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Construction of Historical Memory through Youth Music: Example of the City of Kazan

Albina Raisovna Garifzianova¹, Karina Adgamovna Ozerova²

Abstract

This article is devoted not only to how language, traditions and the past can serve as a creative resource for the creative activity of youth, but also about the ways music becomes a tool for social memory development by youth at the level of everyday life. In this article we want to consider how the historical memory of modern youth is actualized through cultural practices and interests. Actualization should be understood on the one hand, as referring to the themes of the past, not only to legitimize certain decisions of the state, social movements and public persons, but also to justify, with the help of the past, a certain assessment of current events and incitement to action. Also, a significant layer of research draws attention to the creation of symbolic objects (including music) to demonstrate the specific content of historical representations of various groups and those remembering practices that are relevant to them. Moreover, the level of these practices can be both organized, associated with the actions of formal institutions (the World Forum of Tatar Youth, for example), and relate to direct interaction between people at the everyday level - in our study the thing is about the latter.

Keywords: Tatarstan, Tatar Metal, Post-Folk Metal, Youth, Youth Music Scene, Youth Studies, Historical Memory, Social Memory, National Language.

1. Kazan Federal University. Institute of Social and Philosophical Sciences and Mass Communications, Department of General and Ethnic Sociology. E-mail: albina.garifzyanova@gmail.com

2. Kazan Federal University. Institute of Philosophy, Social Sciences and Mass Communication, Laboratory for Sociological Research. E-mail: Karina-usm@yandex.ru

Introduction

The object of the study is the Kazan musical Tatar-speaking youth scene, the main informants in the presented case were members of the musical group Baradj. The style of the Baradj group is the synthesis of metal as a western musical trend, and the use of the cultural heritage of the Volga Bulgaria and Tatar national music. National music is an integral part of the ethnic group culture. Musical works convey ideas about important historical events for the community, and also affect group identity. In this context, we can talk about the connection of the ethnos history, national music, historical memory and ethnic identification in the musical work of the Baradj group. Such a connection in society is noted by such researchers as T. Adorno (Adorno Theodor, 1999), P. Nora (Nora, 1999), E. Hosbaum (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 2000), V. Schnirelmann (Shnirelman, 1999) and others. The youth musical Tatar scene is a whole display of different styles and trends of ethnomusic. The use of the native language as an instrument for a cultural product development, the use of folklore and the history of the Volga Bulgaria in musical subjects leaves a certain imprint on the communicative practices and interests of those who are directly involved in this musical scene and the communication around it. The performance of musical works in the national language plays a large role. This is not only an opportunity to stand out against the background of other youth groups in Kazan, but to actualize their (and listeners') ethnic identity. In addition, the language is considered by theorists of nationalism (for example, by R. Brubaker), as one of the main mechanisms of the ethnic group solidarity, because it forms the ideas about an ethnos as an objectively existing group (Brubaker, 2012). The social space of memory is heterogeneous and is created by the efforts of many subjects at the same time (social institutions, individual opinion leaders, etc.). This heterogeneity can be explained by referring to the idea of "social fields" by P. Bourdieu (Shmatko, 2003). It is also important to consider how the interpretation of the information received is performed, and the formation of a decision on the ways of a new assessment of the past should (or should not) affect the practices of an individual member of society or groups. In general, a reference to the past in the framework of social memory is always associated with an indication of whether it is worth perceiving the present. This property of social memory makes it a powerful mechanism for the integration of society and the socialization of youth in it.

Social memory can become a source of ideas about the need for "revival" of traditions, the attitude to a particular social group (ethnic, age) or own identity. This is especially true in the light of the socialization of youth: images of the common past and their interpretations help young people to feel their own involvement in the history of the country and determine their own attitude to the events of the present. The musical youth scene, especially the underground part of it, which contrasts itself with the Tatar pop stage (pop music), is an important element in the process of social memory update: young people, using Western musical styles in combination with ethnic resources, reproduce the past and form their own peculiar musical style through amateur performances by informal ways.

Methods

The pilot phase of the study, according to the results of which this article was written, was conducted in the spring of 2016 in Kazan.¹ During the study, 7 interviews were taken as the part of the case: the participants of the musical group Baradj, a representative of rap music and one expert interview with a

musician. And back in 2015, there was an interview with group leader Aydar (Djonatan) in 2015². Communication with some of the informants continued through correspondence in social networks. During music scene study, media materials were analyzed, the official website of the group Baradj³ and the publics in the social network VKontakte: "Tatarcha Rock"⁴. In our opinion, a special place was played by observation, during which we attended the rehearsals of Baradj musicians in the Yuldash-2 garage complex and at the "Мин татарча сойлэшэм" event.

Results and Discussion

The group was formed in the provincial city of Elabuga. The informants Rustem and Djonatan (Aydar) began to attend the bard club, where they got to know each other. The search for own style and musical uniqueness is fueled by the influential opinion of one of the relatives of the band member - a famous artist.⁵

Respondent: We played folk metal. My uncle suggested experimenting and playing Tatar metal. And we were writing songs, including "The leaves flew", "White sheet", and "Bulgar Ile". The last song is in the Tatar language and with Tatar pentatonics (Djonatan, 2015).

Soon the band "Baradj" was created and, thus, they gain experience together in track writing. The group first album was in Russian and with one single song in Tatar: Respondent: Well ... this Tatar song hooked people - and we thought like that: "Why do we initially try to use Tatar elements in music, while we don't use Tatar?" - actually we were shy about it, or something initially. (M_32_muzstsenatatar_Bulgar_postmetal_baraj_Garifzyanova_Kazan_3)

Research interest is caused by the musical practices of this group, through which the reproduction of social memory takes place. Creating the memory of the Bulgarian past of the Tatars through music has an educational purpose, according to the members of the group. A common origin, the sense of shared past determines the idea of unity and a certain solidarity in the present. The name of the group 'Baradj' is directly related to the history of the Volga Bulgaria - it is from the mythology of the Volga Bulgaria. According to legend, 'Baradj' is the name of a dragon who lived in the Yelabuga settlement⁶. The dragon protected all Bulgars from evil spirits. The group uses the image of this dragon on its logo:

Respondent 1: Many people do not know their story at all! ... But the story, of course, is written by the winners. ... They are trying to annul history so that humanity does not have history. But we then perfectly understand that history is the fragments of human life. I.e. we take such progressive genres, namely the genre of rock and metal, and we add some thought related to the history of our roots. That's it, i.e. we are guardians, in fact (Djonatan, 2015).

The group 'Baradj' is based on the symbols and culture of the ancient Bulgarian ethnos (in the lyrics, in the arrangement, in the design of the disks), the legends of the Volga Bulgaria⁷, the legends and cultural experience of the Tatars make the basis of the work. The mechanism of ideas about the past influence the strengthening of the group overall identity is explained by many researchers both through the peculiarities of the cultural works themselves (the narrative that they provide) and through the emotional response that they evoke among the group members. The musical basis of the group is the post-metal, post-rock genre, which, together with ethnic motifs, are transformed into the melody that

does not fit into any of the well-known genres. They position themselves as a bolgar-post-folk-metal band.

"... Our niche is the trend of metal, rock, this is the most interesting, because there are a lot of stage performers we decided to make a real mix with European standards ..."

As for the texts, the group members almost do not write them. According to them, "people appeared who began to help them in this matter." At first it was a famous artist, then a university professor in history offered his help. All, one way or another, are included in the translation of historical knowledge and they set themselves, first of all, enlightening goals in their activities.

Respondent 1: We have a historical, scientific consultant. People are looking for information, hypothesizing and it comes to us. And the lyric texts reflect mythology, and antiquity. Not what happened 500, 300, 100 years ago, but much further. I.e. this is a thousand-year history when it is already very difficult to get to the bottom of some historical facts. But people collect it all, find it. Accordingly, we try to weave this text into music organically (Djonatan, 2015).

But, nevertheless, the respondent does not ascribe a patriotic character to the music of the group and emphasizes this fact:

"This is no longer patriotism. Because the Huns do not exist. It's like a reference point from where we started." (M_27_muzstsen_Tatar_Bulgar_Kazan_2)

All these features associated with the history of the native land distinguish the group among others in the musical youth scene, turning their style into a special musical language:

Respondent: I consider them to be the brightest representatives. They, probably, achieved success most of all.

Interviewer: You mean, here ... You measure the concept of success by something ...

Respondent: I mean success ... rather creative appreciation ... they have wide appreciation, that is, they have a lot of listeners outside of Kazan.

(M_40_music scene_underground_expert_Garifzyanova_Kazan_5)

According to the sociologist E. Omelchenko, there is something real, marked as correct and only true in the context of each scene, and this will be framed or interpreted by the participants in their own way, depending on the local, geographical context (Omelchenko, 2016). The local specificity of the Kazan Tatar music scene is, in our opinion, in this division - the urban "elite Tatar" is reproduced through the musical work of the Baradj group, which is, in turn, the part of the Tatar underground, and the Tatar stage (pop) is most often in the interests of the village audience of Tatars who prefer recognizable melodies (Garifzyanova, 2016). The members of the Baradj group, on the one hand, using the Tatars' folk art and the mythology of the Volga Bulgaria as a source of inspiration, mentioned how they were inspired in childhood by village life, and what impact the traditional authentic Tatar song made with harmony:

Respondent: These old records are from the eighties, when Ilham Shakirov could sing in some kind of forest. (Laughs) (M_27_Tatar_Bulgar_Postmetal)

At the same time, Baradj reproduces more likely a European musical style focused on urban Tatars and, moreover, on the audience who does not know the Tatar language, who live outside Tatarstan. That is why they are not only the representatives of Tatar alternative music, representing what the ancestors of the Tatars - the Bulgars were, but also their own lifestyle associated with creativity, constructs a certain elitism, which makes their music unusual for most (Maslovskiy et al., 2018). On the one hand, this relationship with elitism is seen in the specifics of the musical product - a combination of the European musical style (heavy metal) with the Bulgarian heritage plus the Tatar language are complex cultural codes, and many do not understand such music often. The scene "instills certain rules of behavior", and these rules are also applied to music. On the other hand, the sources of elitism, in our opinion, is the background of the Baradj band members: their past and their environment. The family stories of the group members and their education is important. All musicians were brought up in fairly stereotypical families with high social and cultural capital. Suppose, one of the founders of the group, noted that he has "a lot of relatives who are associated with artistic activity."

Based on the life strategies of the stage participants, we observed a relationship between the biographical past and the historical and musical "codes, quotes, references" they transmit through their music. Of course, they are complex in nature, but in addition to being elitist in their work, they form a memory for all the participants of the scene, including the audience. According to the logic of the authors of this article, the creation of cultural patterns and symbols that describe the Bulgars as developed ancestors of an ethnic group, or simply associated with them (for example, Bulgarian music, a Bulgarian fairy tale), is a certain policy of the elite in affirming their own strength and significance.

An important point is that the Baradj group is not a mono-ethnic group in terms of composition. So, not all members of the group are formally ethnic Tatars. Someone is half, and someone does not have any⁸ of Tatar roots, someone has the roots of Siberian Tatars. Moreover, the group leader considers himself a Bulgar:

Respondent: I have the culture that connects me. This is the Volga Bulgaria. Here it is, that is, on these lands.

Respondent: But I'm Bulgar ... (M_27_muzstsen_Tatar_Bulgar_postmetal_Baradzh_Garifzyanova_Kazan_2)

According to informants, often because of the prefix bulgar in the name of the group genre, there is some misunderstanding by public. This is due to the fact that many people have long been concerned about the origin of the Volga Tatars. There are several discourses about the origin of the Tatars - Tatars are the descendants of either the Tatar-Mongol, or the Bulgars, or the Kipchaks (Halikov, 1992). Because of this, difficulties arise in the perception of "Bulgars". Since the collapse of the USSR, the nationalist movements that existed at that time called for the rejection of "Tatar", for example, and the adoption of the fact that the Tatars are not Tatars at all but are the descendants of the Bulgars. Today it is the Bulgarian version of the historical Tatars, despite the ongoing disputes of public figures, historians and journalists that found great political support nowadays. But as the informants themselves say, they do not support political and religious organizations:

Respondent 1: The history exists and you need to talk about it, don't forget about it, that's all. This is our position, and not that we want to raise some kind of wave of inadequate excitement. There are

many companies in Kazan with the prefix “Bulgars”. But no one throws stones at them ... (M_27_muzstsen_Tatar_Bulgar_postmetal_Baraj_Garifzyanova_Kazan_2).

Conclusions

The musical style of the Baradj group, in our opinion, is unique among the youth musical groups of the republic - it is the synthesis of metal as a Western musical trend, the cultural heritage of the Volga Bulgaria and Tatar national music, which is an example of global and local combination in youth music. According to one of the group’s members, this “mixture of cultures, both west and east influenced our identity ...” (M_32_muzstsen_Tatar_Bulgar_Postmetal_Baraj_Garifzyanova_Kazan_3). The group creativity, representing the images of the ancestors of the ethnic group (Bulgars), plays an important role in shaping the identity of all participants of the musical youth scene, where communicative practices closely connect musicians and listeners. The music of Baradj group becomes a kind of “justifying memory” explaining what the Bulgarian heritage is and how to perceive it today. At the same time, the modern form of narrative presentation about the past (folk post metal - music) makes them more understandable and accessible to young people, more attractive to regular listening in everyday life, and therefore the regular updating of “Bulgarian” images in memory.

The performances of the Baradj group become a kind of ritual on the stage, which, on the one hand, strengthens the idea of the Bulgarian historical past connection as the past of modern Tatars, and on the other hand, can influence the identity of modern Tatar youth, increasing the significance of the Bulgarian period, which is described as the era of power, cultural and spiritual upsurge.

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Footnotes

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² In 2015, Z. Bikmukhametova took an interview as the part of an individual case study under the scientific supervision by A. Garifzyanova.

³ The site of the music group "Baraj" <http://baradj.ru/>

⁴ Vkontakte "Tatarcha rock" <https://vk.com/ttrock>

⁵ Bulat Gilvanov is the member of the Union of Artists of Russia. He attracted a wide historical and archaeological material during his work creation. In his other works, the artist creates an original system of images and pictorial language, studies and comprehends the ancient folk Turkic art, as well as the art of the peoples of Eurasia.

⁶ The settlement is the remains of a fortified settlement on a high cape on the right bank of the Toyma River at the place where it flows into Kama, within the boundaries of the modern city of Elabuga.

⁷ The medieval state in the middle Volga region and the Kama basin.

⁸ The informant's speech authenticity is preserved.

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