different and separated worlds, was now reorganized as experience of living in a historically connected sphere of one (European) World which was separated for 50 years.

References


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“Family” and “Collective” Memory (Ways of Ethnic Identity Construction)

I would like to get straight down to the topic of this conference, i.e. to the ‘biographical method’. I would like to show how biographical narrative, when regarded as a self-presentation, as in a certain performance on the stage (Goffman’s metaphor), reveals various existing ways of constructing ethnic identities.

My report is based on the data of the joint research project "Forming of Ethnic Communities in St.Petersburg and Berlin" carried out in 1993-1996 at the Centre for Independent Social Research, co-ordinated by Ingrid Oswald and Viktor Voronkov. Research was supported by the Volkswagen Foundation. I did research on the German Community in St.Petersburg. In the course of my research, 22 biographical, problem-oriented interviews were conducted. It must be noted that along with the interviews (as far as it was possible), analysis of context was carried out. Analyzing only verbal practices is not enough to understand respondents' "reality": participant observation of everyday life is essential for research. I participated in the public activities of the German Community and in the 'closed', family festivities. The highest degree of confidence that a researcher can enjoy is to be invited to such holidays. It is also a compliment, being identified as one of 'them': 'You must have something of a German origin. You look like a German. Those clever, intelligent eyes behind the glasses'.

Each biographical narrative brings together the past and the future, it is a self-presentation, explanation and justification of today's identity of the narrator. Each biographical interview as an act of communication between the sociologist and the informant is a special kind of public speech practice, a show; a certain kind of demonstration: I am this and that. There is no difference whether the informant is speaking of real events and telling the truth; - it is his/her truth, his/her reality. What is really important is what he/she is demonstrating, what the others and the sociologist, in particular, are to see in the performance. For the sociologist who uses this method, it is important to see and to interpret adequately how such self-presentation is formed. 'By his/her behaviour a person accomplishes the statement: I am what I appear to be'. The sociologist's task is to decode such a 'statement'. Below I give an example of the importance of the analysis of biographical interviews as a performance on the base of my research.

How can we explain the growing interest in ethnic identity, which seems to have disappeared during the Soviet period? Total disidentification and a 'certain crucial struggle for existence' in today's Russian reality, according to Leontid Ionin, are reasons that ascriptive characteristics become more important, ethnicity being one of these characteristics (Ionin: 249). Ethnic identity lost by previous generations suddenly becomes urgent, and serves as a basis for building up life-strategies.

Ethnicity is a social construction as it is shown by the research. However, according to the myths drifting around in the society, ethnicity is inherited and therefore family biography and family legends are constitutive signs of such an identity. The search for roots is the basis of its
construction. This explains the growing interest towards genealogy which is very common today.

Genealogy, whose primordial task was establishing and registering official class privileges, gives birth to the myth of the origin of nobleness and of its direct inheritance. So, all the achievements of previous generations and their former status are automatically transmitted to the happy heir of distinguished ancestors. The most important thing is to find the right one.

The following statement of one of the informants (member of the St. Petersburg German Society, 67 years old, retired) is rather common, but the most expressive one and leaves no doubt that the only feeling such a "weight of past" gives him is pleasure: "All my ancestors descend from Germans, but not from monkeys. We can cite as well some published autobiographies. All those Ivars not remembering their kindred invented a saying that suits them very well: A son is not responsible for his father. Well, it's up to them. Personally I prefer another saying: Like father like son. I am the son of my father, the grandson of... of the true German intellectuals who have imbued naturally the great national culture (My duty...)."

So, the son and grandson of the true German intellectuals transfers this quality of a true German intellectual to himself and becomes also a bearer of the great German culture. At the same time, the idea of family is transformed to include the distant past and is extended until the moment when one can say that one's great-great-grandfather was German. If we simply ask the informant about his family, he answers like this: in May of 1844 etc. There is a separate German section in the St. Petersburg Genealogy Society.

The majority of my informants have started to construct their ethnic identity only recently. Until then, it was important only in the 'bureaucratic' space. But when ethnicity becomes a useful resource, namely an alternative to the lost identities gone with the collapse of the Soviet Union, people are likely to 'recall' that one of their ancestors was German. United under a common ethonym, "the Germans" inscribe themselves to various referents, form various codes of 'their people' and choose various life strategies. The differences in organization of the biographical narrative demonstrate different ways of identity construction. It is what the chosen referent is related to that turns out to be fundamental. I distinguish two types of identities based on different contexts of referentiality. So, these are: (1) identity constructed on the basis of what is called "family memory", which exists within the frame of family ideology and family values; (2) identity built on the basis of 'collective', shared memory. In the latter case, the ideology and values are shared by the group. It's clear that such a division is rather relative because any attempt to structure and 'put in order' is undoubtedly a simplification and impoverishment of narration. Below I define what is meant by the terms of family and collective memory.

Family memory is concentrated on reproducing the family traditions and legends connected to some concrete persons, relatives whose lives and actions are mythologized. Collective memory is not simply personified collective recollections filtered through personal experience, but a collective perception and collective evaluations significant to the present behavior. A mass image of past events is created and a collective biography is constructed. By means of such a biography, the ideology of this group is formulated. Each family story being told is reproduced within the frames of this ideology. It is tied to the main events of the group history, all inconveniences being omitted and a selection of topics is held. In the collective memory about the common history there are two points which are significant: arrival of the German ancestors to Russia (as a starting-point of the existence of the group) and the repression (as the reason for special status today). Every family story is anchored to these two main events. In the family memory, these points can be completely absent — in this case, the events connected to the family values, such as honesty, education, etc. become of major significance.

Organization of these narratives is different. It is the place where the interview had been carried out which proved to be important. I'd like to remind the reader once more that interviews usually didn't take place right after the first meeting with the future narrator. First, there is a certain period of getting used to each other, when the informant understands that I am rather harmless and we both start to feel if not an affection for each other, then at least a friendly liking. When possible, the informants chose the place for the interview, an environment where their self-presentation would be appropriate. It is known that the space itself (the space literally) structures the behavior. Surrounding symbols are the scenery of the performance. It could be the territory of the German Society with the German Library, the Grimm Brothers' portrait and the map of Germany on the wall, or the house, a private space with a home library and jigs, which were presented to me as typically German.

In order to confirm their stories, in the first case, informants would show me some documents of social significance like certificates of rehabilitation, court verdicts and passports with the nationality column filled. In the case, when identity was constructed on the basis of family memory, informants used another sort of confirmation of their truthfulness. I was shown documents about their grandmother's education, grandchildren's handicraft items, family photographs with such comments as "Look at this noble bearing, this refinement of appearance, this intellect in the eyes, etc.

Genres of these narrations are also different. While the family legends are something like exciting, amusing and funny family stories, the biographical narratives inscribed into the collective ideology are like heroic epic literature. Here all the events give the feeling of acute tension. This tension of events is relieved by psychological reasoning or rhetorical questions and exclamations. First of all, it is a chronicle of humiliation and offense, an existence not due to, but in spite of something. For example, a story about a professional career is, first and foremost, an advancement in spite of the nationality column in a passport, in spite of a bad surname, the demonstration of constant resistance to the system. I won't tell you about all the humiliation I had to go through because of my origin. As a result of all this I've got a feeling similar to the one black people had in America when racism was at its worst... (this is followed by a detailed story about this humiliation; My deti... 12-33).

And in a child's consciousness (speaking about fights at school because of being called "Nazi" or "fascist") I could... in no way find the explanation, why and what for I was blamed? We felt guilty in every fibre of our being, in our skin. What were we guilty of? It is guilt of being German, of living in this country... It seems that there are different ethnicities on the Earth and if nature wanted to have only one ethnicity, only one species, could you imagine what it would be? There would be only lime-trees or oak-trees or just slender birches. But besides the slender birches there are dwarf birches, lichens and there is some verdure carried by the wind. That means nature needs it all, that means all the ethnicities on the globe are needed for some reason. That means it's necessary that people speak more than one language. That means it's necessary for existence! (from the interview with the principal of the German kindergarten, a member of the Board of the St. Petersburg German Society, 44 years old). I heard the same genre and intonation during the informant's speech at the meeting of the German Society.

The main difference between these narratives and identity presentations is the fact that they are constructed in different discourses. The story of the identity, built on the basis of a shared collective memory, exists first of all in the discourse of the social justice. I quote: ...we should give a hand to those who were unfairly slandered and defamed, banished from their native land and their own hearths, we should relieve the feeling of discomfort that persists until today, we should give them hope. Because in the end it's not generosity, but our duty towards our fellow-citizens. (My deti... 60). Injustice is a key-word in this text. In this case, the
The referent is described in terms of the nation. The idea of belonging to the group which lost something, or is rather significant in the past (like social status that has been lowered) and the struggle to restore the justice of history gives birth to the kind of solidarity different from the family one. It applies to those Germans who form social networks based on the ethnicity in public sphere. We can say that an ethnic group is striving to become a political association and is fighting for its rights. In this case, the collective identity became functional for the citizen's role. A group tries to fill a certain niche in social hierarchy because the very idea of social justice preserves vertical classification of the world (Ikon: 233-235). As J. Habermas argued, in the formation of national consciousness acquired nationalism grow out from inherited ethnicity (Habermas 1996). In this sense, the ascetic status (inherited ethnicity) transforms into achieved status, whilst formulated in the terms of citizenship.

Identity built on the basis of the family memory develops in another discourse where the keyword is prestige. In this case, ethnic difference acquires the quality of personal value and doesn't come out into political space. The identity doesn't become a collective one, it is not laid down as a basis for life strategies, but exists only as an alternative to the other positions in the social space. Here the ethnic identity is presented as non-functional, it has no certain status position. It is the self-value of a personality that is affirmed by means of such identity construction.

The integrative analysis of the autobiographical narrative, its context and the organization of the whole performance has shown that under a common name there exist completely different referents and the ethnicity therefore acquires a different character and meaning. The role of a German oriented towards various referents preserves different life strategies. The reported research reveals two types of ethnic identity construction: identity built on the basis of family memory and identity based on what I call collective memory. This statement was confirmed by the differences in the biographical narrations themselves.

This paper is an illustration of the thesis that every autobiographical narrative is valuable and interpretation is possible only when it is combined with the context analysis, that is, a drama analysis of the performance. Public dramatization, that is, the communication between a sociologist and an informant, is the selling of one's own image. Research in techniques and methods of this dramatization helps to understand the way a person maintains or changes his/her identity, in order to understand his/her world. Combining biographical analysis and participant observation method expands opportunities for understanding.

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