware that it is not so simple to do. As someone said to me 'only wealthy people leave, so what is the point'.

Liaisan also said that she will never leave for good.

'Because here is my own city. Here, even if there is nothing interesting, is where I was born and what I am used to. I lived here all my life. I will always want to come back here'.

On some occasions, and for some pupils, the idea of leaving was perceived as betrayal of their 'country', a disloyalty to their duty as Tatars. However, the option of leaving for good is not directly associated with an absence or less strong sense of patriotism, there is not always a straightforward correlation. For example Amir is willing to leave for good because:

'I don't mean Tatarstan (to leave), but Russia, I would leave Russia... we are under nazi Russia, we cannot grow up by ourselves, we cannot use our oil for our country, for the development of our country, this is also why we have.... A large number of unemployed... people are poorer in Russia.... This is why I would like to leave, possibly for ever, I will come to visit my parents, and I will also try to take my parents out from Russia to a more civilised country.' (Amir)

the constantly
underlined
dichotomy between
Tatars and Russians

In Tatar gymnásias it is possible to detect in pupils' speech the constantly underlined dichotomy between Tatars and Russians. The 'Other' in this case is not a generic and global category that incorporates any non-Tatar population, it is rather a concrete and specific 'Other', synonymous with Russian. As Khakimov⁹ stressed, people perceive Russia as a permanent enemy, synonymous with closing schools and oppression, because during Tsarist and Soviet times there was not enough room to develop Tatar culture.

the myth of
independence was
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pupils

The myth of independence was widespread amongst pupils, and was expressed through a well-developed mythical discourse, and a commonly reproduced narrative about Tatarstan's future. It has a mythical quality because on some occasions they do not think that they could survive without Russia, they depend on Russia as much as they claim that Russia depends on them. They do not want to fight with their neighbours. But part of their sense of 'imagined community' (Anderson vgl. 1991) and belonging is based on the constructed ideal (whether mythical or realistic) of independence, a project for the future, that reinforces the group and is able to create a certain cohesion within the group (Ethno-national Tatar belonging). But at the same time, strongly highlights the notion of the "Others".

The myth of rebirth and renewal (vgl. *Schöpflin* 2000, S. 95) presents the idea of a new start, and, following *Schöpflin*, provides a way of legitimating change directly related with myths of foundation (ibid, S. 96). Such myths mark the new period with some special act or symbol. As *Schöpflin* (ibid.) has emphasised, the implicit and explicit message of the foundation myth is that afterwards everything will be different and 'better'. It amounts to a project for the future, a project in which some pupils believe, and others appreciate as a mythical and not absolutely realistic objective.

As *Gorenburg* stressed, 'Overall, promoting ethnic revival is a more significant part of the republic governments' programmes than its leaders' rhetoric would have us believe' (*Gorenburg* 1999, S. 246). Moreover, the institutional praxis manifested inside Tatar gymnásias creates and encourages static notions of an ethno-Tatar universe that pupils adopt and reproduce; praxis that not always contains inclusive aims.¹⁰

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Non-Tatar gymnásias: Fragmented and multiple belonging

Unconditional support was and still is, part of the youngest generations' rhetoric, who define themselves as patriots, on some occasions of a complex and combined *rodina*; the big *rodina*, (Russia), and the small one, (Tatarstan). The notion of *rodina* has not disappeared from pupils representations, but is adopting a further fragmented dimension. For example pupils from Tatar gymnásias, consider that Tatarstan is their *rodina* (Russia was never mentioned). Whereas pupils from non-Tatar gymnásias consider Russia and Tatarstan, as their *rodina*, occasionally Tatarstan was presented as the only *rodina*, and on one occasion, the former USSR. However teachers do not seem to agree about their pupils' attitudes and perception, which is also an indicator of the notion's fragmentation. Some teachers maintain that pupils have a local sense of patriotism because they do not know Russia anymore. Some teachers will claim that Russian pupils identify themselves more with Russia than with Tatarstan, and some others, that pupils are not really aware of being part of Russia. However, generally, as this research indicates is not a question of one or the other, Russia or Tatarstan, because you do not notice this dichotomy or opposition when you talk with pupils; both are presented, very often as an integrated structure. Their understanding of Tatarstan is incorporated and associated with Russia, they do not perceive them as something separate. 'There is not any difference, because even if you look at it, anyway we live in one country, with the same traditions, so there is absolutely no difference' (Inna). Quite often regardless of whether the pupils were Russian or Tatar, expressions like: 'our Russia', 'our Russian people', 'we are Russians', used to arise; something that I never heard in Tatar gymnásias. However, it is necessary to bear in mind that quite often Tatar pupils referred to themselves as Russians, nevertheless, it never happened the other way around; that a Russian pupil would refer to himself or herself as Tatar.

Their understanding of Tatarstan is incorporated and associated with Russia.

The disintegration of the communist systems in Eastern Europe and the former USSR opened the door to a whole new set of regime transitions. The

transitions that should be defined as very difficult, because it involves not only a dual process of economic as well as political change, but also a considerable change in people's rituals and beliefs, as well as, in peoples' perception and understanding. It is a combination of fluidity and uncertainty that affects all individual and collective representations, and consequently adscription and belonging. The hegemonic party system has "collapsed" and is being replaced by a fragmented competitive multi-party system, the inexperience of the politicians and the weakness of democratic political culture, the economic crisis, the enormous debt and corruption, are some of the destabilised elements for the imagined unity pursued for more than seventy years. The venerated unitary *rodina* has been reduced to ashes, allowing the fragmentation and lack of references to construct a personal rather than collective *rodina* (fragmented belonging).

What seems to be clear is that the notion of *rodina* is still alive.

Consequently, it is not clear anymore what pupils call their *rodina* in non-Tatar gymnásias, nevertheless, regardless of what they mean by this term, whether it includes only Tatarstan, or Tatarstan and also Russia, or merely Russia, or even the USSR; what seems to be clear is that the notion of *rodina* is still alive. The concept exists, but it is not clearly identifiable what they include or exclude from this concept.

According to the Russian language and literature teacher:

'Many of them have never been outside Tatarstan, they haven't been to Moscow or further afield. This is why many of them, of course, are limited to Tatarstan. And only a few know that it is part, of course they know, but they are not conscious of it. Before it was easier – we were saying – this is a big big country – the Soviet Union. We were educated like that. But nowadays they have begun to divide it in their corners. Here is all Russia – and Tatarstan – a little corner. There is not a broad understanding.' (Russian language and literature teacher)

In the context of non-Tatar gymnásias, the majority of pupils do not think that Tatarstan should be independent, they do not consider that the situation would improve if the republic were to achieve the status of an autonomous republic, more frequently they sustain that the situation will deteriorate. Pupils do not talk about unbalanced or unequal situations, there is no anger or frustration in their words, there are no historical blame or reproaches.

For pupils in non-Tatar gymnásias the "Other" does not always have the concrete form of the 'Tatar', indicating that it is not a simple, directly- proportional correlation, even though in many circumstances to the Russian population the 'Other' is precisely the 'non-Russian', rather than a concrete 'Other'. It comprises Tatars, Jews, Uzbeks, Udmurts, Armenians, and so on. In such a context, there is potential for identification to be expressed in a variety of forms, the 'Other', the 'alien', the 'hostile' or in *Simmel's* words the 'stranger' (vgl. 1971), which is not necessarily associated with Tatar.

But not only Russians maintain this position, for example Zulfiya is a Tatar girl and does not think that there is any need to separate from Russia.

'No, I think there is no need. I wouldn't like to separate from Russia, from Russians, because then this division will start, I would prefer to live together'.

Pupils do not seem to share the mythical dream of independence that characterised pupils from Tatar gymnásias.

Some pupils do not reject the option of moving to another country to work, however, most of the pupils will be willing to move abroad to work, but not for good; an emotional attachment with the place, their friends and their family were most commonly the reasons why, although, some strong patriotic loyalties were also manifested, as in the case of Tatar gymnásias' pupils.

'Why? I have a tranquil life, I live fine, I'm happy with this life... Because I say that I believe in our flourishing future, that Russia will transform, ...respond to the government, because Russia has an enormous potential – and the countryside, resources, and many intelligent people and ... it has potential, I think, even more than America has, it is only that in the meantime Russia is getting over a crisis, which is going on for too long, but anyway, soon we will start to live.' (Grisha)

Grisha, like some other pupils reproduces a very enthusiastic and patriotic discourse, showing unconditional faith and hope in Russia; moreover he was not the only one.

'But why, why move from your own country? The rats abandon a sinking ship first. Why do this? Because there is a crisis now, a difficult situation, but it has to come to an end at some point, anyway everything will be solved and it will be fine.' (Andrei)

As in Tatar gymnásias, pupils do not want to move away for good, and they are also expressing quite unrestricted loyalty, but in this case not only to Tatarstan, but also to Russia.

I asked pupils (in non-Tatar gymnásias) what they would say if they were abroad and someone asked them 'Where are you from?' The most common answer was 'from Russia' first, and only after that, would they explain that they were from Tatarstan, a part of Russia. Ideliia, for example, replied by saying she was from Russia, and then would explain in more detail about Tatarstan and Kazan; something that she had experienced when she was in France.

'If for example somewhere in Russia – yes I can say that 'I am Tatar', because they know, that there is a place called Tatarstan, but abroad nobody knows, mainly they know that there is Russia, but they don't know that there is Tatarstan, Chuvashiia, – very few know that. This is why I suppose the word Tatarstan Chuvashiia, – very few know that. This is why I suppose the word Tatarstan is not familiar to many of them.' (Ideliia)

Despite pupils *natsional'nost*, Russian or Tatars, everyone without exception, agrees that they will say first from Russia or that they are Russian, and in some cases, only afterwards, they will explain that they are from Tatarstan. Whereas in the context of Tatar gymnásias pupils clearly indicated that under no circumstances would they present themselves as Russians.

Conclusion

The purpose of this work was to illustrate to how extent institutional side, in this case Tatar and non-Tatar gymnásias, generate rather different discourses of belonging that pupils tend to reproduce. Different narratives inside Tatar and non-Tatar gymnásias that oscillate between "static" (Tatar gymnásias) and more "flexible" (non-Tatar gymnásias) understanding of belonging. It is relevant to

stress that it was not the aim of this paper to reduce the process of identification to mono-causal explanation or relation; however, the aim of this paper was to underline institutional strategies in the current dynamics of Tatarization that the Republic is facing nowadays, and the role that some institutions are playing in the process of ethnic revival.

On the one hand, inside Tatar gymnásias, it was possible to observe among pupils unquestionable loyalty to Tatarstan, and an absolute rejection to the idea of presenting themselves as Russians. Historical asymmetrical and unbalanced relations between Russian and Tatar population are the main justification for this adscription. Pupils' speech inside Tatar gymnásias constantly underlined dichotomy between Tatars and Russians, as two antagonist groups without possible relations. Pupils stressed that they do not want to move for good, and a wish to achieve complete independence from Russia is part of their discourse, although, there is a general awareness that is not an achievable goal (mythical status), specially because of the geopolitical conditions of the Republic. However, a static notion of belonging is constantly justified by Russian historical domination.

On the other hand, inside non-Tatar gymnásias the panorama is rather different, although pupils also reject the idea of moving for good, pupils stressed their loyalty to Russia and Tatarstan, without any distinction, complex and combined *rodina* constantly emerged through the data, and occasionally even the former USSR was also included. Teachers do not seem to agree about pupils' perception of their belonging, which is already an indication of the fragmented and multiple belonging. Generally, inside non-Tatar gymnásias is not a question of Russian or Tatar, because you do not notice this dichotomy or opposition when you talk with pupils; both are part of the same integrated structure, and they do not perceive them as something separate. The data is indicating that the notion of *rodina* is still alive, although, it is not clearly identifiable what they include or exclude from this representation. Inside non-Tatar gymnásias pupils do not talk about Tatarstan independence, and moreover, pupils do not talk about unbalanced situations.

The process of differentiation and demarcation of the 'We' and the 'Others' cannot be detached from how recollection of the past (narrative construction) is performed.

The process of differentiation and demarcation of the 'We' and the 'Others' cannot be detached from how recollection of the past (narrative construction) is performed. The representation of the 'Others' is not always in direct opposition to the 'We', nor is it always surrounded by negative connotations. For example, inside non-Tatar gymnásias the 'Others' do not appear in their discourses and representations because they do not even exist, the category is relegated to silence and to the status of nothingness. It never symbolised a danger or a threat, and in that sense there cannot be a dichotomy or construction of the 'Others', because the domination is clearly established. Consequently the 'Others' do not exist, not because of their integrative, fair-minded and impartial attitude, respect or tolerance, but because of its marginal and irrelevant status in their representations. Extremely little is known about Tatar culture, which has been silenced and made invisible during many decades and centuries. For that reason it is important to appreciate that the strong presence or absence of the 'Others', are parts of the same process, each depending on the other. They are two sides of the same coin, both essential to its appearance.

Repetitive stories about a “common” past, and historical heritage articulated throughout processes of Russification and Sovietization, are important parts of pupils' discourses of belonging, since they reveal institutional strategies which are part of a broader multidimensional process of (re)defining and setting the current relationship between Tatar and Russian population in Tatarstan.

Throughout this paper I illustrated the centrality of the Soviet dynamics of classification and categorisation in the way how current generations of pupils from different gymnásias in Tatarstan construct their understanding and display their belonging.

One of the main issues for the near future in Tatarstan will be to think about how to reorganise a common space where Tatars and Russians would feel equally treated, but not because the silencing code of Russian domination is accepted and reproduced. It would require a real space for cultural communication and dialogue and a school system based on the principle of plurality and diversity, where differences would be perceived as a means of enrichment and the mechanism to escape from a divided society.

Repetitive stories about a “common” past, and historical heritage articulated throughout processes of Russification and Sovietization, are important parts of pupils' discourses of belonging.

Notes

- 1 ‘To codify means to banish the effect of vagueness and indeterminacy, boundaries which are badly drawn and divisions which are only approximate, by producing clear classes and making clear cuts, establishing firm frontiers, even if this means eliminating people who are neither fish nor fowl’ (*Bourdieu* 1990, S. 82).
- 2 According to the 1977 Constitution (Fundamental Law) of the USSR, chapter 8 Article 70. ‘The Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics is an integral, federal, multinational state formed on the principle of socialist federalism as a result of the free self-determination of nations and the voluntary association of equal Soviet Socialist Republics’ (*Lane* 1985, S. 359).
- 3 Nationality as an official component of personal status was introduced in 1932, and had to be clearly specified in the internal passport.
- 4 The difference between ‘given’ and ‘ascribed’ nationality is related with the debate between primordialist and constructivist approach, also formulated in terms of *ius sanguinis* and *ius soli* nationality.
- 5 Smith distinguished between a Western model of national identity, and what he called a non-western model and “ethnic” conception. The distinguishing feature of the East European and Asian model is its emphasis on a community of birth and native culture (*Smith* 1991, S. 11). For Central and Eastern Europe, the idea that ethnic identities are contextual and not essential, that they are constructed rather than inherent, frequently are unacceptable (*Schöpflin* 2000, S. 16). It is not part of this work to analyse the existing debate between primordialist and constructivist approach in East European countries.
- 6 KAMAZ (one of the biggest automobiles enterprise in the USSR) had a labour force consisting of more than 70 nationalities, and more than 307 cities helped with the machinery and plants.
- 7 Something that my own research also confirmed. Most of the people that I had the opportunity to talk with, underlined Tatar cultural repression, however, on a personal level, not even one person considered that they had suffered from any kind of insult or attack, or even discrimination because they were Tatars; but they all talked about Russian domination and Tatar discrimination.
- 8 About National gymnásias see *Alvarez/Davis* (2007), and *Alvarez* (2007).
- 9 Raphael S. Khakimov, State Adviser to President on Political Affairs, and Director of the Institute For Historical Studies of Tatarstan. Interviewed in 1998.
- 10 For more see *Alvarez* (vgl. 2007)

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