

2013-2014 Title VIII Research Scholar Program – Final Report

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Creating a Tatar Capital: National, Cultural, and Linguistic Space in Kazan, 1920-41

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Research Abstract

During the 2013-14 academic year, I spent nine months in Kazan, Russia, conducting research essential to the completion of my dissertation, “Creating a Tatar Capital: National, Cultural, and Linguistic Space in Kazan, 1920-41.” Working in local archives and libraries, I sought to utilize both Russian- and Tatar-language sources to ascertain how Tatars, Russia’s largest ethnic minority and Muslim community, assimilated into the Soviet system during its first two decades. In the early 1920s, after years of war, economic deprivation, epidemics, revolutions, and famine, Kazan lay in ruins. Yet Bolshevik Party and state officials expected Kazan, as the capital of the nascent Tatar Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (TASSR), to serve as a crucible for reorienting the ideology, rhetoric, and customs of its inhabitants. In pursuing the physical, social, and political transformation of their city, many Kazan elites sought to erase the ethnolinguistic animosity that pockmarked the city and its residents. In studying the various agendas for and outcomes of refashioning Kazan into a Soviet capital, I pay particular attention to the many forms of living, working, studying, worshipping, and self-identifying as a Tatar in Kazan, particularly when these practices bumped up against similar habits of Russian neighbors. Speaking to the fields of nationalities studies, urban studies, and spatial history, my project charts how residents of Kazan used the physical space around them to negotiate ethnolinguistic, political, and social differences that divided the city and its inhabitants.

Research Goals

Two objectives guided my forays into this research project. First, I sought to understand how the Party-state endeavored to eliminate physical and cultural barriers between Tatars and Russians in Kazan. Upon the formation of the TASSR, Tatars constituted 20% of the city's population. Most lived in so-called Tatar districts that lacked electricity, running water, sewage systems, and paved roads. On the eve of World War II, Tatars made up 30% of Kazan's population, with an aggregate increase of 120,000 Tatars in the city, many living outside the Tatar districts. I sought to chart the urban planning and development efforts designed to accommodate the influx of Tatars into Kazan. I also wanted to identify the various educational, organizational, and disciplinary measures that assimilated many of these Tatars into the Soviet system. In this regard, I needed to look at the top-down objectives of the Party-state to ascertain what the "ideal" city and citizen would look like. This meant, first, paying attention to how the physical space of the city changed through razing mosques and churches, converting Muslim schools into industrial spaces, and desegregating traditionally Tatar parts of the city. Second, I had to ascertain how the Party-state proposed that Russians and Tatars balance their national differences while fulfilling their larger roles as Soviet citizens.

My second objective was to investigate how Russians and Tatars interacted with and within urban spaces by responding to, reinterpreting, internalizing, and sometimes even rejecting the objectives of the Party-state. Russians and Tatars negotiated their ethnolinguistic differences, with words and sometimes with fists, in universities, factories, communal housing, and cultural institutions such as theaters. Some Tatar dramatists incorporated Soviet-friendly themes into their work, converting the Tatar stage in Kazan into a platform for presenting to the public the

victory of Soviet culture over Tatars' backward, Islamic past. Yet on the factory floor and in student dormitories, tensions flared over perceived, and sometimes real, discrimination. A bottom-up perspective on the realities of life in Kazan, though difficult to find among the mass of state-produced and filtered documents and reports, would provide a necessary balance to my first research objective.

Cumulatively, I set out to use local archival and library collections to answer a number of questions: How did the Bolshevik reimagining of urban space in the 1920s and 1930s incorporate Tatars into the Soviet experiment? How did interactions between Tatars and Russians in Kazan reflect both the tensions and successes of integration? How did the understanding and expression of Tatar ethnolinguistic practices evolve during this time? What does the Kazan experience reveal about life in Soviet cities outside of Moscow and Leningrad? Finally, what might this history suggest about Tatars in present-day Kazan?

Research Activities

I conducted research in several archives, libraries, and institutes in Kazan: the National Archive of the Republic of Tatarstan, the Central State Archive of Historical and Political Documentation of the Republic of Tatarstan, the National Library of the Republic of Tatarstan, the National Museum of the Republic of Tatarstan, and the Lobachevskii Library of Kazan Federal (Volga Region) University, as well as its Division of Manuscripts and Rare Books. I began by focusing on the management of the urban environment of Kazan, looking at files from the Tatar Republic Central Executive Committee, the Tatar Republic Planning Commission, the Kazan City Council, and the Kazan City Council Planning Committee to ascertain the state of Kazan's infrastructure during this period. Many public services, such as tram routes, roads,

bridges, sewage systems, and plumbing, were in ruins after years of war and famine, with Tatar areas of the city disproportionately affected. I also gathered data on demographic changes in the urban population from the TASSR Statistical Bureau.

In reading through the files of the Kazan City Council's Main Architectural and Planning Administration, the Tatar Organization for the Union of Soviet Architects, and the Kazan Institute for Soviet Construction, I discovered blueprints for construction projects, details of internal debates about the architecture of Kazan, and plans for conducting significant renovations to parts of the city that frequently burned down or flooded. I found proposals plans to install monuments around the city, some of which came to fruition, and others that did not. Especially noteworthy were files relating to an initiative to build a Palace of Culture in the middle of the city to unite the Tatar and Russian parts of Kazan. Although never constructed, it did spark significant debate about what such a structure would look like, where it would be located, and how people would use it. I followed this information trail to the TASSR Arts Administration, which not only managed the removal and installation of monuments in Kazan, but also supervised the construction of the new Tatar Opera Theater in place of the Palace of Culture. In inspecting the files of the TASSR Central Executive Committee and the Kazan City Council, I also delved into the management of religious spaces, contrasting, for example, the petitions of Soviet organizations to close mosques and Islamic educational institutions with requests from religious groups to keep them open.

To determine how national difference functioned throughout Kazan, I turned my attention to factories, higher education institutions, and cultural institutions. In appraising the growing presence of Tatars workers in the city, I looked at how Tatars talked about their work qualifications in employment applications to the Kazan Labor Exchange. I examined life on the

factory floor at the Vakhitov Chemical Plant, where the integration of Tatar workers into the industrialized labor force sparked opposition. In assessing educational institutions, I concentrated on files from the TASSR Ministry of Education and the Kazan City Council's Education Department to see which primary schools integrated Russian and Tatar pupils and how this corresponded to city districts. I also spent a lot of time with files from Kazan State University, the Eastern Pedagogical University, and the Tatar Communist University, ascertaining what paths Tatars took to pursue higher education, traditionally the domain of Russians, and what obstacles they faced. Finally, I began to look at the institutionalization of Tatar culture and traditions through the Tatar State Academic Theater and the TASSR Union of Soviet Writers.

I supplemented my time in these archives by working in Kazan Federal University's Lobachevskii Library and the National Library of Tatarstan. These repositories hold rare Russian- and Tatar-language periodicals available only in Kazan, such as the newspapers *Izvestiia TsIK TSSR* (News of the Central Executive Committee of the Tatar SSR), *Krasnaia Tataria* (Red Tatar), *Kyzyl Tatarstan* (Red Tatarstan), and *Eshche* (Worker). I read through many of these periodicals chronologically in order to develop a timeline for important Kazan events. Looking at these newspapers over a twenty-year span, though laborious, provided a comprehensive picture of how rhetoric changed over time, which often served as an important indicator of policy shifts. Additionally, reading the Russian and Tatar newspapers side-by-side enabled me to identify differences, particularly acute during the 1920s and early 1930s, between agendas of the Russian and Tatar editorial staffs. I also noted how debates on the national question were often deemed important enough to appear in translation in both papers. Cumulatively, these newspapers provided a wealth of information on daily life in Kazan, as well as larger political questions under discussion.

At the Lobachevskii Library and National Library I also looked at a number of low-circulation periodicals and journals published for various factories, educational institutions, and cultural institutions, such as *Vakhitovets* (Vakhitov Factory Worker), *Novoe delo* (New Work, published in Russian from the Kazan State University Workers' Faculty), and *Golos proletarskogo studenchestva* (Voice of Proletarian Students). Featuring first person reporting and lots of gossip, these publications served as wonderful sources for details of interpersonal communication. I also photographed material from the theater journal *Tamashachy* (Spectator), the Ministry of Education journal *Megarif* (Education), and the Party's educational and literary journal *Bezneng iul* (Our Path) for subsequent study and analysis.

I also sought out visual sources for supplementary data on daily life in Kazan. I reproduced a number of maps from the 1920s and 1930s that show how street names changed between the imperial and Bolshevik eras and how worker and Tatar districts on the periphery of Kazan became integrated into the rest of the city through the expansion of transportation networks. Various photography collections allowed me to visualize the transformation of the city in similar ways. Photographs of monuments that the Bolsheviks built speak to the visibility and accessibility of the new regime's most important symbols. While looking at photographs of buildings, I paid attention to the languages and alphabets used in signage and advertisements to gain a sense of a region's customer base. Photographs of people provided glimpses of everyday dress for Kazan residents, particularly useful information if the nationality of the subjects in the photographs was known. Additionally, I found in the National Museum collections of Russian- and Tatar-language propaganda posters that were on display throughout the city, a rare window onto what messages citizens saw as they went about their business

Finally, I utilized the Lobachevskii Library and National Library as repositories of published documents and secondary material unavailable in the United States. I found primary documents, including letters and memoirs written by students, faculty members, and workers. Moreover, since my project touches on how people thought of and studied Tatar culture, heritage, and language during the 1930s, I also looked at publications from institutions such as the House of Tatar Culture, the Society for the Study of Tatarstan, and the Tatar Scientific-Research Economics Institute, which served as sponsoring organizations for an abundance of ethnographic and historical research. Many unpublished dissertations at Lobachevskii Library pointed me to valuable archival materials and helped to fill bibliographical lacunae.

Important Research Findings

Through my research I gained a greater understanding the place of Kazan in the hierarchy of Russian cities, particularly given its uneasy relationship with Moscow due to a history of separatist ambitions. My research took me back to the revolutionary turmoil of 1917. To the chagrin of many Tatar nationalists who saw the February Revolution as an opportunity to guarantee independence for Tatars, the subsequent October Revolution seemed to invalidate the Bolsheviks' earlier promises of autonomy for the country's Muslim populations. In February and March 1918, the Kazan Soviet declared martial law in the city to prevent the declaration of an autonomous Idel-Ural State organized by Tatars as part of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic. When Tatar nationalists retreated to the Tatar part of the city and declared autonomy anyway, Red Army soldiers were called in to suppress the alleged separatists, a move that prompted many of the remaining Tatar elite to flee the city. Later that year, in August 1918, the White Army captured Kazan, wreaking havoc on the population and further crippling

infrastructure of the city. Although the Red Army expelled their imperialist foes in September, Kazan remained in ruins, with little sign of coming relief. By the time Moscow announced the creation of the Tatar ASSR in 1920 with Kazan as its capital, the dream of uniting Russia's Muslims had died. For all significant decisions about the governance of the TASSR, Kazan remained dependent on Moscow, with central organs continually cycling Party and government heads through Kazan. Few lasted more than a few years, and many just a matter of months.

While recognizing the consequences of this pressure from Moscow, I remain adamant that this period is not just a continuation of the prerevolutionary era, in which Russians projected unfettered imperial domination over the Tatar population. The Bolshevik Revolution fundamentally changed the relationship between the various nationalities of the Soviet Union, striving to rectify the injustices of the past. From the earliest days of the Soviet regime, Tatars joined the ranks of the Party to build communism alongside Russians. Through my research, I began piecing together the stories of many of these Tatars, as well as Russians, who at various times designed, promoted, undermined, and avoided the authority of Soviet power over their lives. There was not just one way of being a Tatar during the Soviet era. For example, Tatar communists led Tatar battalions to disband Tatar nationalists in Kazan during the Ideal-Ural conflict. The tumultuous Civil War years established the legend of Mulla-Nur Vakhitov, a Tatar communist executed by White Army forces in the city, even as many Tatars were accused of helping the Bolsheviks' enemies. As I subsequently delved into the impact of Soviet-style affirmative action initiatives such as *korenizatsiia* (indigenization) and the Realization of the Tatar Language, introduced in the 1920s to increase the number of trained Tatar workers and fill the Party-state apparatus with Tatars, I began to amass a greater sense of the many possibilities Kazan offered for Tatars. They came to Kazan from villages for the labor and education

opportunities, or to escape collectivization. Others looked to the city as a source of sustenance, particularly during years of famine, which disproportionately affected Tatar villages, historically located on less fertile land than Russians peasants.

Over the course of my research, I grappled with how to incorporate Tatars and Russians into the same framework of analysis. As I discovered, the dismal conditions of Kazan during these years, due to an incredible housing crisis, lack of transportation and other civil services, rampant disease, and a crippled economy, produced shared urban experiences between the impoverished Russians and Tatars who remained in the city after the Bolshevik Revolution. Nonetheless, these common experiences, as bleak as they were, did not remedy the hostile feelings many Russians and Tatars felt toward each other, a reality not helped by a lack of a common language, as few uneducated from Tatars coming from villages knew more than a handful of Russian words. As the TASSR government began issuing new laws for preferential hiring practices of Tatars over Russians and mandating Tatar-language study in educational institutions, many Russians felt they were being unfairly treated. A group of Russian Kazan State University students vocally and publically protested the requirement of attending Tatar language courses, decrying their uselessness, which led to the filing of criminal charges for exhibiting chauvinistic attitudes. The subsequent trial and conviction of these students garnered a lot of attention in the press. Most interestingly, though, for every publicized case of Russian chauvinism, Tatars were criticized for maintaining bourgeois nationalist attitudes. In meting out punishments for a system that was abused from both sides, a delicate balance was needed.

The complexities of interethnic relations during the 1920s and 1930s centered on what it meant to be a Soviet Tatar. What place was there for Tatar language, culture, religion, and other traditions in Kazan? Was Soviet synonymous with Russian? To think through these questions, I

studied how changes to the Tatar alphabet reflected these tensions by reflecting the various agendas for incorporating Tatars into the Soviet Union. In the 1920s, a move to abandon Tatar's long-used Arabic alphabet for Latin signaled a turn away from a past infused with Islamic social and gender relations toward modernization, as Latin could unite Tatars with the larger European proletariat who would soon be joining in the world revolution. By the late 1930s, Russian language and culture had taken the lead as the primary vehicle for integrating non-Russian into the Soviet Union. Illiterate Tatars in Kazan expressed greater interest in learning to read and write in Russian than in their native language. Russian language and literature was made mandatory in all Tatar educational institutions, with more and more classroom hours devoted to the subjects each year. While Tatar language remained prevalent in Tatar villages, in urban environments such as Kazan, it was increasingly severed from governance.

In this regard, my initial hypothesis of the creation of a "Tatar" capital proved false. Tatars who came to Kazan found themselves in a Russian city. Unlike other national capitals that showcased their titular nationality's culture and art in new Soviet architecture and monuments, the few attempts to incorporate images of Tatars or vaguely Islamic styles into the landscape of Kazan fell flat due to a dearth of funds, materials, and trained specialists. When the only Tatar architect in the TASSR Union of Architects was called up to Moscow for advanced study and training, any advocacy for visible Tatar architectural elements in Kazan disappeared along with him. Moreover, the dismal failure of the grandiose ambitions to build a Tatar Palace of Culture in Kazan, bridging the Russian and Tatar parts of the city as a symbol of unity, served as a metaphor for much of this era: a plan that looked promising on paper but ultimately lacked the financial, material, and human resources to bring it into reality. The consequence of these failures was a complete absence of visual markers in Kazan that acknowledged, and much less

celebrated, a non-Russian presence in Kazan.

This is not to say, however, that Tatars could not be seen or heard in the city, but one had to step into this world, which was becoming more compartmentalized and institutionalized by the 1930s. Interested in the creation of these boundaries, I delved into the study of cultural institutions, such as the Tatar State Academic Theater, the Tatar Writers' Union, the Tatar Opera, and the House of Tatar Culture, where Tatars were discussing these themes about national identity. Notably, the Tatar intelligentsia began turning to the village for sources of both artistic inspiration and academic study. The village, an idealized source of "pure" Tatar language, culture, and heritage, was a much safer world to explore than the complexities of urban existence, in which Tatar "chameleons" moved in and out of Russian and Tatar worlds to successfully integrate into the Soviet way of life. Increasingly, the concept of "Tatarness" was pushed back to the village, away from the city. In Kazan, one could don the costume of a Tatar, but the Soviet citizen underneath needed to look, speak, and act like a Russian.

Policy Implications and Recommendations

While conducting my research, I continually encountered reminders of the relevance of my project to present-day Kazan, as well as its broader implications for American policies toward Russia. At its core, my project is about how Tatars learned to live, study, work, and worship alongside Russians in the early twentieth century. During the many months I have spent in Kazan, I have observed Tatars strive to protect group identity through linguistic and religious boundaries while maintaining harmony with Russian coworkers, friends, and relatives. The challenges of balancing these identities bear many hallmarks of the early Soviet era, when the Bolshevik regime endeavored to rewrite the rules about what it meant to be a Tatar in a modern,

Russian city. By the 1930s, Russian language and culture became the primary vehicle for all educational, cultural, and economic endeavors in the Soviet Union, with minority languages such as Tatar pushed to the side. Throughout Kazan today, Tatars remain highly selective about when and where to place their language, culture, and heritage on display. Consistent with another dichotomy established in the 1930s, Tatar culture continues to be primarily depicted as a historical phenomenon rooted in village life, an artifact to be displayed through national costume and grandmothers' warbling folk tunes, distant from the realities of modern life. Only recently, through a number of Tatar youth initiatives that, among other things, embrace Tatar language study and Islamic heritage, has the concept of a visible and proud urban Tatar resurfaced. Significantly, these concerns about the relevancy of minority national culture in modern Russia are not limited to Tatars, but arise among almost every national group living in Russia.

In this regard, American policy should be more conscientious of the challenges of Russia's ethnolinguistic diversity. Initiatives such as the Combined Research and Language Training Program and other Title VIII programs should be fully supported to give scholars the opportunity to invest in Russia's minority languages and cultures. My experiences, as well as many others', have shown that even basic language skills can open innumerable doors for cross-cultural interaction and communication. Such attention to detail and diversity in Russia would also shed light on the differing forms of Islam in Russia, as its practice in Tatarstan differs highly from regions such as the Caucasus. Yet, as seen in various aspects of the current Ukrainian crisis, regional loyalties can often supersede ethnolinguistic difference and should thus be treated as a worthy subject of study in its own right. For example, from my perspective, the quasi-nationalist rhetoric emanating from the Kremlin about ethnic Russian heritage and Russian Orthodoxy serving as the bedrock for the modern Russian state rings slightly hollow in Kazan, where

Muslim Tatars and Orthodox Russians work alongside one another in harmony, entirely aware of their differences. Most in Kazan and Tatarstan are much more interested in advancing local economy growth than Moscow politics. A more nuanced understanding of regional particularities, especially in light of the long history of scuffling between Moscow and Kazan, would serve policymakers well.

Co-Curricular Activity

While in Kazan, I had a number of opportunities to discuss my research, as well as more general topics relating to Russian history and American higher education and culture, in a variety of academic and public settings. I held regular consultations with a number of local historians, in particular my advisors at Kazan Federal University, A. A. Sal'nikova and S. Iu. Malysheva. In November 2013, I presented a paper at the History in Biography and Biography in History Symposium, which was part of the International Forum in Honor of Professor A. S. Shofman, a large international conference held at Kazan Federal University. My paper, "Avtor i antigeroi: Kontrol' na biografiei v epokhu stalinizma" (Author and Antihero: Control over Biography in the Era of Stalinism), drew from past and present research funded by American Councils. During the ensuing discussion, I conversed with Russian historians about American perspectives on the historiography of national politics, Stalinism, and subjectivities. In March 2013, I was invited to participate in a conference on regional studies in Perm, Russia. My presentation, "Osobennosti 'glokal'nosti' v vysshem obrazovanii v SShA: Na primere Universiteta Severnoi Karoliny" ("Glocal" Aspects of Higher Education in the USA: Examples from the University of North Carolina), sparked a discussion not only about American universities' responsibilities to their local communities, but also regional issues in Russian history. I also delivered a talk on the same

theme to students at the Western Ural Institute for Economics and Law in Perm.

On a less formal level, in September 2013, I delivered a talk in English at the Institute for International Relations of Kazan Federal University entitled “American Perspectives on the History of Russia and its Languages,” which was followed by a discussion with students in English, Russian, and Tatar. I was also invited to make two presentations at the Regional Seminar for English-Language Teachers in Naberezhnye Chelny, one based on my research and the second drawing from my experiences working with English-language discussion clubs in Russia. In this capacity I volunteered once a week at the English Club of the Second Turko-Tatar Lyceum in Kazan. While my specific research objectives arose only tangentially during these conversations, they provided me with unique opportunities to interact with young Russians and Tatars and learn about their perspectives on American culture and society, particularly during a period of significant antagonism between the U.S. and Russia.

Additionally, while in Kazan, I completed work on a number of publications related to my research. This spring, a co-authored article entitled “The ABCs of Tatar: Multilingual Accommodation and Soviet Language Politics” was published in the *Russian Journal of Communication*. I published the article “Iazykovaia politika v Tatarskoi ASSR v nachale 1930-kh godov” (Language Politics in the Tatar ASSR during the early 1930s) in the journal *VUZ: XXI vek*. The article “Musa Dzhaliil’ na Tatarskom rabochem fakul’tete” (Musa Dzhaliil and the Tatar Workers Faculty) is also forthcoming in the next edition of *Gasyrlar avazy - Ekho vekov: Nauchno-dokumental’nyi zhurnal*.

Conclusions

The discoveries I made while working in Kazan libraries and archives both challenged

and expanded many of my initial research hypotheses. A lack of archival sources for certain topics closed some avenues of research, even as other material opened new perspectives for thinking about issues central to my project, namely national differences and urban life in the early Soviet era. My interactions with Russians and Tatars in both academic and everyday settings helped to strengthen my comprehension of Russia as a whole, and Tatarstan in particular. As I mentioned above in the discussion of policy implications and recommendations, I am now more convinced than ever that the issues many Tatars confronted in the first decades of the twentieth century, namely how to assimilate into the Russian/Soviet society while maintaining local and ethnolinguistic differences, remain just as relevant in the present day. The tensions of multiethnic and multiconfessional Russia, particularly in a moment when Russian nationalist language forms the bedrock of country's identity, should not be ignored. Cumulatively, the Title VIII Research Scholar Program provided me with unparalleled opportunities to advance my research objectives and increase my understanding of Kazan's scholarly and civic climates.

Plans for Future Research, Presentations, and Publications

I have received another grant to remain in Kazan, Russia, through the fall 2014 semester. I will spend this time completing dissertation research and also writing the first chapters of my dissertation. I also anticipate participating in more conferences while in Russia, at least one in Kazan and possibly another in St. Petersburg. Upon returning to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill for the spring 2015 semester, I will continue writing my dissertation, which I plan to defend early in the 2015-16 academic year. During that time I will also present at the Southern Conference on Slavic Studies and the annual conference of the Association for Slavic, East

European, and Eurasian Studies. I will submit at least one of these papers for publication in an academic journal. After defending my dissertation, I intend to prepare it for publication.

As a final word, I want to thank American Councils and the Department of State Title VIII funding apparatus for their long-term support of my language and research goals. I first traveled to Russia in 2006 to study Russian on an American Councils summer language program, and I subsequently spent the 2011-2012 academic year in Kazan studying Tatar and conducting predissertation research through the American Councils Title VIII Combined Research and Language Program. Now, thanks to the Title VIII Research Scholar Program, I have had the privilege to accumulate a wealth of in-country experience that will serve as an invaluable foundation for my ongoing research and work in both academic and public sectors. I hope that the unique perspective I can provide on Russia, both past and present, will prove a worthwhile return on the significant investment made in my career.

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Journals and Newspapers

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Tamashachy

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