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ARTÍCULO DE INVESTIGACIÓN

Desproblematización de las relaciones interétnicas e interconfesionales y política de memoria en la república de Tatarstán

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Resumen. Un factor clave de consolidación y armonía en cualquier sociedad es una actitud responsable y respetuosa hacia su pasado. El estudio de la relación entre la política de la memoria y las identidades de los grupos étnicos, para los que el origen y el sentido de un pasado compartido consolida la solidaridad en el presente, determina las percepciones de su identidad y las relaciones con otros grupos, es especialmente significativo. El artículo presenta los resultados del estudio de la Política de la Memoria en la República de Tatarstán y considera los procesos de recurrir al periodo búlgaro como fuente a la que remitirse para explicar los fundamentos y las tendencias actuales de los acontecimientos en la política, la religión, el arte e incluso para analizar una serie de cuestiones éticas (como el patriotismo, la tolerancia, etc.). Las representaciones de la época búlgara ayudan a construir una imagen de «paz natural» evidente entre los representantes de los distintos grupos étnicos y confesiones de la región. La estrategia funciona principalmente a través de canales como los medios de comunicación, las declaraciones de funcionarios y la educación. El efecto positivo de dicha política de memoria es establecer la tolerancia como norma que se utiliza para la socialización en el marco de la institución educativa, mientras que el efecto negativo está relacionado con el hecho de que los problemas de interacción entre múltiples grupos étnicos y confesiones pueden atribuirse a la casualidad, y llevan a ignorar finalmente los problemas sistémicos.

Palabras clave: etnia, confesión, políticas de la memoria, memoria social, turismo.

Deproblematization of interethnic and interconfessional relations and memory policy in the republic of Tatarstan

Abstract. A key factor of consolidation and harmony in any society is a responsible and respectful attitude to its past. The study of the relationship between memory politics and the identities of ethnic groups, for whom the origin and sense of a shared past consolidates solidarity in the present, determines the perceptions of their identity and relations with other groups, is particularly significant. The article presents the results of the study of the Politics of Memory in the Republic of Tatarstan and considers the processes of turning to the Bulgarian period as a source that can be referred to in order to explain the foundations and current trends of events in politics, religion, art and even to analyze a number of ethical issues (such as patriotism, tolerance, etc.). Representations of the Bulgarian period help to build an image of a self-evident “natural peace” between representatives of different ethnic groups and confessions in the region. The strategy works primarily through such channels as the media, statements by officials, and education. The positive effect of such a memory policy is to establish tolerance as a norm that is used for socialization within the framework of the institution of education, while the negative effect is related to the fact that the problems of interaction between multiple ethnic groups and confessions can be attributed to chance, and lead to the eventual ignoring of systemic problems.

Key words: ethnicity, confession, politics of memory, social memory, tourism.

INTRODUCTION

Representations of the past largely determine the content of value orientations and identity boundaries of different groups, as well as clarify the context and framework of their interaction. Social memory, in addition to images and representations of the past, is also the activity of their creation, reproduction and actualization at the level of culture as a whole, individual social institutions, groups and communities. This part of social memory is called memory politics.

Within the sociological approach to the study of memory, we should first of all note E. Durkheim's ideas about “collective representations” (Durkheim & Moss, 1996), M. Halbwachs's (2007) studies of social (collective) memory, analysis of social memory through the prism of culture (Durkheim & Moss, 1996), analysis of social memory through the prism of culture in the works of J. Assman and A. Assman (2014), and the works by P. Nora (1999), etc.

The understanding of social memory as a social construct is based on poststructuralist and constructivist sociological concepts. In the context of this study, the concept of reproducing “narratives” by H. White (2002), social constructivism by P. Berger and T. Luckmann (1966), the works of representatives of structural linguistics and the idea of “signifier and signified” (Saussure, 1983), and the theory of representation by S. Hall (1980) are significant.

The connection between memory and local social context is explained using the metaphor of “social field” by P. Bourdieu (2007). The heterogeneity of social memory within one community is considered by G. Schuman and J. Scott (1992). The dynamism and variability of social memory is

described by J. Olick's process-relational model (Olik & Khlevniuk, 2012) and the idea of "invention of traditions" by E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger (2000). Various aspects of practices related to the politics of memory are considered in the works of V.A. Shnirelmann (2010), P.K. Varnavsky (2008) and others.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The article uses materials of analysis of regional media publications devoted to the historical heritage of the Republic of Tatarstan, a series of expert interviews with specialists involved in the processes of constructing and broadcasting images of the past of the Republic of Tatarstan (archaeologists, professional historians, museum workers, guides, local historians, representatives of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the Republic, cultural workers and artists, n=36) and visitors to the museum-reserves Ostrov-grad Sviyazhsk and Velikiy Bolgar (n=33). The combination of different methods of data collection and analysis allowed to verify the results obtained in the course of the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

One of the central narratives within the policy of remembrance of the historical past of Tatarstan is emphasizing the traditions of tolerance and intercultural dialogue (Maximova et al., 2019). The image of Tatarstan's past as a space where representatives of different ethnic and confessional groups lived peacefully and cooperatively is emphasized. The main narrative is that modern Tatarstan and the Tatar ethnic group is heirs to the traditions of tolerance and intercultural dialog established in the historical periods from the Volga Bulgaria to the Soviet Union. The main authors of the narrative are the region's political and ethnic elite, representatives of the academic community and journalists. The intensity and tolerant nature of intercultural relations and communications is also emphasized at the level of work of tour guides and teachers.

The construction of meanings and practices within the framework of this strategy can be divided into parts. The first type includes representations of the historical conditionality of close and peaceful cultural interrelations between Russians and Tatars living in the republic. The narrative is interpreted differently by experts engaged in different aspects of "working" with images of the past. Thus, professional historians, when discussing the role of the past, emphasize the close connection of ethnic groups in the region. For example, an informant who holds a senior position at the Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Tatarstan notes "we should not exclude that we have always lived in the same "cauldron" with the Russian people. This is a complex topic. We are all intertwined by customs, traditions, cultural communications". It is worth noting that the role of the Bulgar period becomes a source of legitimization of an exaggeratedly positive perception of inter-ethnic relations in the region, but at the same time it also emphasizes the existence of a boundary between "we" and "they". That is, despite the recognition of a common past and cultural contacts, the ancestors still remain distinct, divided not into a multitude of nationalities (which is fair to describe the situation in the medieval Volga region), but according to the principle of modern ethnic identification of the two most numerous ethnic groups in the region - Tatars and Russians. Thus, the example allows us to see how the image of the past is constructed according to the realities of the present with the help of a certain strategy of memory politics.

Such an effect is explained by the significance of ethno-cultural myths about the ancestor of the people for actualizing and filling with concrete content the group's ideas about itself and its borders. Although the interpenetration of cultures within the historical heritage of Tatarstan is also recognized as a factor that determines the life of the republic today, this narrative is not as pronounced as the emphasis on ethnic differences with the ability to get along peacefully: "a very interesting culture, a civilization was formed that combined Slavs, Finno-Ugric peoples, and Turkic peoples, and this symbiosis has lived here for centuries, it still does, and we are the direct heirs of those traditions, of that very civilization" (museum researcher, Russian).

It is worth noting that Russian experts offer an explanation of the past through "symbiosis", the presence of a multi-faced but common ancestor, and translate this idea to the current situation in the republic. On the contrary, the Tatar respondents see their ancestors as separate, while the ancestors of the Russian population are presented as partners, neighbors, friends, equal but different.

At the same time, history is represented as a basis for peace and tolerance in the republic: "Our history shows how peaceful and tolerant people have always lived here. And this is a very good basis for the order and stability we have today. Not to mention tourism" (historian, history teacher, Tatar).

The uniqueness of this situation is emphasized by almost all informants: "Tatarstan is a unique republic where all peoples live in such close unity that there is nowhere else" (museum worker, Tatar woman).

The constructivist approach to the phenomenon of the past suggests that cultural memory is characterized by the creation and emphasizing of the unique value of its content. It is the special value, uniqueness of something that becomes the basis for preserving the narrative at the cultural level of social memory. Thus, pointing out that the situation with intercultural relations in the republic is unique, and unique in its positivity, is another way to construct and disseminate a set of meanings connected not so much with the past of the republic, but with the contemporary situation of interaction between different ethnic groups in Tatarstan.

The reference to the ancient past allows us to present the situation as conflict-free, assuming the absence of tension and problems. The emerging contradictions are presented as something untypical, erroneous, against a generally favorable background. The analysis of mass media and social media indicates the prevalence of such interpretations within the messages of official portals of the republic and sites dedicated to tourism in Tatarstan (both official and non-official sources).

In general, the reference to "historical conditionality" is one of the methods of shifting semantic accents in the interpretation of the phenomena of the present. The conditionality of the past is used as a significant argument confirming the reliability and even some sacredness of the narrative about the friendship of peoples in the republic today. Thus, ethno-confessional peace and tolerance are often described in the context of a special ancestral heritage, a special value that modern people of the Republic of Tatarstan have received. In this context, any discussion of systemic problems in inter-confessional and inter-ethnic relations is a kind of encroachment on the "special" experience of ancestors and their "sacred" heritage.

Even more directly the conditioning of the present by the past in specific spheres of social life occurs through the naturalization of contemporary phenomena as a "natural" result of certain historical events. Selecting facts about the past, creating a stable narrative about the nature of their influence on the present and emphasizing the reliability of this narrative by referring to historical

conditioning is an example of “invented tradition” (in the terminology of E. Hobsbawm). Tradition, in this case, is not only a certain meaning and a way of representing a situation, but also the creation of an areola of authenticity.

In the context of the case under consideration, emphasizing peace and tolerance as an absolute fact and a self-established phenomenon is of particular importance: “We have been living side by side for 500 years and have already rubbed off on each other. And indeed the center of stability is the Republic of Tatarstan” (tour guide, Russian).

In general, the representation of interethnic peace as a self-established order of things plays an important role in the process of deproblematization of the republic’s historical past. However, the effect of such a strategy with regard to interethnic and interfaith problems can lead not only to the formation of Tatarstan residents’ perceptions that conflict-free interaction is the norm, which certainly has a favorable effect on the social situation in the region, but also to the ignoring of systemic problems in this area. Since such a strategy of memory policy allows interpreting any emerging conflicts as an accident, which does not entail significant consequences.

The data obtained indicate that the active appeal to the theme of the ancient past of the republic in the tourist and cultural context is a phenomenon of the beginning of the XXI century. Another significant aspect of the implementation of the strategy is emphasizing the special role of interconfessional peace. Thus, the period of the Volga Bulgaria becomes an example of a place where “mosques and churches always neighbored” (employee of the Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Tatarstan, a Tatar) (Schuman & Scott, 1992). There is an active creation of places of memory (museums, monuments, etc.) and narratives (programs, articles, events) that emphasize the connection between religion, historical heritage, and the modern spiritual life of Tatars and people of the Republic of Tatarstan.

This part of the memory policy is connected, first of all, with the work of the Renaissance Foundation, founded by the first president of Tatarstan, M. Sh. Shaimiev, who retains considerable authority in the political and cultural life of the region after the end of his political career. Active parallel work to create and promote the historical and cultural reserves of Sviyazhsk and Bulgar is a demonstration of the tolerance practices of the republic’s leadership. The reserve in Bulgar is represented as a part of the past of the ancestors of modern Tatars, and the museum complex in Sviyazhsk.

Emphasizing the significance of the Bulgar period, its value in cultural, religious and tourist terms occurs in parallel with mentioning the significance of Sviyazhsk when it comes to the sphere of politics, for example, official portals of the republic’s government or articles about the reserves in regional media. As informants note: “We do not forget Sviyazhsk either, we also promote it, no one is offended. Two confessions are key. Here is Bulgar for you, here is Sviyazhsk” (history teacher, Tatar).

CONCLUSION

The justification of the special significance of the work on the development and popularization of the historical heritage of the Republic of Tatarstan is reflected in the discourse of official portals and regional media. The simultaneous development of Bolgar and Sviyazhsk is represented as an organic continuation of the traditions of peaceful coexistence of two confessions (Islam and

Orthodoxy), established historically. This is especially evident in the statements of the republic's political leaders. For example, in an official interview in 2015, the President of Tatarstan mentions both Sviyazhsk and Bolgar in the context of the equal importance of Islam and Orthodoxy in the republic and emphasizes that the republic "is aware of the importance of preserving the objects included in such an authoritative list, and is making every effort "for the best management of the complex of objects of the island-grad Sviyazhsk as one of the pearls of the world historical, cultural and spiritual heritage, and as a significant center of tourism for Tatarstan and the whole of Russia". T.P. Larionova, head of the Renaissance Foundation, also emphasizes that "the most important thing is to reveal the place and role of Bolgar and Sviyazhsk in the Russian and world historical and cultural heritage", but first of all the objects of special spiritual and religious significance are being restored, because "it is important that monuments of both cultures - Islamic and Orthodox - are being restored. For our republic, where national and inter-confessional values are significant and honored, this is especially relevant".

Thus, the political elite of Tatarstan and the regional media citing it legitimize the growing importance of historical heritage in the cultural life of the republic by asserting the exceptional value and richness of this heritage and the opportunities that it offers for increasing the region's tourist attractiveness. As no less important are positioned the works in the two directions of preservation of both "Tatar" and "Russian" heritage, both Islamic and Orthodox heritage.

It is proved that historical heritage is not just a few monuments, it is a value-forming beginning for the whole region, filled with a special meaning, which has a significant impact on the whole culture of the region and intercultural interaction in it.

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