



**2013 -2014 TITLE VIII RESEARCH SCHOLAR PROGRAM
FINAL REPORT**

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Contentious Conceptions of We the People: An Analysis of Nation-building Strategies and Outcomes in Tatarstan

Program Dates: May 22, 2014 – August 13, 2014
Kazan, Russia

Research Abstract:

I undertook research in Kazan to determine how Russian nation-building strategies vary, interact with Republic nation-building, and elicit different responses from titular and Russian populations. Based on three months of fieldwork, Tatarstan appears to be case where multiple identities intersect and coexist without a great deal of regular contention. It prides itself on being the model of a peaceful, multinational Republic. However, even with this normal state of peace, political contention and challenges to nation-building attempts do periodically arise. Since the interactive, iterative process between elite strategies and mass response is shaped by the regional context in which it occurs, this initial research will be part of a comparative study of three Republics within Russia, Tatarstan, Buryatia, and Karelia.

Research Goals:

This summer I went to Kazan with two main goals in mind – to improve my Russian language capabilities and to conduct pre-dissertation research. After studying Russian for two years at Indiana University and its Summer Workshop in Slavic and Eastern European Languages, I reached a proficiency level at which I could live and conduct some research in

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Russia. Despite this proficiency, much more practice and instruction were necessary to be able to work effectively and efficiently in Russia. Therefore, I set the goals of improving my conversational skills, increasing my reading speed, and building my vocabulary.

Secondly, I intend this work to be initial research for my dissertation, which will be completed in 2017. The larger project, described below, entails comparative research of three ethnic Republics with an aim of understanding variation in Russian nation-building across Russia's regions and how it interacts with Republic-level nation-building. I decided to begin this project with Tatarstan, a case of a Republic in which the titular ethnic group is in the majority (53 percent ethnic Tatar) and practices a non-Russian Orthodox religion, Islam. The goals of this initial fieldwork were to identify resources and data sources that I can use in my dissertation, establish contacts, and begin research on nation-building and Tatar-Russian relations in Tatarstan. I planned to analyze debates over national identity issues and identify how Russian and Tatar identities are constructed and interact by reading regional newspapers, conducting archival research on the proceedings and activities of the government and cultural organizations, and observing museums, monuments, religious buildings, cultural events, and holidays. Initially, I intended to analyze nation-building activities and reactions to them over the period of 1990-2014 in order to compare the Yeltsin and Putin eras; however, due to time constraints, I focused my research on the 1990s and current events.

Research Activities:

Under the Title VIII Combined Research and Language Training Program, I spent approximately three months in Kazan, Tatarstan. My research included work in the libraries,

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archives, and museums of Kazan as well as observation of local events, holidays, and celebrations. I began my research at the library of Kazan Federal University. There, I examined secondary sources related to the topic of nation-building and Tatar-Russian relations in order to get a sense of the existing Russian-language work related to my project. Also, I read through a collection of speeches and interviews by Shaimiev, President of Tatarstan from 1991 to 2010, to examine his framing of Tatar-Russian relations and his role in national identity construction in Tatarstan. Additionally, I read regional newspapers, *Sovetskaya Tataria* (1990), *Respublika Tatarstan* (1994) and *Vechernyaya Kazan'* (1990, 1994), at the National Library of the Republic of Tatarstan to understand the discourse surrounding debates on issues and events related to national identity and sovereignty. I also used newspapers to establish the number and nature of past protests, violent events, and national celebrations.

In July, I began to conduct archival research at the National Archive of the Republic of Tatarstan (NART) and the Central Government Archive of Historical-Political Documents (TsGA IPD RT). At NART, I focused on documents pertaining to the Supreme Council of the Republic of Tatarstan and its Presidium (Ф.Р-3610) from 1991 to 1994. I examined transcripts of the Council's sessions, protocols of committee meetings, such as the Commission on the National Question and Culture, and laws passed during this period. At TsGA IPD RT, I examined meeting minutes, photographs, letters, and advertising material from the All-Tatar Public Center during the 1990s (Ф. 8246). Ideally, I would have continued research in both archives farther into the Putin period and expanded my focus to other *fondy*, such as those containing documents related to the political party Ittifak (Ф. 8247); however, time constraints

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did not permit me to do so this summer. This initial archival work in Kazan enabled me to find out what kinds of documents are available and in which *fondy* I should focus my attention during subsequent trips.

In addition to library and archival research, I also examined museums, monuments, and religious buildings in Kazan to determine how memory, the physical landscape, and symbolic (de)construction contribute to nation-building and national identity. The museums I visited in Kazan include the Museum of National Culture of the Republic of Tatarstan, the National Museum of the Republic of Tatarstan, the Museum of the History of Statehood of the Tatar People and the Republic of Tatarstan, the State Museum of Fine Arts of the Republic of Tatarstan, the Boratynskiy Museum, the Gabdulla Tukay Literary Museum, and the Museum-Memorial of the Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945. In each museum, I took note of the language in which informational signs were written, the way in which Tatar and Russian histories and identities were portrayed, which people and events were celebrated or demonized, and how many people were visiting the museum. Kazan is a city filled with monuments. For each one I came across, I photographed it and made note of who or what it memorializes. Finally, I examined where mosques, Orthodox churches, and other religious buildings were located around town. I also went inside the Qul Sharif Mosque and a few churches and went to the site of the still-unfinished Temple of All Religions (see image 2).

Additionally, I attended religious and cultural events, such as Sabantuy – the Tatar holiday of sports and culture, festivities in honor of Pushkin’s birthday, and “literary courtyards”, to explore how Tatar and Russian identity are portrayed, celebrated, and constructed by the

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people. At Sabantuy, I took part in the events (see image 3) and observed how participants promoted and embraced Tatar culture, what kind of people visited the festival grounds, and how speakers, including Tatarstan's President Minnikhanov and Mayor of Istanbul Kadir Topbas, described the holiday. At other events, I observed the composition and response of the audience, the expressed purpose of the event, and the nature of the activities, presentations, and shows.

Finally, apart from Kazan, I conducted research in Yelabuga and Moscow. On a two-day trip to Yelabuga, located a four-hour bus ride from Kazan, I adopted the same research strategy as in Kazan, visiting museums and monuments to see how history and national identities are depicted in a small town outside of the capital. During my six-day trip to Moscow, I similarly visited religious buildings, museums, and monuments, specifically those dedicated to military events or actors, to see how the center memorializes and portrays Russian and Tatar peoples and histories. Additionally, I met with scholars interested in regional analysis to obtain their input on my project and to begin building a network of people working in the same field.

Important Research Findings:

During my time in Tatarstan, I found evidence of both Russian and Tatar nation-building. One medium of Russian nation-building is museums and memorials concerning war and remembrance of those who fought for the Russian nation. By bolstering memory of the Great Victory and connecting it to both the Russian nation and state, the Putin regime is attempting to unify the Russian nation in support of a strong, unified state, heir of this impressive history. Even Yelabuga, a small town of approximately 72,000 people, has a Memory Square dedicated to the remembrance of World War II. Like similar memorials in Kazan and Moscow, it contains

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an eternal flame and the names of those who died in the war inscribed on a long wall (see Image 1). Walking down Yelabuga streets lined with old houses in the wooden-Tatar style, I came across a few with plaques indicating that a WWII veteran once lived or lives there. In Kazan WWII memorials and museums are prevalent as well. For instance, a display, opened in time for Victory Day of this year, depicts the stories, letters, and documents of Tatarstani writers, composers, and artists who participated in WWII. This display is located within the Kazan Kremlin, which also houses a WWII museum-memorial. This museum similarly highlights the Tatarstani participants in the war, their experiences, and wartime correspondence.

While these displays and memorials fit with the larger Russian narrative of strength and greatness, they also specifically emphasize the heroic contributions of the people of Tatarstan within that narrative, connecting them to the whole of the Russian people and history. On the other hand, narratives of another military expedition, the 1552 conquest of Kazan, set Tatarstan apart from and in opposition to Russia. Its portrayal in art and histories together with the 2005 reconstruction of the Qul Sharif Mosque, which was destroyed during that time, emphasizes the victimization of Tatars at the hands of Russians and Tatars' continued perseverance to keep their identity alive. From my preliminary research, war appears to be a source of both Russian and Tatar national identity and pride, depending upon how museums, monuments, leaders, and texts portray it and how the people remember it.

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Image 1. Memory Square (Площадь памяти). Photo taken August 9, 2013 in Yelabuga, Tatarstan, Russia.

In addition to war, religion serves as another source of identity construction and contention. Although the Russian Orthodox faith has served as component of Russian national identity in both the post-Soviet era and before, as illustrated by Uvarov’s slogan of “Orthodoxy, Autocracy, Nationality,” the central government has allowed Tatarstan to promote the peaceful co-existence of both Islam and Orthodox Christianity in the republic. The result of debates in the early 1990s over whether Tatarstan should have a state religion was the legal separation of church and state in Tatarstan’s constitution and the protection of religious freedoms in its laws. State-recognized holidays include those of the Orthodox and Muslim faiths, and public offices and many private business close for both. Local newspapers also report on both holidays and serve as a means of informing the public of the holidays’ meanings. For example, a May 19,

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1994 article in *Vechernyaya Kazan*’ explained the Muslim holiday of Kurban Bayram and called upon people to “Try not to quarrel during the holiday, be attentive to one another, do not talk badly about anyone.” Instead of challenging one another, or seeing the existence of one religion as an attack on the other, practitioners of all religions in Tatarstan generally seem to adopt a live and let live philosophy under the protection of religious freedom laws.

Although parts of Kazan contain either more mosques or more churches, one can stand on some street corners and see both, serving their members only a block or two apart. The sounds of the Muslim call to prayer and ringing Orthodox church bells blend together in this multi-confessional city. On the outskirts of Kazan, local philanthropist Ildar Khanov has been constructing a Temple of All Religions (see Image 2) since 1992. Although the temple is still unfinished, the 16 cupolas representing the 16 world religions are constructed and can be viewed by visitors from the outside. According to the Ministry of Justice, there are 305 Russian Orthodox organizations and 1,193 Muslim organizations, among others, registered in Tatarstan.

The construction and support of religious buildings, including mosques that were destroyed in the Soviet era and earlier, have generated disagreement when Tatarstan’s government plays a role. Occasionally putting this disagreement in print, letter writers to regional newspapers view government support as violating the separation of church and state, or as unfairly favoring Islam over Orthodoxy. Despite these minor disagreements, the religious component of Russian and Tatar identities, although divergent, does not regularly generate

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serious conflict in the Republic, until recent attacks by a radical Islamic group in 2012.

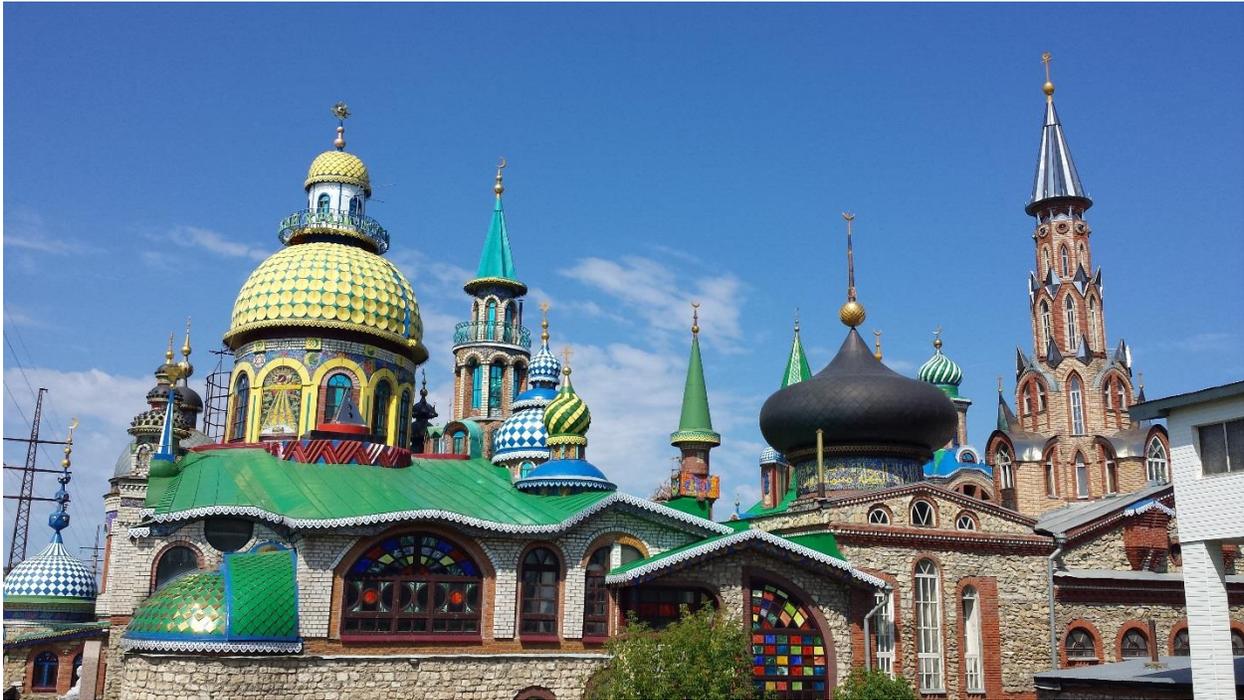


Image 2. Temple of All Religions (Храм всех религий). Photo taken July 13, 2014 in Kazan, Tatarstan, Russia.

Finally, language and culture are sources of debate and ways in which national identities are preserved and celebrated. The debate over whether the national language of Tatarstan should be Tatar, Russian, or both was extremely heated in the early 90s and continues to be a source of debate today. In transcripts of these debates, those in favor of Russian as the official state language pointed out that “some of [their] comrades from the great family of the Tatar people, who themselves do not know the Tatar language, were advocating and demanding that people know two languages.”¹ The transcripts of government sessions themselves indicate that the

¹ Stenographic Report Volume 6; Ninth Session of the Supreme Council of the Republic of Tatarstan, p. 22. (May 22, 1992). NART, Ф. Р-3610, Опись 1, Ед. хр. 2103. Kazan.

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majority of discussion in the sessions of the Supreme Council were conducted in Russian, with only the occasional presenter in Tatar. Even when a member or outside expert did present in Tatar, the response was often in Russian. Although this contradiction existed with representatives demanding two official languages despite their own lack of fluency, Tatar did attain official status alongside Russian.

As a result of having two official languages, street signs, government building signs, and even many privately owned store signs are in both Tatar and Russian. Many, although not all, museums also presented information on their exhibits in Tatar, Russian, and sometimes English as well. Children are guaranteed the right to an education in their native language. Despite this legal equality of languages, the standard language of communication in Kazan and in higher education is Russian. Entering into a store or restaurant, the employee will greet you in Russian. Even walking down the street or sitting in a café, one will most often hear those around them conversing in Russian. In rural Tatarstan, the predominance of Russian is not always the case. For instance, Russian-speakers from Yelabuga wrote a letter to *Vechernyaya Kazan'* complaining that radio programs were almost exclusively in Tatar and basing their demands for more Russian programming on the existence of two state languages.² Although Tatar and Russian languages have legal equality in Tatarstan, in practice there is often competition between the two. In the heated debates over official languages and the language of education, people often connected the Tatar language to the soul and existence of the Tatar nation. Therefore, these

² N. Ponomareva, V. Limonova, K. Kurashova. "Kazhetsya, u nas dva gosudarstvennykh yazyka." *Vechernyaya Kazan'* Feb. 3, 1994, p. 1.

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language conflicts often devolve into conflicts over preserving Tatar national identity versus practical considerations of fitting into the Russian education system and workforce.

In addition to language, people seek to preserve Tatar and Russian cultures more broadly through frequent events and cultural organizations. Large celebrations mark the anniversaries of the births and deaths of great Russian and Tatar literary figures, such as Pushkin and Tukay respectively, and every year there is a Day of Slavic Writing and Culture. In the construction of both Tatar and Russian identity, a large emphasis is placed on the literary, artistic, and musical members of their communities. In Tatarstan, both Russian and Tatar figures are celebrated and learned in school side by side, without any inherent conflict. President Shaimiev, especially in the early 1990s, emphasized the multinational nature of Tatarstan, describing its “rich multinational cultural heritage and traditions of true friendship between peoples.”³ He believed that multiple cultural traditions could peacefully co-exist in Tatarstan as they have done historically. At the Tatar holiday Sabantuy, Tatar cultural traditions are at the forefront, but all are welcome to participate. President Minnikhanov, drawing a comparison to Ukraine’s maidan, stated that “Today we are located on one maidan. This is as it should be: it’s sport, it’s culture, it’s friendship, it’s our hospitality.” It provides the Tatar people with the opportunity to celebrate and engage with their traditions and heritage, while also demonstrating them to those outside of the community. Although there was heavy police presence at the festival, it proceeded

³ Mintimer Shaimiev. “Vosstanovit' istoricheskuyu spravedlivost' (Vystupleniye Predsedatelya Verkhovnogo Soveta Tatarskoy SSR na sessii Verkhovnogo Soveta SSR 21 maya 1991 goda)” *Tatarstan – progress cherez stabil'nost': Izbrannyye stat'i, vystupleniya, interv'yu, materialy press-konferentsiy, privetstviya (1990-1992 gody) 1 Kniga.* (Kazan: Ideal-Press, 2001), 136.

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peacefully. Like religion, other aspects of Tatar and Russian culture co-exist without great contention. Based on this initial research, language appears to generate the most conflict.



Image 3. Tatar national holiday – Sabantuy (Сабантуй). The author is pictured on the left participating in one of the many traditional games played during Sabantuy. Photo taken June 21, 2014 in Kazan, Tatarstan, Russia.

Policy Implications and Recommendations:

It is difficult to draw firm conclusions from the single case of Tatarstan; however, it does serve as an example of a case with limited interethnic violence and secessionist impulses. There is an intense debate in the academic literature and in policy communities regarding whether regional autonomy increases or decreases the likelihood of violence and secession. The Yeltsin regime granted Tatarstan substantial autonomy with a 1994 bilateral treaty and calmed demands for secession. During this time, Shaimiev and his government worked to obtain the support of

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ethnic Russians as well as Tatars for this treaty. By highlighting the economic rationale for enhanced regional sovereignty and emphasizing the long history of mostly peaceful multinational cohabitation, the Shaimiev government attempted to create a Tatarstani identity that would encompass everyone living in the Republic.

This combination of the absence of forced assimilation from the center and an emphasis on a multinational regional identity that still protected Tatar culture calmed ethnic tensions and allowed Russian and Tatar identities to coexist. Inter-Republic comparison and further exploration of changes during the Putin era, including increased central pressure, decreased autonomy, and reignited instances of protest and violence will allow me to better understand what policies and framing processes generate political contention.

Co-Curricular Activity:

During my time in Kazan, Rustem Tsiunchuk, Professor in the Department of World Politics and International Economic Relations at Kazan Federal University, served as my academic advisor. He proved invaluable in helping me to navigate the archives and libraries of Kazan. Furthermore, Prof. Tsiunchuk introduced me to Rosalinda Musina, Director of the Center of Ethnosociological Research at the Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences, Republic of Tatarstan. At my meeting with her, she informed me of the Institute's activities and pointed me towards the Institute's publications and other scholarly work on societal attitudes toward Tatar and Russian nations and relations between them. These sources inform me of the methodology and theoretical understandings of Russian scholars concerning questions of

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national identity and nation-building in Tatarstan, and provide me with a base upon which to conduct my own research.

While on a six-day trip to Moscow, I met with various scholars, both senior scholars and experienced graduates students, who conduct work on Russia's regions. I obtained input on my research project, perceptions of Tatar-Russian relations, and advice on conducting research in the regions from Irina Busygina, Nikolay Petrov, Rostislav Turovsky, Irina Soboleva, Anton Sobolev, and Grigori Knyazev. This experience enabled me to begin building a network of scholars interested in regional analysis to which I can turn for assistance, advice, and collaborative work in the future.

Conclusions:

Tatarstan is an interesting case where multiple identities intersect and coexist without a great deal of contention. When conflict does arise, it is usually over issues of favoritism toward one religion or language at the expense of another, such as the funding of mosque construction and Tatar language requirements for jobs. The Republic government attempts to preserve Tatar language and culture through law and administration, while trying not to anger ethnic Russians at the same time. In addition to Republic efforts at Tatar and Tatarstani nation-building, Russian nation-building is also evident through the dominance of the Russian language in everyday life and through the connection of Tatar soldiers, leaders, and artistic figures to the greater narrative of Russia.



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Plans for Future Research Agenda/ Presentations and Publications:

Using the data and experiences I accumulated this summer, I will present a paper at the 2014 Annual Convention of the Association for Slavic, Eastern European, and Eurasian Studies in San Antonio, TX. The roundtable of which I am a part is titled “Measuring Elusive Concepts: New Work on Corruption, Clientelism, Nationalism and Protest in Russia’s Regions” and will be chaired by Prof. Turovsky, who I met in Moscow. The focus of my presentation will be on contemporary nation-building in Kazan that I witnessed this summer through festivals, holidays, museums, media, and the relationship between Kazan’s position as the 2014 Cultural Capital of the Turkic World and the Russia-wide 2014 Year of Culture. After this conference, I plan to submit the paper for publication to a journal such as *Nationalities Papers* or *Europe-Asia Studies*.

I plan to return to Russia in September, 2015 for a period of approximately 9 months to build on the research I began this summer. I will conduct comparative research in the ethnic Republics of Tatarstan, Buryatia, and Karelia to address the questions of how do Russian nation-building strategies vary across space and time? how does federal nation-building interact with Republic nation-building?, and how do different ethnic groups respond to various nation-building attempts? Answering these questions will elucidate who gets to participate in constructing the “We” in “We the people” and how those left out of the process respond. After this fieldwork is complete, I will use the data to write my dissertation, and subsequently a book, on the interaction of nation-building, federalism, and political contention. Finally, I will



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incorporate this research into the classroom when I design and teach courses on nationalism and Russian politics.

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Newspapers

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Respublika Tatarstan
Vechernyaya Kazan'