This is a very theoretically sophisticated, densely detailed and documented account of one of the most important and least studied places in the former Soviet Union. Virtually no other work on the market has anywhere near the amount of detailed information about what life is like on the ground in Tatarstan, what the "nation-building" project among Tatars there actually looks like and what implications that project has for future developments in Russian politics. The author’s fieldwork-grounded observations about language communities and the way identity influences everyday life in Tatarstan are invaluable.”

– Katherine Ellen Graney, Skidmore College, Saratoga Springs, NY

Nation, Language, Islam is an engaging and moving study of how people living in a particular post-Soviet space imagine their cultural possibilities and their connections to political and social groups. In her careful exploration of two language communities—people bilingual in Tatar and Russian and Russian-only speakers—Helen Faller uncovers distinctive “referential worlds.” Based on vivid analysis of Tatar cultural practices, including song, festivals, educational policy, and revived Islam, Dr. Faller reveals the multiple roots of Tatarstan’s palpable civic peace and its multi-cultural politics. This sensitive study shows that nation-building is not necessarily state-building and offers a critical corrective to generalizations about Muslim politics. This lively book captures the ambiguities of the situation in which Tatarstan’s citizens exist—the limitations and possibilities of their Soviet and post-Soviet experience—as well as the resilience and grace of present-day Tatar culture. A scholarly, enjoyable, and fundamentally human book.”

– Jane Burbank, New York University
Nation, Language, Islam
Nation, Language, Islam

Tatarstan’s Sovereignty Movement

Helen M. Faller

Central European University Press
Budapest–New York
# Table of Contents

Acknowledgments ix  
List of Maps and Figures xiii  
Introduction 1  

**CHAPTER 1** How Tatar Nation-builders Came to Be 29  

**CHAPTER 2** What Tatarstan Letters to the Editor (1990–1993) Reveal about the Unmaking of Soviet People 75  

**CHAPTER 3** Creating Soviet People: The Meanings of Alphabets 109  

**CHAPTER 4** Cultural Difference and Political Ideologies 143  

**CHAPTER 5** Repossessing Kazan 177  

**CHAPTER 6** Kazan in Black and White 217  

**CHAPTER 7** Mong and the National Reproduction of Collective Sorrow 257  

**CHAPTER 8** Words Apart 283  

Bibliography 309  
Index 329
Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly found, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living. And just when they seem engaged in revolutionising themselves and things, in creating something entirely new, precisely in such epochs of revolutionary crisis they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service and borrow from them names, battle slogans and costumes in order to present the new scene of world history in this time-honoured disguise and this borrowed language (Marx 1978: 595).

Unofficial Tatar National Anthem, based on the poem by Gabdullah Tukay (translated by the author)

Native Tongue
Oh native tongue, oh beautiful language, the language of my beloved father and mother!
I have learned many things in the world through you, native tongue.
At the very beginning with this language my beloved mother sang to me in the cradle,
Later on, through the nights my beloved grandmother recounted stories.
Oh native tongue! With your help from early childhood my joys and sorrows have always been understood.
Oh native tongue! In you my earliest prayers were made.
I said: Have mercy, my Lord, on me, and my beloved father and mother!

Tugan Tel
I tugan tel, i matur tel, ätkäm-änkämneng tele!
Dön’ïada küp närsä beldem sin tugan tel arkyly.
Ing elek bu tel belän änkäm bishektä köilägän,
Annary tönnär bue äbkäm xikäiat söilägän.
I tugan tel! Härvakyttä iardämeng belän sineng,
Kechkenädän anglashylgan shatlygym, kaigym minem.
I tugan tel! Sindä bulgan ing elek kyilgan dogam:
Iarlykagyl, dip, üzem häm ätkäm-änkämne, Xodam!
Map 1. Tatarstan’s Location within the Russian Federation

Map 2. Autonomous Areas of the Russian Federation

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Downloaded from http://d1o112.dk.telia.net/~u142900308/frame_Tatarstan.htm

Downloaded from www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/commonwealth/russia_auton96.jpg
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List of Maps and Figures

Map 1. Tatarstan’s Location within the Russian Federation viii
Map 2. Autonomous Areas of the Russian Federation viii
Figure 1.1. Üzebez’s “I Speak Tatar!” Badge v9
Figure 3.1. National Writing Systems 113
Figure 3.2. Azeri Latin Alphabet, 1923 119
Figure 3.3. Tatar Latin Alphabet, 1926 (Kurbatov 1999) 119
Figure 3.4. United Turkic Alphabet (Yangalif), 1927 (Kurbatov 1999) 120
Figure 3.5. Tatar Alphabet based upon Yangalif, 1927 (Kurbatov 1999) 122
Figure 3.6. Tatar Cyrillic Alphabet, 1939 125
Figure 3.7. Orthographic Particularisms 126
Figure 3.8. The Turkish Alphabet since 1926 127
Figure 3.9. Tatar’s Latin Alphabet, Perfected Yangalif, 1999 129
Figure 3.10. Moscow Street Sign in Latin Script, 2006 133
Figure 4.1. Tatarstan’s State Seal, the ak bars 165
Figure 5.1. Kazan Kremlin from Below 179
Figure 5.2. The Pyramid 181
Figure 5.3. Dom Kekina, with “For Rent” Banner 182
Figure 5.4. Wreckage in the Old Tatar Quarter 183
Figure 5.5. Kol Shärif Mosque, with Söyembike Tower in background 188
Figure 5.6. Söyembike Tower, inside the Kazan Kremlin 192
Figure 5.7. Typical apartment building stairwell 196
Figure 5.8. Old Tatar women favor white headscarves 199
Figure 5.9. Car with Tisbı 201
Figure 6.1. Nazi Posters on Kazan Street, 2006 219
Figure 6.2. “Tatars” in Eisenstein’s film, Ivan the Terrible 230
Figure 6.3. Code Choice Tree—Tatarstan, 2000 236
Figure 6.4. Iman nury, photo courtesy of Liliya Karimova 244
Figure 6.5. Kazan’s House of Tea (no flash) 248
Figure 6.6. Inside St. Basil’s Cathedral, Moscow (with flash) 248
Figure 6.7. A Tatar Apartment in the Old Tatar Quarter, Kazan 249
Figure 7.1. Woman’s jewelry 12th-century, Bolgar. Found near Mokryie Kumali Village 257
Figure 7.2. Lyrics to Täftiläü 263
Figure 7.3. Lyrics to Kara Urman 268
Figure 7.4. Lyrics to The Wild Goose 269
Figure 8.1. Söyembike Surrounded by her Warriors 284
Figure 8.2. The Marchers Prepare 284
Figure 8.3. Lyrics to First Verse of Bez (We) 303
Introduction

“In Germany I have a son. He has been living there with his children for two years,” the old woman explained to me in Russian, smiling broadly. She turned her head back towards the postal clerk sitting behind her window. The clerk, a Tatar woman in her twenties, took the pens and pencils out of the old woman’s package and passed them back to her through the narrow opening. “Only printed matter,” the clerk pronounced grimly from her seated position. The old woman bent over, putting her face close to the opening, and tried to catch the clerk’s eye. She beseeched her, “Just one? It’s good. It’s ours. It’s Soviet.” The postal clerk kept her eyes averted and shook her head.

Field notes, Kazan’s Central Post Office, 14 August 2000

This exchange demonstrates one of the central paradoxes of living in post-Soviet Russia, which is that while Soviet bureaucratic institutions are still in place, Soviet ideology has lost its persuasive appeal. The highly regulated bureaucracies the Soviet government created—the postal system, mass transit, banking, long distance trains, the passport regime—still operate according to strict Soviet-period rules. However, Soviet things possess little perceived merit and are especially unimportant to people of the postal clerk’s generation, who came of age during perestroika. Calling something “good” because it is “ours” and “Soviet” can no longer change circumstances or be employed to bend rigid rules towards felicitous outcomes.¹

This book is about the unmaking of Soviet people. It takes as its example a movement for political sovereignty (1990–2000) in the Russian autonomous republic of Tatarstan and examines its continuing social effects. Accepting the local interpretation that the post-Soviet revival of Tatar—a Turkic language—and Tatar culture in Tatarstan constitute part of a decolonization process, it illustrates how Tatar-speakers’ reality has changed since Mikhail Gorbachev, the last General Secretary of Communist Party of the Soviet Union, initiated his liberalizing reforms—perestroika or restructuring (1986–2001) and glasnost or openness (1985–1990).² It accepts as a truism that when colonized peoples engage in processes of decolonization, they draw their initial demands—which largely
concern reified aspects of their culture, such as national language, institutionalized religion, and genres of art—from within colonial frames of reference. Decolonization changes their subjective identities in ways they do not expect, with consequences they do not intend, illustrating Marx’s precept that men (and women) cannot make history just as they please, haunted as they are by the spirits of the past, and reinforcing Bakhtin’s theory of heteroglossia, according to which every word is populated by someone else’s intentions.

Literature on the failed “transition” of socialist states demonstrates that, while the inhabitants of formerly socialist states can unmake previous social and political orders, they have been unable to transform their societies into the free market, capitalist states imagined by western advocates of neoliberalism. Thus, although the Tatarstan sovereignty movement neutralized much of the Russian cultural hegemony once prevalent in the Republic of Tatarstan, it was nonetheless constrained by social and political structures that prevented it from realizing its nation-building ambitions. Since 1986, Tatarstan’s Tatar-speakers have undergone a revolutionary transformation that has caused them to view the world in ways profoundly different from Russian-speakers. Communication within Tatar social networks means that this transformation has affected even Tatars who don’t have functional ability in the Tatar language, as well as Tatars who live outside Tatarstan. While nation-building failed to produce a sovereign state, it has had the unintended consequence of estranging Tatar-speaking Tatars from their Russian-speaking neighbors, colleagues, friends, and relatives.

Drawing upon terminology anthropologist Richard Handler used to analyze nationalism in Quebec, I describe the loosely defined group of sovereignty activists seeking to create change in Tatarstan and more broadly in the Russian Federation as “nation-builders.” Perestroika provided Tatar-speakers an opportunity to openly oppose what they perceived as institutionalized discrimination against their national language and culture and to advocate for its end. The Soviet Union’s subsequent collapse gave them a chance to create a society for their children more equitable than the one in which they grew up.

Tatarstan’s nation-builders are educators, politicians, students, journalists, artists, and intellectuals. They constitute the Tatar élite of Kazan. Many are former communists, but like other ex-Soviets, decolonization has fundamentally transformed them in ways they didn’t expect. Until Vladimir Putin became president of the Russian Federation in 1999, the politicians among them had fairly successfully brokered power sharing
with the central authorities in Moscow. In August 1990, the year before the Soviet Union collapsed, Boris Yeltsin visited Tatarstan and urged Russia’s polities to “take all the sovereignty they could swallow.” The same month, Tatarstan declared sovereignty and announced that the republic had two official government languages, Tatar and Russian. In 1992, Tatarstan adopted its own Constitution and in 1994 concluded a bilateral treaty upholding sovereignty with Moscow.

Based on the fundamental premise in linguistic anthropology that language not only describes and mediates but also creates reality, this book examines Tatar nation-builders, who are all Tatar-Russian bilinguals. It is not concerned with the experience of monolingual Russian-speakers in Tatarstan, but rather what is taking place there unheard and unperceived by Russians—that is, by people unfamiliar with Tatar discursive worlds—and the significance of that for Russia as a whole.

A Few Words about Publics

Scholars commonly define publics as groups of people who imagine themselves to constitute a unified, undifferentiated, homogenous whole. This belief emerges primarily from the theoretical work of anthropologist Benedict Anderson and sociologist Jürgen Habermas. Anderson proposes that print media catalyze the development of national identity. Individuals living in different regions of a state read newspapers published in standardized national languages. As a result, it is assumed, they all imagine themselves belonging to the same undifferentiated nation. While Anderson’s theory purports to describe the development of nationalism in nineteenth-century Europe, it has been freely applied to radically dissimilar contexts.

Habermas describes the emergence of a “public sphere” created by and accessible to the 18th-century European, primarily male, bourgeoisie, originating in and centered on coffeehouses, literary salons, and print media. Discourse in the public sphere promoted Enlightenment ideals of equality, human rights and justice, but was subsequently enfeebled by the growth of state capitalism and commercial mass media. Both theorists’ approaches are culturally and historically particular. Their application to other times and places presumes that the experiences of literate, property-tied, bourgeois European men are universal.

Moreover, Anderson’s and Habermas’s ideas about the development of national cultures rely on a simplified understanding of people’s relation to
standardized languages. Both, for instance, assume that consumers of print media identify with a single standardized national language employed within a unified public sphere. The work of linguistic anthropologists on indexicality shows, however, that dissimilarly positioned speakers of a language will vary in their affective relations to it.

Indexicality refers to the ways that speakers divide physical categories such as space and time, as well as social ones such as degrees of intimacy and rank through lexical terms such as here, there, you, we, now and then. These are differently structured in different languages, and thus cause speakers of different languages to parse the world in quite different ways. In the earliest recorded and perhaps best-known example of this phenomenon, anthropologist Franz Boas discovered that speakers of different languages perceived colors differently depending upon the color terms available in the languages they spoke. Whorfian effects, as linguistic anthropologist Michael Silverstein names the phenomenon in homage to the famous linguist, occur at the cognitive level, conjuring into existence a habitual thought world. Silverstein defines this as “a complex, emergent, partly analogically driven conceptual orientation that is absolutely ‘real’ to the people in whom it emerges….We reveal and affirm this thought-world to ourselves each time we use fashions of speaking about matter in ‘space’ and ‘time,’ that is, every time we formulate a sentence.” In a multilingual society, it follows, the existence of different habitual thought worlds will make for the existence of multiple publics, loosely bound by the circulation of particular forms of discourse. But even when speakers of a particular language inhabit overlapping thought worlds, and so may seem to make a single public, individual variation in speech practices and life experiences will mean that no two thought worlds are completely identical. In bilingual situations, like the one in Tatarstan, speakers of the subordinate language are furthermore linked by their uneven knowledge of the hegemonic language. Not quite part of the same public that represents monolingual Russians, because their knowledge of Russian varies, neither do they comprise a unitary group. This places them in different relations not only to Russian-speaking Russians but also to other, variably competent, russophone Tatars.

Assuming the existence of habitual thought worlds, I explore another means by which language influences how people see the world. Instead of examining the ways grammatical categories structure quotidian life, I focus on discursive worlds and the multiple, variegated publics they more or less encompass. My research reveals that increasing the number and breadth of the domains for doing things in a subordinate language can
make for a divergence in the discursive worlds inhabited by speakers of that language from those of people who only speak the hegemonic language. As the arena of available activities in the Tatar language expanded, greater communication occurred across previously existing boundaries, and this changed Tatar-speakers’ worldviews, particularly their conceptions of national difference.

Building upon other criticisms of Anderson’s work, I hold that the ways in which Tatars imagine their nation territorially, religiously, and linguistically fluctuates as much as other aspects of their identities. In particular, I take issue with Anderson’s assertion that nations are imagined “as both inherently limited and sovereign” defined by “finite, if elastic, boundaries.” For all their concern with sovereignty, Tatar nation-builders do not consider their nation to be limited by finite boundaries. My research suggests that Anderson’s model of the nation is incorrect, not only for “the Tatar nation,” which does not fit Europe’s historical trajectory of development, but for all nations. And here is why. First, the boundaries delimiting any group of people are always both permeable and subject to significant change over time. Second, the processes whereby the social groups we call nations come into being and perpetuate their existence are fraught with tension, uneven, and always incomplete. For these reasons, defining a nation or public in any kind of sustained way is not possible. Third, groups imagined as homogenous contain internal differentiation with respect to social position, gender, class, region of origin, age, ethnicity, education, political views, profession, sexual orientation, race, and so on. Members of that group consequently read, or otherwise interpret information available to them, variously. That is, publics are always multiple and fragmented, even when they represent speakers of the same language. Fourth, half the people in the world are bilingual, which means that they may not feel affiliated with just one language. Fifth, Anderson’s approach promotes an unsophisticated view of people who, though they consider themselves as belonging to the same nation, often recognize and even promote internal diversity.

**Historical Background**

Tatarstan’s capital, Kazan, is located on the confluence of the Volga and Kama Rivers. Situated like Rome atop seven hills lush with greenery, Kazan is a little over 600 miles southeast of Moscow, in the European part of Russia to the west of the Ural Mountains. It has been inhabited for
more than 1,000 years, according to recently unearthed archaeological evidence. This discovery makes Kazan significantly older than Russia’s two leading cities—Moscow by 200 years and St. Petersburg by over 700 years—which Tatars view as a point in favor of their civilized status.24

Before Russia colonized the region, Kazan was the center of the Kazan Khanate (1438–1552), a daughter state of the Golden Horde twice the size of present-day Tatarstan.25 Kazan Tatars claim descent from the city-state of Bolgar, now an archaeological site 100 miles south of Kazan. Bolgar was occupied by Turkic-speaking Muslims from at least the 10th through the 13th centuries, when, in 1230, Chingis Khan’s Great Horde invaded from the east.26 Claiming descent from Bolgars is significant because it defines Tatars as both European and as indigenous to the region they currently inhabit, and not invading newcomers descended from troops in Chingis Khan’s army and Asian, as Russians often allege. In 922, influenced by the missionary work of Ahmad ibn Fadlan, Bolgars converted to Islam—Tatars imply that it was a mass conversion—and began writing in Arabic script.27 When speaking of medieval Tatar history, Tatar Muslims do not hesitate to point out that they became monotheists 66 years before Prince Vladimir of Kiev adopted Orthodox Christianity. Even though up to 10% of Muslim Tatars had converted to Orthodoxy by the time of the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, the majority of present-day Tatars nevertheless iconically equate Islam with Tatarness.28

After Chingis Khan died, his sons cooperatively established a state, known as the Golden Horde, that ruled Eurasia for approximately 250 years. The Golden Horde’s official religion became Islam, though the state tolerated other faiths.29 Moscow developed dynamically under Golden Horde rule, accumulating political power and wealth, a result of its success in exacting taxes for the government from other Russian city-states.30 When the Golden Horde collapsed, several daughter states, including the Kazan Khanate, continued to receive taxes sporadically from Russian principalities, though wars were chronic among the Golden Horde daughter states. This changed in 1552, when Ivan the Terrible, Prince of Muscovy, detonated a bomb in Kazan, according to an eyewitness, and captured the city.31

Ivan IV razed Kazan and put to death every Kazanian he could find.32 He instituted a policy of forced conversion to Orthodox Christianity and decreed that the remaining Muslims be removed from Kazan or drowned.33 His conquest was part of an effort to expand the Principality of Muscovy, for once Ivan had conquered Kazan, and subsequently Astrakhan, in 1556, he declared himself Tsar of All Russia.34 Although, at a
later date, the Russian state claimed religious reasons for conquering Kazan, at the time of conquest the Middle Volga region’s primary attractions were economic.\textsuperscript{35} Perceived ethnic differences based upon linguistic knowledge were not incorporated into the historiography of Kazan’s demise until the 19th century.\textsuperscript{36}

**National Categories in Socialist States**

The Soviet Union was a vast territory that spanned 11 time zones. The work the Bolsheviks needed to accomplish in order to make administrative decisions about how to divide and govern that territory after the October 1917 revolution was likewise vast. At the outset, Soviet administrative policies were deeply influenced by two basic precepts of Marxian thought. The first precept was that human social organization develops along a single universal path of social evolution, while the second proposed that nations are the fundamental unit of human social organization, with some classified as “great historic nations” and others as unviable, small, and lacking their own history.\textsuperscript{37}

Beginning in 1924, the Soviet authorities employed linguists, ethnographers, and statisticians in the state-building process of categorizing people living in the Soviet Union by nationality. This required intellectuals to reconceive imperial bureaucratic categories, which had been imposed on the basis of religion and native language, and to decide which groups actually constituted a nationality and which should be absorbed into a neighboring group. Creating the Soviet nations and nationalities that would comprise the USSR required the tidy categorization of an untidy reality: Soviet ethnographers had to schematize the patterned but nonetheless changing practices that comprised people’s everyday lives. One thing remained constant, however: as peoples came to be identified with nations, and as nations required national languages as essential components of their national culture, languages came to stand for nations.\textsuperscript{38}

The practices that came to identify differences among official national cultures included life rituals, such as those performed at funerals, births, and particularly marriages; aspects of material culture, such as clothing, types of abode, and various kinds of utensils and tools; and forms of art, such as literary genres, music, and theatre. The codification of national languages was essential to this process of differentiation. For Turkic peoples, slight differences in speech patterns, dress, musical genres, and other potential expressions of social status and personhood came to indicate the
existence of different nations, much as clinal variation in human morphology has historically been perceived racially.\textsuperscript{39}

While at first the trend was to create a proliferation of nationalities, by the late 1930s this had turned into an officially sanctioned effort to absorb smaller groups into larger national-territorial units.\textsuperscript{40} The result was somewhat paradoxical. Soviet nations were conceived according to a western European model which granted them language, territory, and history, but denied them statehood.\textsuperscript{41} As historian Francine Hirsch points out, fitting Soviet people into a comprehensive conceptual framework with national, territorial, and standardized linguistic boundaries gave rise to nationalism where it previously did not exist.\textsuperscript{42} Nineteenth-century European nations were built on speakers of what seemed (though weren’t actually) common languages living within the same territorial state borders.\textsuperscript{43} By contrast, 20th-century Soviet nations emerged from processes that divided people living within one state in ways that helped to maintain Russian hegemony. Moreover, national membership was complicated by state policies that, in the words of sociologist Rogers Brubaker, “established nationhood and nationality as fundamental social categories sharply distinct from the overarching categories of statehood and citizenship.”\textsuperscript{44}

The Soviet Union was eventually determined to consist of 15 union republics, with each union republic containing numerous autonomous republics and regions. The borders the state drew caused many Soviets to live outside their titular national territories.\textsuperscript{45} The Russian Republic was granted 89 autonomous polities, among which Tatarstan remains one. Autonomous republics were a level lower in the Soviet administrative hierarchy than union republics, which was the status of Russia itself and the other 14 republics that became “independent states” after the USSR’s collapse.

During the process of nation formation in the 1920s, some Kazan activists sought to have Tatarstan declared a union, rather than an autonomous, republic. Contemporary Tatar politicians claim that, in making Tatarstan an autonomy, Soviet authorities split the Tatar population between Tatarstan and Bashkortostan—the autonomous republic on Tatarstan’s eastern border—to prevent Tatarstan from becoming too powerful a polity.\textsuperscript{46} Before the Soviet Union dissolved at the end of 1991, Tatar nation-builders tried once more to elevate Tatarstan’s status to that of a union republic, again without success.\textsuperscript{47} They also suggested uniting the two republics territorially to strengthen their joint ability to make political claims against the government in Moscow and appeals to the outside world, but Bashkortostan declined.
Early Soviet nationalities policies were remarkable for simultaneously promoting diversity and demanding conformity. The USSR created “national cadres”—non-Russian intellectuals and bureaucrats to occupy posts in the newly created state structure—in a process called korenizatsiya [rooting]. Then, it arrested or shot members of these national cadres who did not follow the state’s dictates closely enough. It promoted the fluorescence of non-Russian language varieties and then took measures to cut the number of schools teaching them.

Each Soviet citizen carried an internal passport listing his or her nationality, which was supposed to be based on “mother tongue,” imbuing nationality with bureaucratic, and hence political, form in daily life. As Brubaker notes, in every bureaucratic encounter, whether it was borrowing a library book or purchasing a bus ticket or applying for a job, Soviet citizens had to present their internal passports and have the information in them, including their nationality, noted down. Soviets thus received constant reinforcement of themselves as members of a particular nationality.

All the same, beginning in the 1960s, the Soviet state took steps to discourage national particularism, marked by ethnographers’ sudden employment of the term “ethnos” to refer to groups of Soviet people.

Under Soviet rule, Russia’s 89 internal polities were required to hand over much of their foodstuffs and other resources to the central government in Moscow, while few expenditures were made to maintain the infrastructure of the regions, as they came to be called. When perestroika began, several regional polities tried to negotiate the retention of some locally generated revenues from industries (oil and car manufacture in Tatarstan) and taxes in order to reinvest them locally. Because the most assertive of these polities were the official territories of titular nationalities, efforts by the regions to negotiate economic self-rule became ethnically colored.

Soviet economic domination was matched by a program of cultural control. Resources for Tatar national schools declined sharply during the Soviet period. There were 31 such schools in Kazan in 1917, but, by 1945, only two remained. By 1990, there were none to which parents who cared about their children’s future would choose to send them. Tatar-language education was confined to villages and there was a stigma against speaking the language outside Tatar villages, the bazaar, or the domestic sphere (as variously defined).

At the same time, as “Soviet” lost much of its staying power as a supra-ethnic identity marker, identification according to the already-existing category of nationality became more salient. Though ex-Soviets began to
express opinions that would have been previously inexpressible, they nevertheless tended to view relations between social groups using Soviet categories of analysis—as most fundamentally between nations or peoples. Post-Soviet nationalisms do not reveal the existence of age-old ethnic rivalries, but rather emerge from structures of feeling constructed by Soviet nationality policies. The social evolutionary theories of Marx and Engels continue to permeate post-Soviet thinking about the relationships between levels of civilization, language, and nation.

In post-Soviet Russia, people who call themselves Russian, especially those living in urban centers, may treat adherence to a national identity as if it were evidence of backwardness. By contrast, in the provincial capital where I carried out my research, nationality remains an extremely important, perhaps even the most important, identifier of who a person is. Indeed, Kazanians who have suffered discrimination as a result of their minority nationality status—especially Tatars and Volga Germans—possess a heightened awareness of nationality as an essential identity category.

Tatarstan Sovereignty

In 1989, according to the Soviet census, Tatarstan’s population was 3.6 million (one million in Kazan). Of this number 48.5% were Tatars, while Russians comprised the republic’s second largest nationality at 43.3%, followed by single-digit percentages of Chuvash, Ukrainians, Mordvins, Udmurts, Mari, and Bashkirs. Tatars became a majority in the republic, accounting for 52% of the population in 2001, when the percentage of Russians was estimated at 42%. The 2002 All-Russian Census attests that Tatarstan’s population grew to nearly 3.8 million, with Tatars making up 53% of the population, while Russians dropped to 39%. These statistics are significant because they show that, along with Russian out-migration, Tatarstan policies facilitating the repatriation of people originally from Tatarstan seem to have made an impact.

Following its declaration of sovereignty in 1990, in 1991, Tatarstan’s leadership refused to accept the legitimacy of the Russian Federation’s presidential elections. Only 36.6% of Tatarstan’s eligible voters participated in the election that made Boris Yeltsin Russia’s president, while over two-thirds turned out to elect Mintimir Shaimiev president of Tatarstan. In 1992, under pressure from the Moscow government, which was sure that sovereignty wouldn’t enjoy support among Tatarstan’s majority
Russian population, Tatarstan held a popular referendum on sovereignty. The Tatarstan electorate was asked to respond “yes” or “no” to the following question:

*Do you agree that the Republic of Tatarstan is a sovereign state, the subject of international law, forming its relations with the Russian Federation and other republics and states on the basis of legal agreements?*

To many people’s surprise, 61.2% of voters supported the measure, even though Moscow carried out fear-inducing media blitz propaganda campaign declaring that a “yes” vote would result in civil war and, on polling day, the Russian army carried out demonstrative tank maneuvers along Tatarstan’s borders, while the Russian air force dropped leaflets from overhead.

In addition to ratifying its Constitution in 1992 and concluding a bilateral treaty with Moscow in 1994—which some nation-builders considered an unnecessary concession—, Tatarstan forged economic agreements with foreign states. During sovereignty, the strength of Tatarstan’s government and its concrete, if sometimes corrupt, efforts to improve life for people in the republic caused everyone who lived there to experience life differently from people elsewhere in Russia. This difference was visible as soon as one crossed into Tatarstan, for example, by the fact that public spaces like bus terminals and fences were suddenly covered in fresh paint, in contrast to the typically unrelenting drabness of rural Russia.

In 1994 the Russian government discovered that Tatarstan was only transmitting 6–7% of locally collected taxes to the center, instead of the 30% earmarked for the federal budget. In 2000—his first year as Russia’s President—Vladimir Putin came to Kazan during the annual Sabantuy celebrations in June and held a 24-hour-long closed-door meeting with Tatarstan President Mintimir Shaimiev and Bashkortostan President Murtaza Rahimov. According to a source close to Shaimiev, Putin threatened to “discover wahabbists” on the two presidents’ territory, which he would use as justification for “making a Chechnya” out of Tatarstan and Bashkortostan, unless both republics relinquished their adherence to the power-sharing agreements they had concluded with Moscow in 1994. Whatever actually happened behind those closed doors, Tatarstan immediately agreed to cede at least 50% of the revenues generated on its territory to Moscow, which, as in Soviet times, were not redistributed back to the republic.61

During his tenure as president, Putin implemented a number of centralizing measures that applied equally to all Russia’s 89 regions. These in-
cluded “harmonizing” regional constitutions and laws to comply with the Russian Federation’s, even when their adoption predated Russia’s, as was the case with the Tatarstan Constitution; placing local publications, distilleries, and regional secret police, who have heightened their surveillance, under Moscow’s direct control; and making regional presidents, such as Mintimir Shaimiev, who had previously been popularly elected, his appointees. Beyond this, Putin directed special measures at Tatarstan, namely his demand that Tatarstan’s 1994 bilateral treaty with Moscow be annulled. As a result, Tatarstan had to renegotiate its status vis-à-vis Russia’s central government in a new treaty finally signed in July 2007 after years of heated debate.

The new agreement refers to the 1992 referendum as a basis for the original 1994 treaty, but doesn’t contain the word sovereignty. It states that the Republic of Tatarstan is a subject of the Russian Federation, which will conclude agreements jointly with the Russian Federation regarding Tatarstan’s economy, environment, and culture. It grants Tatarstan the right to pursue relations with international organizations “in coordination with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation in accordance with the procedure established by the Government of the Russian Federation” and Tatarstan citizens the right to a special insert in their domestic passports bearing the Tatarstan State Seal.

While political scientist Katherine Graney maintains that Tatarstan government officials’ continuing ability to negotiate with Moscow provides evidence that sovereignty is still alive, I hold that Tatarstan sovereignty as a popular movement no longer exists and that Tatarstan nation-builders’ aspirations have become largely denuded of political thrust. My claim that sovereignty is dead reflects the perspective of once-hopeful Tatar-speakers whom I consulted after 2001 about the effects of Putin’s visit and the subsequently renegotiated political relations with Moscow. When asked what changes had occurred to sovereignty, they responded that sovereignty no longer existed.

Since the Soviet Union’s collapse, a shift in the status of Tatarstan’s two primary languages and consequent changes in the rules that dictate which language interlocutors should use in interactions have taken place. As long as sovereignty held sway, the pragmatic use of Tatar was perceived as necessary for navigating bureaucratic structures. During that time, the stigma against speaking Tatar lifted. People who did not know any Tatar during the Soviet period often studied it—government bureaucrats, university students, and school children—but didn’t employ their minimal knowledge outside the classroom. Even so, the number of do-
mains in which people spoke Tatar without fear of harassment expanded—including universities, schools, government ministries, shops, sidewalks, restaurants, and museums. Passive speakers activated their linguistic knowledge and active speakers of Tatar came to feel comfortable using the language in all domains.

Even though sovereignty elevated the status of Tatar language and the domains in which Tatar is spoken have increased since the Soviet period, Russian nonetheless remained more widely used in schools, media, and other public domains. The overwhelming majority of media consumed by children, even those studying in Tatar classes, is exclusively in Russian and Russian is the hegemonic language in Kazan schools, even in Tatar classrooms. Though Tatar teachers delivered their lessons to students in Tatar, most conversations among Tatar children at school occurred in Russian. All the same, when speaking Russian to each other, children inserted phrases and made jokes in Tatar. These speech patterns created a certain kind of solidarity among them that they couldn’t share with their monolingual Russian schoolmates. Thus, the introduction of new Tatarstan ideologies complicated an already-existing two-tiered system of national identification, so that children came to identify with nations as peoples, for example, Tatars or Russians, as well as with territorial governments, that is, Tatarstan or Russia.64

Categories of People

In the 2002 All-Russia Census, nearly 80% of the Russian Confederation’s population stated that it was Russian, while about 4% chose Tatar as their nationality. Of Tatars living in Russia as a whole, 81% claimed knowledge of Tatar language, as opposed to 0.1% of Russians. Almost 100% of Russians in Russia reported fluency in the Russian language, compared to 96% of Tatars. In Tatarstan, 99% of Russians and 93% of Tatars claimed fluency in Russian. The figures for Tatar language are 4% and 94%, respectively.65 A combined total of 53% of Tatarstan’s 3.8 million population—including Russians, Tatars, Käräshens (Christian Tatars), Chuvash, Bashkirs, Mordvins, Mari—affirmed that they knew the Tatar language.66

One of the core features of Tatarstan’s post-Soviet sociolinguistic field is a fundamental asymmetry between Tatar-speakers and non-Tatar-speakers, which defies attempts to think of Tatarstan language communities as bounded units. In the late 1990s, about half of Tatars in Tatarstan
spoke Tatar at some level, with fluency rates higher in villages than in cities. Nearly all Tatars are functionally bilingual in Russian. The percentage of “Russians” in Tatarstan claiming to know Tatar rose to 4% in 2002 from 3% in 2001 and only 1.5% in 1991. This asymmetrical distribution of linguistic proficiency stems from the fact that participation in Soviet and (subsequently Russian) society requires the ability to communicate in Russian. Consequently, Tatar-speakers possess cultural knowledge of the world inhabited by monolingual Russian-speakers, even if their knowledge of that world is not deep. By contrast, monolingual Russian-speakers frequently do not even perceive and certainly rarely acknowledge the world around them transpiring in Tatar and other low-status languages. The result is that bilingual Tatars are part of a Russian language community, while the converse is not true.

Aware that sociolinguistic categories, such as language and speech communities, are constructed out of the messy variability of social interaction, I nevertheless attempt to classify speakers. Therefore, when I use the term “Tatar-speaker,” I am referring to bilingual Tatar-Russian speakers who self-identify as Tatar. Just as mapping people’s national identity is difficult, so is comparatively gauging their level of bilingual ability. Tatars generally say that “to know Tatar” is to be fully conversant in Tatar quotidian speech and literary language. Since the domains in which Tatar and Russian are spoken in Kazan—where most tasks cannot be accomplished speaking Tatar language—are not socially equivalent, bilingualism cannot be judged by the ability to engage in the same kinds of linguistic exchanges in both languages. Consequently, my evaluation of whether a person is Tatar-speaking or not is based upon limited observation and self-reporting. Bilingualism often becomes a topic of ideological discourses about linguistic purism, as many Tatar-speakers say they are not fully bilingual because they do not know Tatar literary language, only everyday speech. Connected to this difficulty in categorizing speakers is the problem of separating passive from active bilinguals. Even though an unknown number of Kazanians have activated their previously passive knowledge of Tatar language over the past 25 years, it is not clear to what extent or how frequently they use this knowledge.

When I use the term “Russian,” I am primarily referring to monolingual Russian-speakers who identify as Russian by nationality. Like “bilingualism,” however, this is messy as many, if not all, “Russians” descend from multiple and variegated backgrounds, some of which include strong “Tatar” influence.
Tatarstan Russians and Tatars do not belong to culturally distinct groups of people, that is, they do not occupy separate cultural fields or even social networks. However, since perestroika, people who identify as “Tatar” have been taking steps to figure out what that means. Partially as an attempt to distance themselves from the chaos and hopelessness of daily life in post-Soviet Russia, they have practiced being Tatar through trying to speak Tatar and pressuring other people to speak it, by reviving Muslim practices, as they understand them, and by embracing idealized Tatar social relations and cultural practices. The result of these repeated processes is that what it means to be “Tatar” in Kazan is becoming increasingly different from what it means to be “Russian.”

Like most everyone, Tatars tend to perceive the world as divided between “us” and “them.” These divisions become differently configured depending upon subject position, setting, and the kind of solidarity being emphasized at a particular moment. Tatars, like other Soviets, subscribe to an ideology which posits that a person’s “native language” is the standard national language ascribed to his or her nation. Consequently, divisions between the Self and Other are often made along lines of perceived native language. Perceived religion also becomes a boundary-creating device. Certainly, neither religion nor language determines national culture. Nonetheless, the discursive worlds Tatarstan people inhabit are differently configured depending upon whether Tatar or Russian is their primary language of orientation and affiliation. At the same time, while Tatarstan’s Tatar-speaking, ethnic Tatar, and Muslim communities overlap, they do not encompass a single group of people.

Definitions

Throughout this book, “nation-building” refers to what is elsewhere called patriotic nationalism, civic nationalism, or statism, based on participation in democratic institutions, while “nationalism” refers to exclusionary nationalism based on perceived ethnicity. Nation-builders therefore are people engaged in creating inclusive Tatar and/or Tatarstan nationalism. “Sovereignty” is a slippery term, worthy of its own treatise. At sovereignty’s height as a movement, approximately 1989–1992, when Tatars engaged in daily mass protests in Freedom Square, Tatar sources employed the term interchangeably with “independence.” During my fieldwork in 1997–2001, Kazanians used sovereignty to describe Tatarstan nation-building efforts and the right to national self-determination Vlad-