BOOK REVIEWS

Pedagogies of Culture: Schooling and Identity in Post-Soviet Tatarstan, Russia

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School education is one of the critical structures where the state implements its projects of social and political transformation. Governments commonly seek to shape political subjectivities and to inculcate a new set of civic values and commitments through public education. Hence, public education is a strategic arena for the state in its aspirations to shape loyalties and construct categories of identification that go beyond local, ethnic, or religious affiliations toward an institutionalized state-centered national identity. It is crucial for the processes of state formation not only to create bureaucratic institutions, but also to induce in individuals the belief that they are citizens of the state and they belong together. At the same time, the centralized educational system with its state-level aspirations may cause a dilemma for the cultural and ethnic minorities as their own local and regional appeals could be overshadowed under the state-centered national identity formation process. Such a dilemma is explored by Dilyara Suleymanova in the new book entitled *Pedagogies of Culture: Schooling and Identity in Post-Soviet Tatarstan, Russia*. The discussion is based on an ethnographic fieldwork research conducted in two schools (one Russian-medium and the other Tatar-medium) and a madrasah in a small semi-urban settlement in the northeastern part of Tatarstan, a Muslim-majority autonomous region within Russia.

This new volume accordingly offers insights into the life of a peripheral location in post-Soviet Russia, marked by ethnic, religious, and linguistic diversity. Education here is envisaged as an institution that seeks to form, transform, and reproduce the sense of identification and belonging among children and youth, thus envisioning to shape political attitudes and cultural attachments within society.

The book consists of seven chapters. In chapter 1, the author introduces the reader to Tatarstan and its educational projects. Chapter 2 provides

a comprehensive observation of educational policies, developments, and projects that have been implemented in Tatarstan since the collapse of the Soviet Union to promote regional and ethnic identity formation. The author divided this period into two parts: (a) the era of sovereignization and ethno-cultural revitalization (from the 1990s to the early 2000s), and (b) the era of centralization of public education under the presidency of Vladimir Putin. During the first period, educational policy projected to construct a distinct regional identity and post-Soviet Tatar nationhood that involved the revitalization of the Tatar language, culture, and religion. The regional components such as Tatar language lessons and the course on the history of the Tatars became one of the focus areas of the republic's educational policy and curriculum. School knowledge and textbooks became more localized with local and regional cultural, religious, and historical cases. Students got involved in various classroom and extracurricular activities related to their immediate locality (city, town, village) and their region. Thus, Suleymanova observes that, in the case of post-Soviet Tatarstan, the regional component created an institutional framework and a discursive space within which regional, local, and ethnic notions of belonging could be promoted and forged. In this way, as the author suggests, the regional component presented one of the most important instruments in forging and constructing not only a regional identity, but also an ethno-national identity among school students. A person with a consolidated ethno-national consciousness will naturally strive to learn his/her ethnic language, culture, and traditions and thus contribute to the Tatar ethno-national revival. As a result, this era produced a new cohort of young people with a strong sense of ethnic and regional identity and high levels of activism. The same chapter also observes the failure of all these achievements in constructing ethno-national identity in Tatarstan due to the new policies of centralization and homogenization under the presidency of Putin, which resulted in the elimination of the regional component and the introduction of the new federal education standards.

Chapter 3 discusses the role of schools in the practices of "reinventing ethnic cultures" of local communities. Based on the experience of two particular schools, the author demonstrates the ways the dynamics of regionalization and centralization have played out in a small locality in Tatarstan. Under the new policies, schools became a primary instrument of state-centered Russian nation-building with no interest in regional and local cultural revitalization. The policies of financial optimization have led to the closure of small rural schools across Tatarstan, especially

the Tatar-medium schools, with the rest of the Tatar-medium schools switching to instruction in Russian, leaving Tatar-speaking children few opportunities to be instructed in their native language. The chapter alarms about the future of non-Russian ethnicities in Russia as it highlights that if language vanishes, then the ethnic group vanishes as well.

The book further showcases examples of how local ethnic communities are involved in what the author calls the practices of "reinventing ethnic culture," in which schools play an important role. In chapter 4, entitled "Pedagogies of Culture: Learning to Perform, to Belong and to Remember," the various pedagogic techniques and ways of transmitting and constructing the sense of belonging and identity are discussed—whether ethnic belonging, regional identity, or patriotic devotion to a nation-state—that the author observed at her field site. Under new circumstances, cultivating attachment and commitment to regional and ethnic identity and language was burdened to native literature and history teachers as a "hidden curriculum." Local schools thus function as a locus of knowledge about the vanishing ethnic culture, and play an instrumental role in "rediscovering" and "reviving" or sometimes even "reinventing" what people perceive as their authentic cultural heritage. In that sense, ethnic culture is used as a pedagogic technique in inculcating a sense of ethno-national belonging among schoolchildren. Yet this technique could be unsuccessful in current realities as most of the students are mainly interested in global youth culture, in the images and products they would consume on social media and the Internet rather than in traditional *Sabantuy* or *Navruz* celebrations.

Chapter 5, entitled "Pedagogy of Islam: Madrasa Education and Moral Upbringing," highlights the pedagogical potential of Islam by providing the results of field study in a local madrasah. As the author highlights, with the political turn toward unitary and centralized modes of governing in Russia education has been subjected to the new ideological aims such as patriotism, militarism, and awareness of unifying episodes from national history. This situation created a need for religious education to fulfill the demand for moral standards, which the current school education in Russia was missing. Thus, local educators promote and widely use Islamic precepts in practices of moral upbringing, which is called in Russian *vospitanie*. In such a way, the local madrasah actively and positively participates in the process of moral upbringing of youth by providing basic religious knowledge and promoting religious practice and lifestyle among the residents. The madrasah shapes and mediates the local religious revival in this community. The main finding of this chapter is that, far from being used as a

tool of political instrumentalization for the town's schoolchildren, religion (in this case, Islam) is a significant ethnic marker in everyday practices of ethnic identification and categorization. It is one of the primary means of distinguishing between ethnic groups and is an important category in constructing and negotiating identities. Religion constitutes a boundary in everyday interactions between children and is a significant factor in everyday life in ethnically mixed environments.

Chapter 6 entitled, "'I'm only half!': Negotiating Identities at School," explores the ways in which students inhabit the school as a social scene of enactment and negotiation of ethnic belonging. School is the most essential social space where ethnic categorization and labeling is acted out. It is above all in school settings that children and adolescents are confronted with various expressions of racism and ethnocentrism. The author concludes, based on observations in the field site, that children of Tatar ethnicity readily and unconditionally accept the Tatar ethnic identity. Importantly, among adolescents, the Tatar ethnic identity is valorized and perceived in positive terms due to the ethno-cultural revitalization in Tatarstan. The situation differs in the cases of minority ethnicities such as Mari and Udmurd adolescents as they prefer to be Russian or, at least, Tatar. In sum, young people are confronted with a complex social terrain defined by movement between status roles and ethnic ascriptions. The concluding results of the research are highlighted in chapter 7.

In sum, this book provides a constructive examination of the political, ideological, and power-laden dimensions of education from an anthropological perspective. By looking at how society is defined in relation to education, it arouses several essential questions related to the role of state in identity formation.

First, schools are bestowed a primary role in the task of transmitting and inculcating state vision and ideology. The citizens that the Russian state now seeks to mold are dedicated patriots, loyal to the state and to the current regime, and committed to traditional Russian values—defined primarily in opposition to the West. This educational policy is embedded in the larger political and ideological strategy of the ruling regime toward traditionalism, spiritual security, patriotism, and strengthening national cohesion.

Second, centralization and homogenization policies eliminated the regional components in schools, and adoption of a new education standard have effectively dismantled institutional spaces within which regional cultures and languages could be transmitted at schools. In fact, the regional components are often seen as a tool fostering separatism and

ethnic mobilization among schoolchildren, prioritizing regional identity over state-centered identity.

Third, in post-Soviet Russia, the curriculum and federal textbooks have remained Russocentric, becoming even more nationalistically oriented, emphasizing the spiritual and historical uniqueness of Russia and making more pronounced references to its dominant religion, Christianity. A few federally produced textbooks have attempted to reflect the diversity of historic experiences of the various peoples of Russia, yet they still have not managed to adequately represent the past of ethnic minorities, particularly their tragic and problematic episodes, such as deportations and genocides. Alternative historical narratives and visions that had been silenced by federal educational discourses thus mostly emerged from the regions, within the framework of the regional component.

This book also envisages the failure of centralization and homogenization policies of the state in moral upbringing and disciplining, thus making the pedagogical potential of Islam increasingly accepted in Tatarstan. The *madrasah* and religious education evolve as an important institution for understanding the dynamics and developments of school education in the context of the larger processes of desecularization in post-Soviet Tatarstan.

In addition, this work perceives language as an essential component in identity and ethnicity constructing. Thus, the state's current political turn toward centralization of educational policies and transformation of schools into a primary instrument of state-centered Russian nation-building processes ensures the dominant position of Russian language and a key to success in educational and professional path. It is the institutional dominance of the Russian language in the educational sector, and specifically in higher education, that forces Tatar families to adopt those strategies that would ensure foremost and primarily the acquisition of Russian-language competence by their children.

In sum, this new publication is a useful resource book for those who are interested in the role of schools in constructing ethnic identities of minorities and the formation of ethno-regional components in post-Soviet Tatarstan.

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